

Annual Report

2025-2026

GROWING Chefs!



Our mission *is to change the way children, youth, families and the greater community learn about and develop healthy relationships with food!*



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OUR TEAM

Meet the team behind everything you see in this report, without whom none of it would be possible! Thank you.

GROWING CHEFS! ONTARIO ANNUAL REPORT

2025 - 2026

Letter from the Executive Director

Another year has come and gone - and another year of our team raising the bar to show us what is possible in ways that give us so much to celebrate.

Our programs reached well over 10,500 participants across our community. Our social enterprise revenue grew by more than $100,000, strengthening our ability to invest in our mission. And, perhaps most excitingly, our new farm harvested more than 12,000 pounds of fresh food - food that helped nourish hundreds of families in our community who are experiencing food insecurity.

Along the way, we built new programming partnerships, strengthened community connections, and continued to grow our impact. But, what I celebrate most is the incredible team behind all of it.

Year after year, I am amazed by their commitment - to our mission, to one another, and to the community we are so proud to serve. Their creativity, dedication, drive, and resilience inspire me every single day.

One of the greatest joys of my professional career has been watching this team help to build Growing Chefs! into an organization that I could never have imagined on my own when this journey began. To every member of our incredible team: THANK YOU! Your work matters, and the impact you make reaches far beyond the metrics and numbers captured in these pages.

At the same time, there is an important challenge ahead - one we want to be honest about. Behind the scenes, the clock is already ticking.

We have two years remaining in the funding agreements which have supported the establishment of our Learn to Grow, Grow to Give Farm. Once that funding ends, Growing Chefs! will need to replace those dollars while continuing to deliver our programs at the scale our community has come to rely on.

As we shared in last year's report, we made a commitment to be more open about the challenges we face - and to be clear about what we need. And that need is significant. Over the next two years, Growing Chefs! will need to replace approximately $250,000 in annual grant funding to sustain our program operations at their current scale. At a time when funding for charitable and non-profit organizations is becoming increasingly scarce, we know this will not be easy.

But we also know it is possible. And we know we cannot do it alone.

We need you.

We need this community to step up, just as you have done for us again and again over the past 19 years.

The work of this team deserves your investment and support. The work we do is essential to building a healthier, more connected, and more food-literate community. Together, we can continue Growing Chefs!' leadership in food education and ensure that children, youth, and families across London and the surrounding area have opportunities to create meaningful connections with what they eat, with our food system, with their community, and one another.

We invite you to read our Case for Support to learn more about our funding priorities and needs - this year and in the years ahead. Most importantly, we invite you to connect with us. There are many ways to support this work, and we would love to talk with you about how you can invest in the future of Growing Chefs! and the communities we serve.



Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for investing in this work. And thank you for 19 incredible years of support.

Here's to the next 19 - and to everything we can grow together.

Andrew Fleet
Executive Director & Co-Founder

Food Education Programs

Another milestone year!

This year, food education took root across London, growing through partnerships with new schools and so many great organizations and events that bring our community together.

Across our gardens, kitchens, and community spaces, children, youth, and families gained food and cooking skills, explored growing and gardening, and built connections through shared food experiences.





WESTERN FAIR district

GROWING Chefs!

PARTNERS IN FOOD & AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

448 Food Education Programs

74 School and Community Partners

10,726 Food Education Participants from:

- 319 School Programs,
- 72 Public Programs,
- 57 Community Programs,

& countless food memories made









"This program was a fantastic opportunity for my students to learn about food preparation, food history, and healthy food practices! They loved getting to eat their creations. I was really impressed with their engagement, enthusiasm, and willingness to try new foods. The chefs do an amazing job teaching valuable content while engaging the students and using age-appropriate strategies. What an incredible experience!"

- Teacher, Growing Chefs! in the Classroom

"My son loved the creativity of the menu for the class. He enjoyed the hands on chance to cut and prepare alongside other kids. Getting to eat all the yummy food after and take home some extra goodies was definitely a highlight. As a parent I love fostering new skills for my son! We get excited every month to sign up!"

