

**2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund
Final Project Narrative Summary**

Project Title Pay It Forward program

Name of Organization Yellowknife Farmers Market (YKFM)

Name and Title of Person Reporting Joslyn Oosenbrug, YKFM Board Member

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Please consider the following questions in the description of your activities:

1. Please provide a brief summary of your overall project in 500 words or less:

The *Pay It Forward* program aims to make the Yellowknife Farmers Market (YKFM or the Market) more accessible to community members who are at risk of food insecurity by providing vouchers for use at Market.

In 2023, the Market took place Tuesday evenings from June 6 to September 19 at Somba K'e Civic Plaza in Yellowknife (three markets had to be cancelled due to the evacuation). Vouchers for 20 dollars (\$20) were provide to seven (7) partner service agencies, who distributed the vouchers to their clientele for use at the Market. This increase in value (up from \$15 in past years) reflects the increasing cost of food and ensures the voucher covers the cost of a meal at the Market.

Vouchers for the *Pay It Forward* project are indistinguishable from the loyalty cards used for the YKFM Compost Program, which helps to remove any stigma that may be associated with food vouchers or the *Pay It Forward* program. The *Pay It Forward* program has been delivered since 2019 with more than 300 vouchers redeemed every summer.

In 2023-24, the project was coordinated by a contractor who liaised with the agencies to coordinate distribution, gathered data from the redeemed vouchers and collected feedback from the agencies at the end of the season. This summer, 376 vouchers were redeemed over 13 weeks. 95% of these vouchers were used at food vendor stalls.

An evaluation of all YKFM programs in 2023 (including *Pay it Forward*) was conducted by a graduate student at the University of Waterloo. The evaluation revealed the *Pay It Forward* program was very much appreciated by the agencies and their recipients. The agencies described the Market as an important weekly outing for clients, and in some cases the only community outing they have each week. One community partner explained that they have incorporated a trip to the Market into their organizational programming.

2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

2. Did you make progress towards achieving the goals of this project? What activities took place? What are some of the changes you see in your community as a result of this project?

The project's goals were: 1) to provide 500 meals to individuals and families in need; and 2) to further establish the Yellowknife Farmers Market as a safe and inclusive space for our community's most vulnerable.

In 2023, there were 498 vouchers distributed to seven agencies. Over the 13 weeks of the Market, more than 376 vouchers were redeemed. In comparison, in 2022, there were 369 redeemed vouchers over 15 weeks. We believe more vouchers would have been redeemed in 2023 if we had been able to run a full Market season that was not cut short by the impacts of wildfires.

The comments from the participating agencies and the evaluation were very positive and support continuing this program in future years. Agencies told us their clients look forward to the Market each week and wait for its return each summer. They described the Market as a way their clients can feel safe to participate in the community. This is particularly true for clients who are in recovery and women and children fleeing abuse.

The sense of safety that attending the Market creates for vulnerable community members is a very important finding and suggests the YKFM plays an important role in social inclusion. Participating in community and a sense of belonging are key factors in mental health and wellbeing. The YKFM is proud to support social inclusion as well as mental health and wellbeing of some of our most vulnerable community members.

Additionally, the program helps support Yellowknife's local food economy by infusing an additional \$7,520 into locally-produced meals and ingredients, and helping small business owners to grow their companies.

2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

3. How do you know whether your project was successful? How did you track your progress? What feedback did you receive from participants?

Voucher Redemption by Organization

Agency Name	Dates Distributed									Total Distributed	Total Redeemed	Total Redeemed % of Distributed	Total Redeemed % of Overall Distribution
	Jun 6	Jun 12	Jun 22	Jul 11	Jul 17	Jul 25-28	Aug 8	Aug 15	Sep 12				
NWT Disabilities	0	20	20	30	0	0	0	0	0	70	63	90%	13%
Yellowknife Women's	0	20	20	0	0	20	0	0	0	60	43	72%	9%
Yellowknife Salvation Army	0	20	20	0	20	20	0	20	0	100	91	91%	18%
HomeBase	0	20	20	0	20	20	10	0	12	102	86	84%	17%
Alison McAteer	0	20	20	0	0	0	0	20	0	60	28	47%	6%
YWCA Family Services	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30	7	23%	1%
Inclusion NWT	0	0	0	0		10	0	0	0	10	8	80%	2%
Other (Org. or event)	40	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	20	66	50	76%	10%
Total	40	10	100	30	70	76	10	40	32	498	376	76%	76%

- Total number of vouchers distributed – 498
- Total number of vouchers redeemed – 376

Based on the total number of vouchers redeemed (376) and the portion of vouchers used at food stalls (95%), partner service agencies estimate the number of people who received food at the Yellowknife Farmers Market are as follows:

- Individuals (# meals) – ~ 300 and ~350 meals
- Families – ~100+ and ~ 150 meals

2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

Summary of Comments from Partner Service Agencies:

NWT Disabilities Council

“The NWTDC would like to continue participating in the program and we encourage our families and individuals to get out and get involved by attending each of the markets.”

“Families have been using the vouchers on a weekly basis, there are no issue with the way the program is operated and we only wish there were more vouchers available, so thank you.”

