

April 2nd, 2020

To whom it may concern:

When I began volunteering with the GVFB in January of 2019, I was so deeply excited by the values driving the organization. Coming out of university having read about the endless number of well-meaning but ultimately damaging Western organizations who offer only a patriarchal hand to those marginalized in our society, I felt ecstatic about and refreshed by the dignity-first, no-questions-asked system the GVFB modelled. The folks we serve in our Vancouver community are so often unfairly treated and/or perceived as lesser, as failed, as unimportant, as invisible; to be a part of an organization whose goal was not only to provide food security, but also very intentionally to create a space in which interactions would be guided by respect, dignity and safety for our members felt remarkable. I felt honoured to represent this style of organization and to be given the opportunity to learn how to do so to the best of my abilities from the incredibly caring, passionate, grounded, and bright hub-staff at the sites where I volunteered. I am writing today in light of a perception that I have and that many others share that these values which once fuelled the GVFB have shifted in a detrimental direction - one that unnecessarily increases opportunities for shaming and excluding already wrongfully shamed and excluded members of our community. More specifically, I am writing to share my concerns about changes to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank's intake process announced on March 2nd that will require new and existing clients to provide additional documentation in order to access food.

Based on the GVFB's dignity-first values, it is troubling that the decision to make clients “prove their poverty” has not yet been reflected upon and flagged as deeply flawed. For our members to take the step of showing up to ask for help is difficult enough without having to prove one's worthiness first. This seems to be an uncharacteristically controlling regulation for the Food Bank, and one that launches us dangerously backwards in terms of progressiveness. What I feel is so critical to reflect upon is that real people, real families and lives will be detrimentally impacted by this decision - be it by having their food access stripped from them, or by having to grovel for access. The GVFB is an essential service. It is relied upon and its staff have spent years - decades - building a relationship of trust with our community. To make a decision as impactful and controversial as this at all, let alone without taking the time and care to involve the valuable opinions of our community and the people we serve, is to leave the impression that you do not care. It suggests that you would prefer to catch “cheaters” - a dehumanizing term I have heard thrown around by your interim hub staff - than ensure that our community as a whole remains able to count on us as a stable source of food and dignity.

Further, based on the demographics we serve, it should seem clear that many of our members will not be able to meet the new and eerily authoritarian requirements. Many who need our services do not have fixed addresses, may not have documentation, may be stretching their income thin due to health concerns or supporting others or living in this wildly expensive city or a plethora of other reasons we, as people who likely have never been in those deeply difficult positions, have no business digging in to. Who are we to select who deserves food support? Who are we to choose who receives *dignified* food access and who does not? Our business should be to offer it, and to offer it safely and kindly. By choosing to roll out new and unnecessary hoops to jump through we will become yet another condescending hand reaching out to dignified

people, forcing them to beg for something they should be receiving without question. Needless to say, I and many others are immensely concerned for our members.

I recognize that running an organization as large and as critical as the GVFB is unimaginably complex and difficult. I recognize that pressures must be incredibly high, and that it may feel easier to make unilateral decisions, or even impossible not to at times. I do not envy the position you are in as people who are relied on by so many. I implore you, however, to rethink these decisions. You are an organization who presents as "by the community, for the community," and so in this time when your community is speaking up so loudly against your decisions, I believe it is your duty to listen. It is not too late to undo this, and to show that while not immune to mistakes - as would be impossible - you are, as an organization, actively reflective, humble, and ultimately aimed at putting the community's interests and wellbeing above all else.

Thank you for your time.

An Anonymous Greater Vancouver Food Bank Volunteer