- Parent, Monthly Kid's Cooking Class

Program Spotlight: After-School Snacks



This accessible, confidence-building cooking class, focused on after-school snacks, supported blind and partially-sighted youth from FDK to Grade 12 in building independence through fun, practical kitchen skills.

Delivered in partnership with the Thames Valley District School Board, recipes were provided in braille and large print, and the program was hosted in the accessible kitchen at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.



"This was a meaningful experience for our students and it certainly built their confidence in the kitchen. Our students and staff are still talking about it, and I've heard more than once that students have used these recipes at home. It was a wonderful experience and we are so grateful."

- Jaclyn F., Thames Valley District School Board, Vision Resource Teacher



Have a look through our 2025-26 compilation of Impact Reports for more stories, photos, and testimonials about our work!

One Year on the Learn to Grow; Grow to Give Farm!





Project Partners

osnp ontario student nutrition program

London FOOD bank

WSIB Ontario

Harvest Metrics: July 2025 - September 2026

- 2,400+ food boxes delivered
- 16,000+ lbs of food harvested
- $125,000+ estimated value of food
- 120+ volunteers contributed over 500 hours



Ontario Trillium Foundation / Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario
An agency of the Government of Ontario / Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Miggsie Fund – Lawson Foundation

London Community Foundation – Community Vitality Grant

The Londonlicious Festival helps bring our vision of a healthy, food-literate community to life!

Londonlicious continued to celebrate and strengthen London's incredible food and hospitality community, connecting diners with local restaurants while championing the farmers, growers and producers who make our regional food system possible.

98%
of festival participants would participate again!

Across our Summer and Winter festivals, nearly 100 participating venues invited Londoners to explore our city one delicious bite at a time, with 11 new restaurants joining the festival throughout the year.

53 on average per festival
restaurants

$1.1M
Estimated revenue for our local economy

22k+
Total estimated participants

$65
Average spend per person

Combined Social Specs
Londonlicious and Growing Chefs! Ontario

6,842
Growing Chefs! Ontario Audience

16,261
Londonlicious Audience

4,616
Growing Chefs! Ontario Audience

11,273
Londonlicious Audience

Thank you to our festival sponsors!

Every sponsor of this bi-annual festival also contributes directly to our children's education programs.

For more information on the new Londonlicious Festival visit *www.londonlicious.ca*

Social Enterprise

Our Social Enterprise continues to function as the backbone of the organization by connecting and amplifying everything we do!

For the **third** year in a row our Social Enterprise revenue has increased by over **$100,000.** Our goal is to offset declining grant funds with increased self-generated Social Enterprise revenue over the next three years.



Our Catering & Events portfolio consists of private events in-house, catered events offsite, facility rentals, board meetings and so much more...



To learn detailed information about our Catering and Event options, please visit **growingchefsontario.ca/events** or contact Jen at **jen@growingchefsontario.ca** for a conversation or a site tour!



"I enjoy Growing Chefs classes because they make learning to cook fun, engaging, and easy to understand. The hands-on activities help me build my food and prep knowledge in the kitchen, and I get to try new foods and experiences with the different culture nights."

- Teresa C.
Monthly Adult Class participant

"Growing Chefs! is my favorite non-profit because their adult cooking classes do more than teach scratch-cooking. They build deep, lasting community. Through these classes, I've strengthened old bonds, formed new friendships, and connected people who have become friends themselves.

Best of all, this community building directly supports their incredible work fostering food security in children."

- Tracy F.
Monthly Adult Class participant

The Beet Kitchen: Hot Lunch Program

It was another exciting year for the Beet Kitchen which expanded its services to schools and camps across the region providing children with healthy lunches.







This year we partnered with 16 schools, child-care centres & community organizations, delivering meals to 30 different locations across the city daily.

That's approximately 150,000 hot lunches over the course of the year!