Yellowknife Women’s Society

“The Women’s Society is happy to participate in the Pay it Forward program like we have the last few years. It’s a great program that our clients like to participate in...Thank you for supporting the clients of all our programs.”

“I encourage use of the vouchers at the farmers market although it does take some time for me to motivate them to go as lots of our clients are elderly. Thank you again for including us in this program. The residents in our programs who have used them have been so grateful!”

Home Base

“This program is excellent, thank you. We love being involved in the community with our youth and this certainly helps.”

Alison McAteer House

“Yes we are interested 😊 in taking part of this program and looking forward to giving the vouchers to the women and children here at AMH. I know once again they will enjoy it.”

Salvation Army

“Thank you so much for the Vouchers, our Clients are really happy and look forward to going to the Farmers Market every Tuesday and we appreciate. I would appreciate if you could give us extra vouchers as I distribute them to 3 departments who run different programs.”

2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

“Thank you to all involved in this initiative. This is a wonderful partnership, and we are truly blessed to help others through this avenue.”

YWCA NWT

“This is such a wonderful program, and I am certain our families have enjoyed the benefits of your generosity.”

“We really did appreciate the vouchers, clients are always super excited and I guess they utilized them. For sure we would like receiving a few more. So far 20 families had a chance to benefit from the offer and many more are still waiting.”

4. Did you encounter any challenges during your project? If so, what were the challenges and how did you address them?

While most agencies indicated that the *Pay it Forward* voucher program has been working well for their organization and their clientele, we did receive feedback that having the agency’s name on the back of the voucher can make clients feel stigmatized and reluctant to use them. The vouchers used in the Pay it Forward program are the same as those used in the Compost Loyalty Card Program, which should normalize the use of vouchers—however, including the agency’s name on the voucher may negate this normalizing effect. This issue was brought to the attention of the YKFM, and the name of the agencies were replaced by a number.

Additionally, agency partners noted that the vouchers are only able to be used at one vendor and patrons cannot get change. This is a barrier for some clients, who may not understand these aspects of the voucher program, especially those who are in the early stages of recovery from mental health and/or addiction. It also presents challenges for parents who are trying to treat their children at the Market. It is important to note that in many cases the Market voucher is the single opportunity vulnerable parents have in the week to purchase treats for their children. The market will consider these comments and make any necessary adjustments for 2024.

5. Did you have any partners in this work? Did you work with any other groups?

The YKFM partnered with six Yellowknife-based service agencies to deliver this program:

- NWT Disabilities Council
- Yellowknife Women’s Society
- Yellowknife Salvation Army
- Home Base YK

2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

- Alison McAteer House
- YWCA Family Services
- Inclusion NWT

Many of these agencies have been participating in this project since 2019 and are becoming more familiar with its operations and are problem solving to ensure use of vouchers. For example, some agency workers are meeting their client at the Market and distributing vouchers there or going to the Market together. These approaches also seemed to help with the sense of safety clients felt, as they are not alone in the community. Agencies are also using vouchers when people do not feel up to attending, the staff or other clients will purchase on behalf of others. This builds community among clients and allows clients peripheral participation when they are not able to otherwise attend.

6. How many participants were involved in your activities (including clients, workers, and volunteers)?

Participants/clients	Staff	Volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-50 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 50+	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-50 <input type="checkbox"/> 50+	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-50 <input type="checkbox"/> 50+

7. Would you apply for this funding again? Why or why not?

YES, we will apply to offer the *Pay It Forward* program in 2024. We believe the *Pay It Forward* program offered at the Yellowknife Farmers Market has become an important venue that gives vulnerable people the opportunity to feel like they are a part of the community in a way that feels safe and accessible to them.

The evaluation revealed that it was clear that providing quality food and giving clients choice related to food is important. Agencies expressed gratitude for the *Pay it Forward* program, as not only do their clients feel a sense of safety, but so do the workers in our partner community service agencies. One agency stated that if something were to happen to a client, if they were in trouble, they believed that the community of Yellowknife at the Yellowknife Farmers Market would help that client.

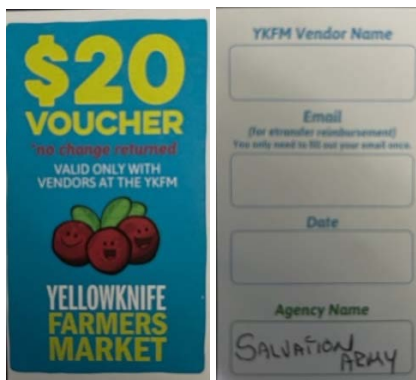
2023-24 Anti-Poverty Fund Final Project Narrative Summary

8. Please include any additional comments that you would like to add:

One agency shared a story about a client who purchased a jar of locally made pickles to share with the group. The pickles were a hit and the whole group was talking about the pickles for weeks! The pickles brought joy and connection to the program and the community.

9. Please submit any photos you are willing to share.

Front and back design of Pay-it-forward program voucher



10. Ensure you have completed your final financial statement and submit with this report.

If you have any questions on your report and how to complete this form, please contact us and we will be happy to assist.

Send completed reports to: anti-poverty@gov.nt.ca or Fax: (867) 873-3585.

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