



Impact Report

**Nourish Third Anchor Cohort
2023-2025 | Team London**

Harvesting Hope for a
Healthier World



Visionary health care leaders dedicated to transforming food and health systems across community, institutional, and policy scales, in the national Nourish cohorts.

Nourish's Anchor Cohort is a two-year national innovation program. The program's goal is to support health care systems across the country to develop anchor leadership and to deepen commitment to food as lever for health and well-being.

Through collaborative learning, innovative projects, and shared resources, cohort members drive change where food and health systems intersect. Cohort members lead projects that weave together sustainability, equity, and well-being to drive systemic change in food and health systems.

"By focusing on health, community, and sustainability together, we are seeing real change. This project is about better health, stronger connections, and a healthier planet all at once."

Team London

Cohort team members working together to develop their collaborative projects.



Third Cohort team members at the Food for Health Innovation Retreat at Wasan Island, September 2025.

[Click here to learn more about Nourish's Anchor Cohort program and meet the teams.](#)



Meet Team London

St. Joseph's Health Care London is located in the city of London, Ontario. Renowned for compassionate care, St. Joseph's is a leading academic health care centre dedicated to helping people live to their fullest by minimizing the effects of injury, disease, and disability through excellence in care, teaching, and research in a wide range of hospital, clinic, and long-term and community based settings. It manages 963 beds, serving over a million meals, annually.

Urban Roots is a non-profit organization that revitalizes underused land in the City of London for agriculture by producing high-quality organically grown produce, distributing produce equitably through our model of thirds, developing urban agricultural educational opportunities, and growing an ecological urban agricultural model.

Atlohsa Family Healing Services is a charitable Indigenous non-profit organization in Southwestern Ontario, dedicated to strengthening the Indigenous community through Indigenous-led programs and services that offer wholistic healing and wellness.

(Left) Team members set up for a tasting event at St. Joseph's Parkwood Institute.

(Right) The new sign for Onuhkwa:t Tsi'tKah^tay^ - 'At the Medicine Garden', the new on-site garden space created in collaboration with community partners Urban Roots London, Atlohsa Family Healing Services, and Nourish.



Harvesting Hope for a Healthier World

Team London's Story of Change

St. Joseph's Nourish project applied for a victory lap and was accepted as one of five national teams. In the last cohort, we started a garden, made strides in single use plastic waste reduction, and local purchasing. However, we wanted more time to embed the work, test our dreams, and continue to do better with cohort three. Our cohort two team was small, so this time we spread our team beyond just Food and Nutrition Services and included more teams in the organization and community. Our ambitious team had big dreams and ideas and many times we were caught in project ambiguity. We pulled from previous learnings and divided the work into four pillars and associated working groups: Onsite growing, local procurement, sustainable meals including the Coolfood pledge and waste reduction strategies, and food prescription boxes pilot program.

The first two years of the garden had significant challenges to overcome to ensure the pilot was operationally sustainable, especially around labour, processes and weeds. After the second year, two Canada Summer Job students were hired and were invaluable to the success of the garden. With their support the garden yield and internal communications processes for menu planning improved. The students are paid a living wage to align with our continued partnership with Urban Roots London. Starting at 90 kilograms in its first year, the garden has grown to produce 1,362 kilograms of fresh produce in 2025. For tomatoes alone, it is about two to three months supply for two sites.

With our Indigenous partners at Biigajiiskaan and Wiigiwaaminaan, medicines are being grown in the garden for ceremonies along with the three sisters. An Oneida knowledge keeper provided our garden name: Onuhkwa:t Tsi'tKah^tay^, meaning "At the Medicine Garden", further reflecting the garden's purpose to provide medicine for body, mind, and spirit. The mental health care patients continue to use the garden space for horticulture activities. This past summer, the heat and air quality led to the therapeutic recreation team to adjust their approach and offered mindfulness sessions in the evenings and returned to gardening activities in the fall.



One of our local procurement goals was to switch from imported to local lettuce in 2024 – we often heard our lettuce described as wilted, brown, and wet. However, we experienced some factors outside our control along the journey. Two years ago, we put out a request for proposal (RFP) to understand the local farms in our area and, although we were able to gain a better perspective on farms in our area, it unfortunately did not result in a partnership. We made a pivot, and our menu planning team found a local hydroponic lettuce grower through our distributor. The change reduced waste from spoilage, maintained patient satisfaction, and saved us \$10,000 annually and increased our local produce spending by 15%.