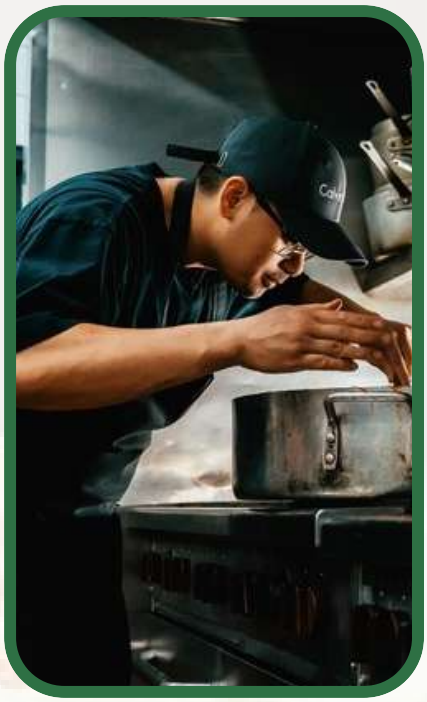


Special Event: SOUPer Bowl

SOUPer Bowl is a collaborative fundraiser that brings together **Growing Chefs! Ontario**, **Urban Roots London** and **Clayworx: Ceramic Arts Learning Centre** around food, art and community. Our Growing Chefs! Chef team creates delicious homemade soups using fresh, locally grown ingredients supplied by Urban Roots, while Clayworx artists create beautiful handcrafted bowls for each guest to choose and take home.

Proceeds from the event are shared between all three organizations, making the SOUPer Bowl a model for fundraising built on collaboration rather than competition.

Together, we're able to pool our resources, share our strengths and create a greater collective impact, while supporting food education, local food access and London's arts community. We hope to demonstrate what is possible when community organizations work together!







GROWING CHEFS!

Clayworx
Ceramic Arts Learning Centre

URBAN ROOTS LONDON

Special Event: Re-opening Auberge du Petit Prince



On May 1, 2026, Growing Chefs! Ontario hosted a one-night-only, sold out fundraising dinner at our Headquarters, the building many Londoners will know as the Auberge du Petit Prince, bringing together donors, supporters, and community members for an evening rooted in the history of the space itself.

At the centre of the night was Chef Chris Squire, who spent two decades building Auberge into one of the city's most cherished dining institutions before the building found a second life as a hub for food education.



Returning to a kitchen he knows intimately, Chef Squire guided guests through a menu drawn from Auberge's storied past; dishes and flavours that shaped London's culinary identity over those twenty years.



Proceeds from the dinner surpassed $22,000, with every dollar going directly toward Growing Chefs! Ontario's food education programming across London and Middlesex.

Special Event: Re-opening Auberge du Petit Prince

We're deeply grateful to Chef Squire, our staff, volunteers, and everyone in our community who joined us for a truly special and memorable evening.















Help Us Grow!
2026-27 Funding Priorities

Donations/Grants can be directed to any of Growing Chefs!' core funding priorities:

Food Education Programs

Your commitment lets us book school and community programs a full year in advance, hire and train the right staff, and deliver food education to more children, consistently.



Funding Goal: $500,000 Annually

Food Education Subsidy Fund

Your pledge lets us hold spots for children and families who can't afford to participate, before programs fill. No child is turned away because funding arrived too late.

Funding Goal: $40,000 Annually

Learn to Grow; Grow to Give

Your multi-year gift supports the ongoing development of Growing Chefs!' urban farm and community food access programs - work that needs a longer horizon than a single year can provide.

