

McDonald's, Popeyes, or No Food at All: My Family's Experiences Living and Eating in Jane and Finch, Toronto



(Image taken from <https://www.blogto.com/real-estate-toronto/2022/06/jane-finch-mall-toronto/>)

My name is Samuel. I am a 23-year-old graduate of the University of Toronto living in the northwest Toronto community of Jane and Finch. For 21 years, my family and I have called this culturally diverse community home. Sadly, my community faces intense marginalization and oppression that has created and fuelled many social issues, such as severe poverty and community violence, distressing my community. One social issue my family and I personally experience is inaccessibility to healthy, nutritious food because of our low-income status and the community's lack of healthy, nutritious food options.

For many years during my undergrad, I can remember the only food options available for lunch on my days off were either some sort of frozen meal, such as a frozen pizza or pasta, or one of the several fast-food options within a five-minute walk from my home (the image above depicts some of the many fast-food options clustered together in my community). There were also so many nights where my family had to rely on McDonald's, Pizza Hut, or Popeyes, for example, as a dinner option because of their accessible and cheap food. This chronic reliance on fast food has caused my family and me to develop and experience health issues, such as my mom suffering from diet-influenced high blood pressure and my diet-related high cholesterol levels.

The lack and expensiveness of healthy, nutritious food options significantly impact my younger sister, Mairenn, who recently found out she has a severe gluten intolerance that can cause 2 to 3 weeks of intense stomach issues if she eats anything containing gluten. Within the last few months, my sister has gone weeks eating only one meal a day because of the lack of gluten-free options available at home and affordable gluten-free foods within my community, which has negatively impacted her productivity at school and work.

After reflecting on my family's struggles with nutritious food insecurity, I hope to see increased governmental efforts towards creating and implementing systemic social change to increase accessibility to healthy, nutritious food for marginalized communities and families such as mine. Alongside increasing accessibility to healthy, nutritious food, I also believe in increasing access to culturally relevant nutritional literacy programs for people of all ages, especially school children, within communities such as Jane and Finch. I believe this programming can provide critical nutritional education for marginalized communities that I should have been taught in school years ago.

Additionally, these programs can provide meaningful aid to families like mine to help us navigate the relationship between healthy, balanced eating and healthier living. This education can also fill the gaps left by inaccessible (time, location, cost, culturally appropriate, consistent) dietician and nutritionist supports that are challenging to find and receive. Lastly, accessible and culturally relevant nutritional literacy programs can help people to learn, practice, and try out diet options that can improve health, well-being, and quality of life for people such as myself, my mom, and my sister.

By: Samuel Garcia-Feliz