(Above) Team London members work together at Nourish's 2024 Food for Health Innovation Retreat on Wasan Island.

To reduce the climate impact of the foods we serve, we signed onto the Coolfood pledge. Our first strategy was working with our chef to develop eight plant-based new recipes for the menus. They were tested at a staff sampling event to vote on their favourite options. Many were hesitant to try the tofu options and were pleasantly surprised, scoring the tofu options in the top four recipes. We implemented three out of the eight initial plant-forward recipes but we received mixed satisfaction results compared to our usual meat-forward recipes. As a result, we revised the project goals and adapted recipes to a combination of meat and plant proteins to better suit our population. The new homemade Shepherd's pie and meatloaf recipes made with ground beef and lentils scored over 90% satisfaction with patients and residents.

In London, one-sixth of households experience food insecurity. From previous cohorts, we were inspired by their food prescription programs and designed our own program to support mental health outpatients experiencing food insecurity. The team won a \$2,500 award for other innovation initiatives and used it to design and pilot a program.

The Food Prescription Program was carried out in partnership with the London Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team and Odd Bunch. The Food Prescription Program aimed to address food insecurity while promoting better nutrition and overall health by increasing intake of fruits and vegetables. The program provided participants with a box of fresh produce every two weeks over a 12-week period. Clients were screened for food insecurity risk to determine their eligibility for the program. Of the clients screened, 65% were positive for food insecurity, and a total of 15 clients opted into the pilot program. The team partnered with Odd Bunch who delivered directly to participants' homes to remove the transportation and accessibility barrier highlighted in the scoping surveys conducted early in the planning phase.

The project team developed educational resources, including vegetable and fruit recipes to provide participants. The teams' occupational therapists provided personalized support to participants based on their goals. After the pilot, post survey results showed an increase in weekly intake and their satisfaction with how much they were consuming. The variety in the boxes allowed participants to try new foods like passion fruit, squash, and avocado. Often clients are told that they need to eat and prepare healthy food but are rarely given the resources to support themselves to do it. The clients were grateful for the normal experience of receiving the boxes and now have one more link to society.

As we graduate from cohort three, the future of food services looks different from where we started. Looking ahead, we will carry forward our Nourish lessons, stay open to thinking differently, and remind ourselves that it doesn't need to be perfect. Food services may always live in the basement, but we will continue to be a shining beacon of hope taking small steps forward to provide exceptional care, stronger communities, and a healthier world.

Team London, September 2025

Chocolate Beet Loaf

By St. Joseph's Health Care London's Nourish Team

Ingredients:

- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup brown sugar (packed)
- ¾ cup grated beets
- 1/3 cup of olive oil
- 1/3 cup of 2% milk
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup Dutch processed cocoa powder
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon table salt

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (205°C). In a large bowl, whisk flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt.
2. In a separate bowl whisk egg, add sugar and mix until there are no lumps. Add grated beets, oil and milk to egg and sugar mixture.
3. Gently fold in 1/3 of dry mixture at a time to the wet ingredients. Ensure batter is evenly combined with no clumps.
4. Grease a 9x5 loaf pan, line with parchment paper to cover along the edge of the pan. Pour batter into loaf pan.
5. Bake for 35 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clear from the center. Remove from oven and cool on wire rack.
6. Enjoy!



Team Aspirations

Team London's aspirations centred on deepening community connections related to food security and supporting patients after discharge by ensuring they had continued access to appropriate food. The Team strove to enhance the existing hospital garden, sustain and grow partnerships, and shift food procurement practices to become more local and sustainable. Compared to their participation in Nourish's second Anchor Cohort where they focused efforts within Food and Nutrition Services, the Team aspired to expand impact to include other departments and with community partners.



(Above, L-R) Team London in their on-site garden: Roy Butler - CEO of St. Joseph's Health Care London, Ben Wilcox, Rob Flack - former Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness, Lori Higgs, Patricia Superville, Michelle Stranges, Deana D'Ambrosio, and Kerrie Dewachter.

"Overall, the Nourish Cohort has provided more general awareness to Truth and Reconciliation. Moving forward, Biigajiiskaan and Food and Nutrition Services would like to continue to explore more partnerships for National Indigenous People's Day and Truth and Reconciliation Day to ensure the food served and the teachings shared with patients and residents remain meaningful and inclusive."

