SAS Honors Program
Capstone Report
Option E

Advancing Community Development
Building Volunteer Resources for Emergency Food Providers in New Brunswick

Graciela Cando
RUID 146000674
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PLEDGE

According to John Dewey, a community is an association of individuals and groups in constant communication with each other striving for a conjoint "good" activity. Without connectedness among an optimistic society Dewey states, "Fraternity, liberty and equality...are hopeless abstractions."

To this community pledge my knowledge, experiences and listening ear to act as more than the simple "interplay of iron and the oxygen of water" in creating a healthy, sustainable and just society.

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MOTIVATION

Some of my best experiences at Rutgers have been outside of the classroom, studying abroad in Thailand for 3 weeks, researching health beliefs on diabetes in the New Brunswick community, volunteering at health clinic as a medical interpreter, and organizing awareness campaigns for global health initiatives. Throughout the years, these experiences have repeatedly brought my attention to the importance of civic engagement and food security.

The impetus behind my involvement with community work began in a student-led classroom. As a part of a student organization called GlobeMed, I learned about global health issues during weekly meetings that encompassed education, gender inequality, and access to clean water. In an effort to encourage an active student body of global citizens, we engendered conversations about these issues during awareness events outside student centers and dining halls. Teaching other students, I found myself feeling like a part of a

much larger movement on campus and globally. I wanted to keep being a voice for people thousands of miles away, but I also wanted to meet them.

A few months after my first year in GlobeMed, I spent three weeks on a service-learning trip in Thailand. Although we resided in the bustling city of Bangkok, we visited rural communities where our Professor conducted research on the association between pesticide exposure and Parkinsonism in farmer populations. One weekend, we visited a school, where the students showed us their rice field, chicken and pigpens, and fish farms. They were learning sustainable agricultural practices. In doing so, the kids were gaining the tools to become less dependent on pesticides affecting their community. They were being empowered and put at the front of their health!

When I returned to the states, I knew I wanted to help empower communities. Therefore, I joined Dr. Rosenthal's Enhanced Diabetes Education Project at the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research. The purpose of the study was to monitor changes in the behaviors, beliefs, and HbA1c levels of patients as we tried to equip them with the educational tools to understand and manage their disease. Speaking directly with patients, I realized our study population faced multiple barriers that made it difficult for them to take adequate care of themselves. Although we were providing patients with the knowledge for healthier diets, this did not matter if they had no access to healthy and affordable foods.

After visiting the school farm in Thailand and learning more about how patients are able or unable to cope with diabetes, I decided to join the Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research and Service's Advancing Community Development team and contribute what I learned globally and locally about service, advocacy, community

work, and food insecurity. Throughout this reflective capstone, I will provide a background on the problem of food insecurity and its significance in New Brunswick; reflections on community service, civic engagement and partnerships; and a presentation of a team project with the Feeding New Brunswick Network.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Food Security

Writing in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* states that hunger is "a condition resulting from chronic under consumption of food and/or nutritious food products" (Lenhart and Read, 1989). However, direct starvation is very rare in the United States (Bhattacharya, 2004). Food insecurity is a complex phenomenon that extends beyond the boundaries of physiological hunger. Although it does not hold the same painful connotation, it is a prevalent result of our social and political institutions and cause of nutritional deficiencies, obesity and diabetes. The US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service estimates that 14% of American households were food insecure at least some time during 2014. According to The State of Food Insecurity 2001, food security is defined as "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

In the 1990s, the USDA developed survey questions based on financial constraints designed to measure food insecurity and highlight the spectrum of food insecurity that exists in the US (Bhattacharya, 2004). The Core Food Security Module (CFSM) contains the most recent set of questions, and it emphasizes the link between financial hardship and food security (Bickel et. al, 2000). Based on answers to 18

questions, households can be placed in one of three categories: (i) food secure (all household members had access to food at all times for an active, healthy life); (ii) low food insecure (some household members were unable to acquire enough food due to insufficient resources); (iii) severe food insecure (one or more household members were hungry some time due to inability to afford food). An affirmative answer to three or more questions places households in one of the two food insecure categories (Gunderson, 2011).

Predictive Factors

The food environment, which influences food choice and diet quality, is characterized by store/restaurant proximity, food prices and taxes, food and nutrition assistance program and community characteristics (i.e. demographic composition, income and poverty, metro status, recreation and fitness centers) (USDA, 2014). Similarly, factors impeding food security in America include, but are not limited to, poverty, transportation costs, uneven distribution of food accessibility, high costs of healthy foods, and unemployment (Holben, 2010). However, these predictive factors, however, are often not synonymous with food insecurity. For example, about 65% of households close to the poverty line are food secure (Gunderson, 2011). Often the poverty lines does not adequately measure physical deprivations and material hardship (Bhattacharya, 2004). Current income collected in Current Population Survey (CPS) datasets also does not portray a family's ability to avoid food insecurity. Instead, an average household income over a two-year period may be a better predictor, because it accounts for income volatility and unemployment periods (Gunderson, 2011).