Funding Goal: $370,000 Anually

Capital Needs

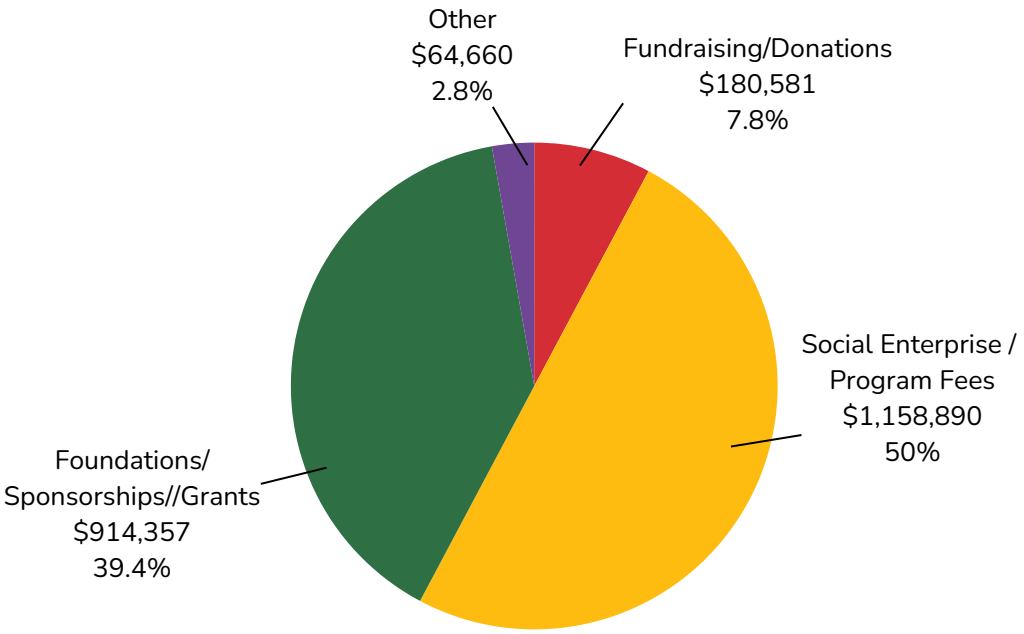
Equipment wears out. Infrastructure needs upgrading. When funding is uncertain, repairs happen reactively. A multi-year capital commitment changes that, letting Growing Chefs! plan proactively, protect its programs, and keep delivering without interruption.

Funding Goal: $75,000 Timeline: Ongoing

Your donation helps ensure more children in London and Middlesex grow up with a relationship with food that is joyful, confident, and lasting.

