

# It was a true ‘Cruel Summer’ for many Ontario students this year

As the cost of living crisis and inflation worsen, post-secondary students are forced to forfeit their summer plans to avoid breaking the bank

Audra Jander • Oct 1, 2023



A look inside the fridge of fourth year McMaster University student, Colton Harvey. (Submitted by Colton Harvey)

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Summer vacations are meant to be a time of well-deserved relaxation, yet the majority of post-secondary students in Ontario spent their last break trying to decide whether enjoyment outweighed not being able to afford costs of living.

“I need to budget a larger portion of my income on essential goods and stuff nowadays,” says Noah Baptie, a third year Wilfrid Laurier University student.

“I work, I don't make much more than minimum wage over the summer so it was very difficult to be able to do anything fun.”

Colton Harvey, a fourth year student at McMaster University, has also felt the impact of rising costs, largely in relation to food. “I’m now spending regularly on just a grocery trip more than my outing to the grocery store to stock my pantry when I first moved in, just before summer 2022,” he states, an inclination to the [6.8 per cent increase Ontario saw in food prices over the past year](#). Because of this, he says that he spent most of his past summer turning down plans with friends simply because he knew he could not afford to go out without compromising his budget for the upcoming school year.



As post-secondary students grapple with increased costs of living and inflation, many have started cancelling plans to save money. (Image created with Canva| Audra Jander)

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A 2022 study found that almost [40 per cent of post-secondary students in Canada experienced food insecurity](#), and although data is not available for 2023, it is reasonable to assume that this number has risen.

Megan Pontes, a University of Guelph student, can personally attest to this. “I have started eating less,” she says, as she can no longer afford the cost of food on a student budget. Last summer, she spent most of her free time attending concerts, going to cottages, and dining out, activities that she had to almost completely cut out of her plans for summer 2023.

“I think I wanted to do more road trips. The price of gas is just too much. And I kind of wanted to do at least more stuff on the weekends, but everything costs money now, and you can't find anything for free, even going to a frickin conservation area is 20 bucks.”

These experiences of financial pressure however, portray a different reality than that determined by [Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey](#), which found that student summer employment overall had decreased between summer 2022 and summer 2023. While the study did provide [a detailed analysis into why such employment rates had decreased](#), it still leads to the assumption that the rising costs of living did not impact Ontario's post-secondary population the same.



Despite many students stating they have experienced significant impacts from inflation and rising living costs, overall student summer employment was lower in the summer of 2023 compared to 2022. (Community job board| Audra Jander)

Thankfully, the concerns raised by many Ontario students have not gone unheard. The College Student Alliance (CSA), an advocacy group for Ontario colleges, has proposed [a number of recommendations to the provincial government to assist college students](#), such as the implementation of a \$30/week food coupon program for low-income students. Further, almost every Ontario college and university campus has some sort of [student food resource centre](#) or

funding program to help those who are facing food insecurity, a service that has unfortunately become more in demand.

If prices continue their upwards trend, these somber experiences may become the norm for Ontario's already struggling student population, as they continue to grapple with whether their summer breaks should be a reward for making it through another academic year, or a way to build up their finances.

"I had to almost pre-budget my school year," claims Owen Adema, a student at Nippissing University. "The entire summer, I had to keep in mind how much money I need to have for the school year. I had to think and anticipate the prices going up."