– Team London

BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOAL



Nourish takes a systems view of food for health transformation, working on leverage points at the intersections of equity, climate, and community well-being. All Cohort teams crafted a problem statement and identified indicators for mission achievement. Teams were also challenged to set a big, hairy, audacious goal - one that would set the course and their focus for the two year program. Teams set this audacious goal, knowing they would be unlikely to achieve it in the program timeframe; rather, their audacity was encouraged to set focus and commitment, knowing that shifting the status quo is a longer-term project.

TEAM LONDON: PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a resource gap that hinders access to sustainable, local, culturally diverse and affordable food options for patients, residents and the community. By bridging this gap, St. Joseph's aspires to strengthen the connection between food and health, alleviating pressures on health care systems, fostering community well-being, and contributing to the overall sustainability of our planet.

The Team's BHAGs centred on local procurement, growing initiatives, and food security. To start working towards achieving their BHAGs, the team focused on four main pillars of work, each with their own aims and objectives.



TEAM LONDON: INDICATORS

Pillars	2025
Local Procurement	Lettuce waste reduced by 100% .
	Proportion of dollars spent on locally sourced, fresh produce: Increased by 23%
	Proportion of dollars spent on local: - Ontario remained the same - Canada increased by 4%
On-Site Growing	- Weight of produce grown: 14x more than first year. - Total weight in 2025 = 1362 kg - Processes and roles defined and outlined. - Weekly horticulture activities for mental health patients.
Coolfood Pledge	New plant forward recipes: 4
	Waste reduction strategies: - Created a pan waste audit and dashboard for leftovers from trayline. - Packaging waste decreased by: 336,645 units or 37% (20% by cost)
Food Prescriptions	Developed a produce prescription program with a community partner and implemented a pilot project. 15 participants
Truth and Reconciliation	Community partnerships with Biigajiiskaan and Wiigiwaaminaan: - Garden named by Oneida knowledge keeper. - Planted medicines. - Created half a garden block for growing the three sisters with plans to expand.
	10 new members participated in Nourish's Food is Our Medicine Learning Journey.
	Served menu specials and provided educational material for patients and staff.

"The hospital garden presented both surprises and growth opportunities. A major emerging opportunity was using half of a plot for growing the Three Sisters, which provided a chance to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and teachings. During this past season, Biigajiiskaan had one of their team members share their knowledge on the Three Sisters to ensure the garden space honoured the traditions appropriately."

– Team London

Changing systems means embracing complexity.

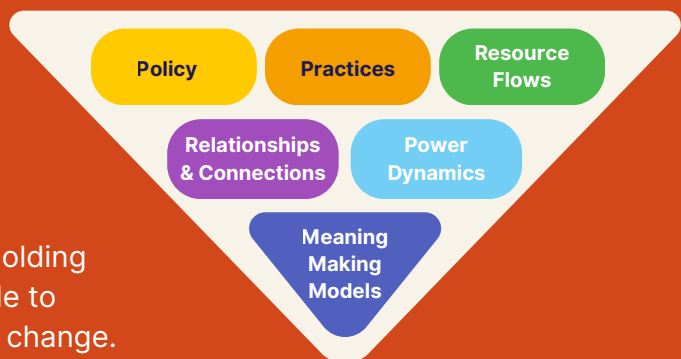
Systems change is a holistic approach to tackling large-scale societal challenges. It refers to the intentional and strategic effort to transform a system, first by building an understanding of how the system works, and then actively working to shift the underlying structures, behaviours, and mindsets that keep that system (the status quo) in place.

Systems change involves intentional effort to understand and address the **root causes** of complex issues, rather than only the symptoms, creating meaningful change and longstanding influence. For food for health systems, this can look like taking the Coolfood Pledge, increasing resources for local food sourcing, and changing how people understand the role of food in health and wellbeing.

Six Signals

Along with quantitative indicators, **all Cohort teams tracked six signals of systems change**, noticing the influence of their work over time.

When teams better understood what was holding their systems in place, they were better able to determine when, where, and how to create change.