2025-2026 Audited Financials

Income

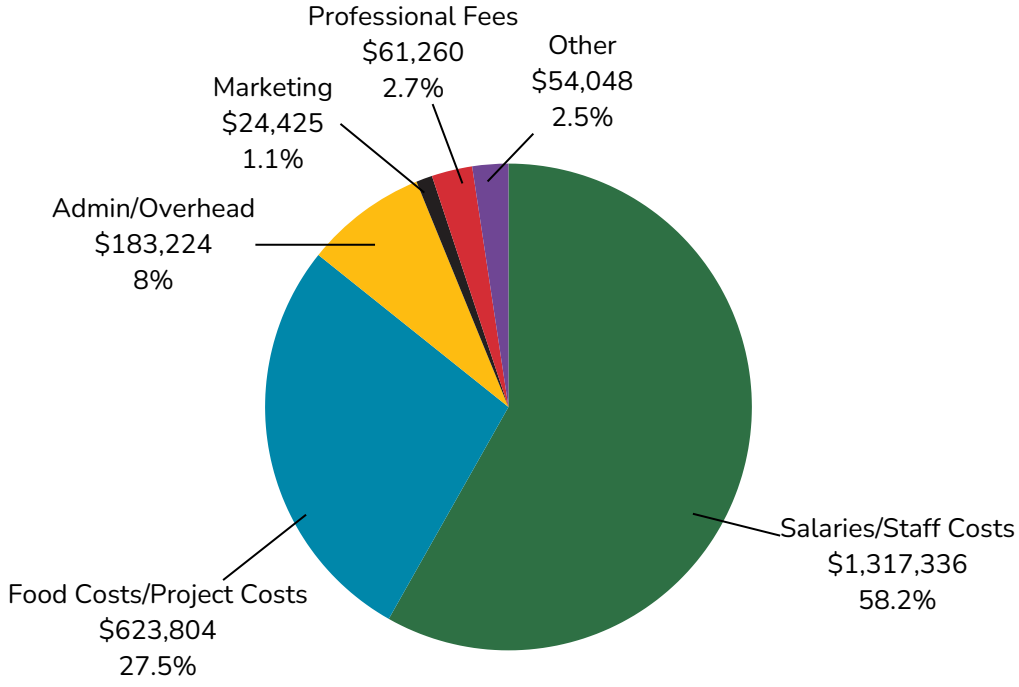


Total Revenue
$2,318,488

Total Expenditures
$2,264,097

Expenses

Total Revenue over Expenses
$54,391



Our 2025 - 2026 Food Education Programs are presented by our Title Sponsor:

WESTERN FAIR district

With the generosity of the following Corporate Sponsors and Community Partners:

Libro Credit Union

canada life

Tourism London Canada

c h Cohen Highley LLP Lawyers

McFarlan Rowlands Insurance Brokers Inc

Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers

Harrison Pensa Personal Injury Lawyers

family lawyers collective

Downtown London Business Association

Covent Garden Market Est 1845

LERNERS

LACTALIS Canada

seasons care 25 years Dietitian Network

Scott Petrie LLP Law Firm

OPTIMIZE Asset Management | CH Financial

Kiwanis Forest City-London

Optimist Club of Byron London Ontario

Colborne Street United Church Local Outreach Committee

Dorchester Horticultural Society

IRONSTONE BUILT.COM

FRIENDS of the London Civic Garden COMPLEX

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

Grand River Agricultural Society

Slegers living organic greens

Master Gardener

SPM Financial

MANAGE YOUR RISK. GROW YOUR WEALTH.

We are fortunate to have the generous support of Grants, Individual Donors and Private Foundations $10,000 +:



















Peter & Catherine Clark Family Foundation

The Smibert Family

The Brian and Heather Semkowski Foundation

Brenda and Dave Savel Foundation

Lynn Davis and The Verna D. Davis Family Foundation

Rocca Hunter Family Foundation

Richard and Shelley Baker Family Foundation

Cambia Development Foundation

Estate of Jeanne Olliver

We are fortunate to have the generous support of Grants, Individual Donors and Private Foundations $500 - $9,999:

Auberge du Petit Prince Inc.

Making a Difference - C & J Wright Family Fund

The Gate Key Foundation

Dana Lambe

Brian & Sharon Lessard

Vincent Chicoine

Libby McMillan

Jordan Hypes

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Richard and Donna Krug

Jeffery and Louise Carroll

Ian Smith & Janet Fleet

Enterprise Mobility Foundation

Nigel and Rhonda Gilby Foundation

Christine Scheer & John Wilson

Jen Govier

Les Siemieniuk & Jackie Bell

Mary Hajpel

Justin Pilon & Sarah Emms-Pilon

Natasha Roberts

Cheryl Heizer

London Waldorf School

Mortgage Wise Financial

Ivey Community Connects Internship

Optimist Club of Byron

Joel Bakker

Jo-Anne Hammond

Maria and Joel Shapiro

Eden Pulchinski

Jessica Davis Design Inc.

London Knights Alumni Foundation

We are proud of our in-kind supporters:

London FOOD bank

Jill's Table A Feast of Kitchen Essentials

PATRICK'S BEANS Coffee on the level

We are fortunate to have received generous support through:

CanadaHelps.org giving made simple

Giftfunds Canada

AQUEDUCT FOUNDATION

CANADA GIVES

LONDON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION










GROWING CHEFS!
at the grove.
Food Education Centre

Our Growing Team

Thank you to all of our amazing staff, Board members and volunteers for all of your tireless work this year.
None of this would have been possible without you!

