

## Harold's Story



“Some days I feel like an inconvenient charity case, when what I really want to do is proudly stand on my own two feet.” Harold

*NOTE: This fictional story about food insecurity is based on real life experiences faced by residents of Guelph and Wellington County. The character of Harold represents dozens of descriptions we have heard about the struggle of community members to access and afford adequate healthy food.*

A former worker at a manufacturing company, Harold's world shifted when a workplace injury put him out of work at age 42. Denied access to Worker Safety and Insurance Benefits, Harold relied on Ontario Works until he was eventually approved for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Living in a rural town with no pension or savings and only \$1,228 per month from ODSP, Harold struggles to make ends meet.

“My ODSP payments aren't enough. Sometimes I try to do small jobs for neighbours on days when I feel not too bad, but it's really tough on my body,” says Harold. “Some of my money needs to go to health costs that aren't covered by OHIP or Ontario Works. It doesn't leave a lot and I'm still in pain most days. The food in my house right now is really just canned tuna and some bananas, and I mostly have just one meal a day. That's what I've got to do to make sure I have enough to pay expenses.”

Harold considers himself one of the lucky ones as he receives a rental subsidy. “I don't know if I'd even have a place to live if it wasn't for that,” says Harold. Even with the rental subsidy, Harold is having a hard time putting food on the table. The cost of food at the nearest grocery store has risen more than 15% since the pandemic, which has made

matters worse. “I rely on my neighbour for rides to the grocery store, so I can’t always take advantage of sales, but even if I can, it’s just so expensive on a tight budget like mine.”

As a result, Harold is left grappling with the stark difference between his day-to-day economic situation and the broader lifestyle he sees in his town. He says that the glances that often accompany his humble payments – counting out nickels and dimes – sting his pride. He has heard about community programs that might be able to help him with some food, but transportation is a barrier, and he worries about facing judgement. Ultimately, like 75% of other food insecure households, he chooses not to access food from local charities, saying he prefers to leave that for families that he says need it more than he does.

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**Reflection:**

- 1. What stood out to you in this story? (A moment, emotion, or detail that felt powerful or memorable)**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. What message or takeaway do you think the storyteller wanted people to understand? (About poverty, food insecurity, needed change, etc.)**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. What do you think makes this story impactful for advocacy or powerful for an elected official to hear?**