- **Policies:** Rules, regulations, and priorities. *E.g., Coolfood adoption, local food as a strategic priority, etc.*
- **Practices:** Activities, procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits. *E.g., new composting programs, revisions to RFP processes, etc.*
- **Resource Flows:** How money, people/staffing, knowledge, information, and other assets like infrastructure are allocated and distributed. *E.g., new staff roles, increasing funding, etc.*
- **Relationships and Connections:** The quality of connections and communication, especially among those with differing histories and perspectives. *E.g., new relationships with Indigenous elders, etc.*
- **Power Dynamics:** The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence. *E.g., regular meetings with senior leadership, etc.*
- **Meaning Making Models:** Deeply held beliefs, assumptions, ways of thinking, and unconscious behaviours that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk. *E.g., deeper understanding of the role of food in healing, etc.*

For more on signals of systems change, see [The Water of Systems Change](#) (2018) by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge.

TEAM LONDON: SIGNALS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Pilot climate action benchmarking tool.	New practice of growing medicines with Indigenous community partners.	Now record origin of new products in food service software.
Coolfood Adoption	Created a new process manual for on-site garden and on-site vegetable processing practices.	Daily pan waste audits and dashboards to analyze food waste.
Garden produce is used in the Let's Get Cookin' program while in season.	Sourcing more food products from within Ontario and Canada.	Paying a living wage to all Canada Summer Jobs Students (garden).
Increased collaboration and cross-learning with other hospital programs.	New relationship with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) 1 Team.	Nourish project used as an exemplar for how strategic priorities can leverage work.
Relationship building between St. Joseph's, Biigajiikaan Mental Health Wellness Program and Wiigiwaaminaan.	Worked with an Indigenous artist to create the garden sign and art, and a Knowledge keeper when naming the garden.	Influenced food distributors with goals to support more local businesses.
Building positive relationships with clients through the food prescriptions pilot to support skill building and resources provision.	The former Minister of Agriculture visited with St. Joseph's CEO, VP external affairs, and VP Clinical Support/CFO.	Creation of a steering committee for the Nourish project period for more open communication with senior leadership to support decisions or provide guidance.
More autonomy to cooks on how to prepare recipes with the garden produce during testing periods.	Frontline staff were involved in all the working groups. They gave feedback and provided details on workflows.	Shift in patient and staff expectations to have more local foods on the menu, aligning with their values.
Organizational shift in its understanding of the vital connections between food, health and community, and in the role of food in healing.	Shift in belief that we were able grow our own food and at usable quantities for our population with the garden space available.	With waste reduction practices, staff are more conscious of what they are wasting and the impact.

TEAM LONDON: KEY OUTCOMES



Sourced 23% more Ontario-grown produce, supporting local farmers.

Adopted the Coolfood program and implemented four new plant-forward menu items, including beef and lentil meatloaf, increasing nutrition and lowering food-related emissions.

Built community partnerships with Biigajiiskaan and Wiigiwaaminaan, planting medicines, and making a Three Sisters garden block.

Decreased waste - packaging waste by 37% (20% by cost) and lettuce waste by 100%.

15 participants in the pilot Food Prescription Program received fresh produce boxes, boosting access to healthy food.

Team London Spotlight: Food Prescription Pilot Program

Health care often tells clients to eat better and increase their intake of fruits and vegetables to support their health goals, without supporting people's access to the food or other resources required to make significant changes.

Team London wanted to explore how providing clients with produce boxes for a defined period could help people increase their intake of fruits and vegetables, increase their confidence in preparing produce, and offer meaningful resources on how to incorporate produce in meal planning. The team developed and implemented a program to provide clients experiencing food insecurity an opportunity to opt into a food prescription program to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables.

An important consideration was to ensure that the pilot program provided people with a low barrier way to increase their intake of produce and develop sustainable skills, confidence, and knowledge that would outlast the project timeframe.

Tailoring the Hunger Vital Sign™ Screening Tool to suit their population, 65% of clients screened positive for food insecurity. Each participant received a custom-sized box (eight items) of fresh fruits and vegetables every other week for 12 weeks, for a total of six boxes. Participants also received practical resources including easy recipes, food storage tips, advice on what to use first, and information on available community food programs. There was no cost for clients to participate in the program.