Staff

Walker Antone-John
Renée Armstrong
Sawaiz Ashraf
Laine Barnfield
Sus Bhagat
Christy Cook
William Cowan
Ben Elliott
Rian Fennell
Andrew Fleet
David Gillies
Mac Gozon
Jordan Grecia
Ilana Guslits
Aron Guslits
Lauren Ibbott
Katherine Jones
Nat Krieger
Ehaan Kwon
Camryn Latif
Meredith Lewkowitz
Maria Lierman
Ella Mackintosh
Natalio Meijia
Ash Middlestadt
Justin O'Reilly
Andrew Paquet
Darienne Patkau
Dillon Patkus
Eve Pisano
Dawn Redskye
Haydn Rooth
Matt Rice
Jayme Russell
Matt Rylett
Ale Sanchez
Kyenna Sanders
Mojdeh Shams
Joel Silva
Chi Tran
Jen Wyant
Rowan Wyant
Aaron Yonick





Our Volunteers







We engaged:
133 volunteers (82 new), through
197 volunteer experiences, on the farm,
in our gardens, programs and events!

Please contact
lauren@growingchefsontario.ca
if you'd like to start, or
restart, volunteering with us!



Letter from the Chair of Our Board of Directors

It has been a privilege to serve my first full year as Board Chair of Growing Chefs! Ontario. While I have been connected to this organization for many years, serving in this role has given me an even greater appreciation for the people, passion and hard work behind the impact reflected throughout this report.

And what a year it has been. Growing Chefs! Ontario delivered 448 food education programs to more than 10,500 participants, while working alongside 74 school and community partners. That is real tangible impact that fills me with pride. Our Learn to Grow; Grow to Give Farm continued to demonstrate what is possible when food education and food security come together, harvesting more than 16,000 pounds of fresh food and delivering over 2,400 food boxes to our community.

At the same time, The Beet Kitchen provided approximately 150,000 healthy lunches to children across London, and our Social Enterprise continued its remarkable growth for a third consecutive year which is a testament to the hard work and dedication of staff, volunteers and community partners throughout the region.

The numbers are impressive, but what continues to resonate most with me is what sits behind them. It is the child discovering confidence to prepare a meal on their own, a family receiving fresh locally grown food, a volunteer giving their time, or a community partner choosing collaboration over competition.



Growing Chefs! Ontario has become far more than a food education organization - it is an important part of the fabric of our local community. With that impact also comes responsibility. As outlined in the annual report, the funding environment for charitable organizations is becoming increasingly challenging, and Growing Chefs! Ontario will need to replace significant funding sources to maintain programming at its current scale.

As a Board, ensuring the long-term sustainability of this organization and the work it does will remain one of our highest priorities. We will continue to seek out like minded partners in both the private and public sectors to ensure the team at Growing Chefs! Ontario can continue to provide the incredible services outlined in the annual report.

I encourage anyone who is looking to learn more about how they can make an impact or participate in any programming reach out to me on LinkedIn or connect with the team at Growing Chefs! Ontario to see how we can work together.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank Andrew and the entire Growing Chefs! Ontario team for their extraordinary dedication, as well as our volunteers, donors, sponsors, granting organizations and community partners who continue to believe in this work.

I am incredibly proud of what Growing Chefs! has accomplished this year, and even more excited about what we can continue to grow together.



Josh Fentin
Board Chair



2025 - 2026 Board Members

Josh Fentin: 2023 - Present (Board Chair)
Mary Hajpel: 2021 - Present (Treasurer)
Michael Clark: 2022 - Present (Secretary)
Andrew Wolwowicz: 2010 - Present
Caitlin Fisher: 2023 - Present
Dara Lambe - 2024 - Present
Sara Lovell - 2026-Present
Gord Hart 2024 - 2025





Our vision is to build and maintain a healthy, empowered community that is engaged with our food system.



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Growing Chefs! Ontario

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Growing Chefs! Ontario

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