The pilot program generated the following insights:

- **Consumption of fruits and vegetables increased** with the produce boxes, along with people's satisfaction of their consumption levels.
- 82% of participants reported feeling **more confident and inspired** to maintain their intake of fruits and vegetables beyond the program.
- **Transportation matters:** the delivery option was helpful because the quantity of fruits and vegetables received would require multiple trips to the grocery store.
- Clients felt a **sense of purpose** participating in the program and appreciated the normalized experience of the boxes and receiving texts when it arrived.
- Being part of the program lessened feelings of **social isolation**.



Looking Ahead

Overall, Team London has been successful in achieving their goals and objectives outlined in their Cohort program. The Team has created a number of new structures and processes to help ensure that their Nourish work continues and is sustainable. Food and Nutrition Services integrated the local procurement and Coolfood working group into existing Quality Committee meetings, where the Committee determines the high-level direction of initiatives and manages approvals. The team also created a new Production Sub-committee that will meet monthly on how to implement ideas for improvements and complete recipe testing. These meetings will include Food and Nutrition Services managers, supervisors, cooks, and systems team.

The current Onuhkwa:t Tsi'tKahAtayA' (Medicine) Garden with Urban Roots London, Biigajiiskaan, and Wiigiwaaminaan will continue to grow and integrate into the work. The team looks forward to expanding the Three Sisters' growing plot and trialing different traditional planting methods. The garden working group will continue to meet monthly.

The team is also working to find the right combination of championing, funding, and community support to be able to continue the food prescribing program beyond the pilot.

"We still hope to build more local partnerships, and advocate for food system opportunities to support small food producers and the need for contingency planning in local sourcing strategies."

– Team London



(L) Harvesting radishes in their on-site garden. (R) Pitching ideas for collaborative projects at Nourish's 2024 Food for Health Innovation Retreat on Wasan Island.

Acknowledgements

St. Joseph's Health Care London

Michelle Stranges, Specialist for Quality, Transformation and Innovation, and Team Lead
Rachel Adamson, Manager of Food and Nutrition Services
Deana D'Ambrosio, Manager of Food and Nutrition Services
Lindsay Botnick, Director of Food and Nutrition Services
Lori Higgs, Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer

Urban Roots London

Anna Badillo, Executive Director
Ben Wilcox, Director of Farm Operations

Atlohsa Family Healing Services

Crystal George, Program Manager

Third Anchor Cohort: Team Leads

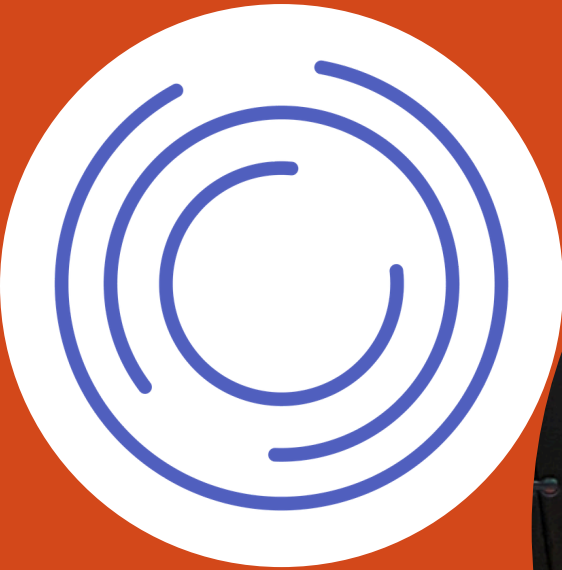
Elaine Chu (BC)
Dana Marshall (NL)
Avery McCorkell, Kaya Hill, Kendal Garlow, Kyleigh Farmer, and Sara Montour (Six Nations)
Donna Kwan, Heather Goodison, and Shelly Durrant (Toronto)

Nourish

Roya Damabi	Hayley Lapalme	Jennifer Reynolds
Amy Ford	Ngaire Leaf	

"The Nourish Project reflects St. Joseph's commitment to our vision of Exceptional Care, Stronger Communities and a Healthier World. Through our work with Nourish over the past four years we have experienced the vital connection between food, health, and community. Each cohort has built on the last - reducing waste, testing on-site growing, advancing food prescribing, and fostering new partnerships. At the heart of this work is the belief that food is medicine, nourishing both people and the planet. By working with our partners and community, we are improving the patient and resident experience today while building a healthier, more sustainable future."

Lori Higgs, Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, St. Joseph's Health Care London



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