Outcomes on Health

In the United States, a person can be obese and undernourished at the same (Campbell, 1991). Inadequate intake of fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains is especially problematic in communities with high food insecurity where the diets of low-income households are calorie rich but nutrient poor (You et al, 2011). These food choices are reasonable given the high costs of healthy foods and the choices households have to make between buying food and paying for medication, rent, and/or utilities (Campbell, 1991). With a lack of access to nutritious foods, food insecurity has been associated with weight gain and chronic morbidity (e.g. type 2 diabetes, hypertension) (Laraia, 2014). Further associations with food insecurity include increased stress levels, adverse health outcomes for infants and toddlers, and depression (Holben, 2010).

Federal Food Assistance Programs

Coping strategies for food insecurity include reducing variety in diet; participating in federal assistance programs; and using food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters (Holben 2010). In an emergency response to a hunger crisis in the 1980's the first network of charitable food assistance programs was established. As unemployment, low wages, and poverty continue to plague millions of Americans, institutionalized government funded programs remain in place to aid those persons who are food insecure (Campbell, 1991). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is the largest assistance program run by the USDA. In May 2015, about 1 in 7 people in the U.S. received SNAP assistance. Furthermore, about 83% of SNAP benefits go to households with children, elderly persons, or persons with disabilities. It is estimated that half of American children and adults (ages 20-65) will

receive SNAP benefits at one point (Hartline-Grafton, 2013). Gross and net income tests and family size determine the benefits distributed via an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. The average monthly benefit in 2010 was $288/month for a family of four and the maximum was $668 (Gunderson 2011).

Other programs include The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and School Breakfast Program (SBP). WIC provides federally funded support to low-income pregnant women, infants and children up to the age of five in the form of supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutritional education (Hartline-Grafton, 2013). NSLP operates in over 100,000 public and nonprofit private schools and childcare institutions to provide low-cost or free lunch to children. In 2010, over 31 million children participated in NSLP. School food authorities must meet several requirements for their lunches: meals no more than 30% of a student's calories from fat, meals less than 10% from saturated fat, and meals containing at least one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, and calcium (Gunderson, 2011).

Although these efforts seek to alleviate food insecurity and improve health outcomes, SNAP, WIC, and NSLP remain inaccessible to many Americans who need assistance. Addressing child food insecurity remains a problem for children who may be home schooled or in their summer recess (Gunderson, 2011). Furthermore, at any given time about 3 in 10 eligible American will not participate in SNAP. Mobility, technology, stigma and beliefs about SNAP serve as the most prominent barriers to populations of older Americans who qualify for benefit but do not receive them (Hartline-Grafton, 2013). There are also several costs to SNAP recipients that include transaction (i.e. travel

time to a SNAP office) and information (i.e. language barriers) factors (Gunderson, 2011). The calculations made to determine SNAP eligibility also present difficulties in allocating funds to people who are food insecure (Hartline-Grafton, 2013). Benefits calculated based on federal guidelines of income and family size do not take into account economic differences among states or the continuing difficulty of acquiring food at incomes slightly above these limits. Furthermore, SNAP benefits are subject to immigration and work status requirements (You et al., 2011). Additionally, though the goal of federal food assistance programs may be to reduce food insecurity, food insecurity among recipients are double the rates than among eligible non-participants (Gunderson, 2011).

Expanding Local Efforts

In an effort to address the continuing problem of food insecurity, the number of organizations devoted to providing food to Americans has increased over the years. Just within the Feeding America Network, there are more than 200 food banks and 60,000 food and service program (food pantries) across the country serving more than 46 million people each year (Feeding America, "2015 Annual Report "). In New Jersey there are 7 food banks (*FOOD BANKS OF NEW JERSEY* [PDF]) and over 400 food pantries providing food insecure residents with a supply of food. These networks of food dispensers, however, often fail to serve healthy foods, further perpetuating the problem of obesity in America. They also leave clients at a nutritional disadvantage. A dietary assessment of food pantry and soup kitchen users showed that 68% of the study population demonstrated some degree of inadequate nutrient intake, commonly calcium, vitamin C and thiamin (Lenhart, 1989). With a need to promote a healthy nation, hunger

organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to foster communities with affordable, local, healthy and culturally appropriate options for their residents. Such efforts include expanding community gardens, helping small food businesses grow, promoting local farms and bringing food insecurity issues to local and state government.

ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IN NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick is a city of 5.789 square miles and population of over 55,000 located in Middlesex County, NJ. In Middlesex County, the poverty rate in 2010 was 7.7%, and the three-year average of household food insecurity between 2010 and 2012 was 12.1%. Nevertheless, between 2009 and 2013 the rates of obesity in adults have increased from 23.4% to 26.3% (USDA ERS, 2015). The city of New Brunswick has multiple comprehensive programs that seek to address the lack of access to sufficient, safe, culturally appropriate and nutritious food. These programs include initiatives by community, religious and government coalitions and organizations; school systems; businesses; and higher educations institution. The 2014 fellows at the Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement have provided an extensive list of the programs available in New Brunswick in "Improving Community Food Security in New Brunswick Report". The food pantries and soup kitchens in New Brunswick access food from two of the seven food banks in New Jersey: MCFOODS, a county food bank, and the Hillside Community Food Bank, a regional food bank (Glaser et al., 2014). To provide a brief, yet thorough, compilation of some of the services made available to New Brunswick Residents, the focus here will be on the emergency food providers within the Feeding New Brunswick Network, Elijah's Promise, and the New Brunswick Farmer's Market.

Feeding New Brunswick Network (FNBN)

FNBN is a coalition of food pantries and emergency food providers in New Brunswick. The New Brunswick City Council officially recognized the coalition on February 17, 2016. Before then and now, the coalition meets monthly to discuss concerns faced by the food pantries, as well as strategies to better allocate and coordinate their resources.

Members include:

- Vanessa's Pantry
- Christ Church Food Pantry
- Puerto Rican Action Board (PRAB)
- Ebenezer Baptist Soup Kitchen
- Elijah's Promise Soup Kitchen
- Salvation Army Pantry
- Second Reformed - Five Loaves Pantry
- St. Alban's Pantry
- St/ Vincent DePaul Pantry
- Suydam Street Reformed Pantry
- Tabernacle Baptist Pantry

(Patel, A., Interview)

Elijah's Promise

Elijah's Promise, although known for its soup kitchen, has expanded to provide a variety of services for New Brunswick residents. Jim Zullo, executive director of Elijah's Promise outlined a few of the the programs offered by its organization:

Community Soup Kitchen

- Serves more than 300 meals a day
- Volunteers and Promise Culinary School graduates cook nutritious meals
- Social services team provides information on housing assistance and referrals for medical services
- On-site program provides health and vision screenings, flu shots, and HIV/AIDS testing
- "Code blue" program opens up the community soup kitchen for the homeless when temperatures go below freezing or it is snowing

Promise Culinary School

- Provides a 6 month, state certified job training program in the food service industry
- Provides training to low-income, disabled, homeless or unemployed individuals

Better World Cafe

- Community kitchen allowing consumers to "pay what you can"
- Seeks seeks locally grown produce when possible and composts food scraps

(Zullo, J., Lecture)

New Brunswick Community Farmers Market (NBCFM)

NBCFM brings healthy food from local farms to the residents of New Brunswick at various locations throughout the city between the months of June and November. It also works closely with the community and schools to host some of the following programs:

Community Garden

- Supports school and community gardening efforts with programs on gardening, cooking and nutrition

Market Bucks

- Returns half of customers spending in the form of market bucks to be used with vendor at the farmers market whenever customers use their SNAP or WIC benefits

(Dixon, S., Lecture)

The aforementioned organizations do no justice to the expansive network of initiatives that seek to address the growing demand for access to food by vulnerable populations. According to FNBN, one of the greatest difficulties faced by these organizations due to growing demand is resources, both financial and volunteer-based. The remainder of this capstone will focus on the complexities of volunteer and service learning work and the importance of partnership and collaborative efforts in community work; and present a project aimed at building volunteer resources for food pantries within FNBN via a collaborative service-learning effort.

ADVANCING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: Didactic Phase

The Advancing Community Development (ACD) program is a community outreach initiative that aims to create a space where students can learn about and discuss disparities that exist in New Brunswick. ACD is one-year service-learning program emphasizing both classroom discussions and fieldwork. The first phase of the program encompasses learning about the year's topic and New Brunswick. During the second semester, in collaboration with local non-profit organizations, students develop capacity-building projects to improve the resources and delivery of resources made available to New Brunswick residents. This year, the focus of the ACD program was food insecurity.

During the first semester, we took the time to define food insecurity, as well as the risks and the outcomes; discuss the roles and responsibilities of Rutgers in the New Brunswick community; define and discuss the need for sustainable civic engagement; and identify the needs of New Brunswick and the Feeding New Brunswick Network. We learned about these topics directly from community leaders, including Jim Zullo, executive director of Elijah's Promise, and James Cahill, mayor of the city of New Brunswick. In addition to readings, discussions and guest lectures that encouraged civic engagement, we completed fieldwork in the community through volunteer hours or attendance at meetings with community organizations, including the Feeding New Brunswick Network. These experiences allowed us to learn first-hand what was happening in the community, as well as provided us with an opportunity to engage with the New Brunswick residents. Equally as important, the program let us reflect on the role of Rutgers University in the city of New Brunswick and our responsibilities as students.

Reflections

Critical Perspectives on Service: Sustainability

When people think about community service, they view it with positivity and optimism. Individuals and groups who see a need within a community and use their time and resources to address the problem represent such a fundamental part of our social responsibility to human dignity and well-being. Volunteering in communities, whether it's been cleaning up a park or interpreting at a clinic, I often think I am making a difference, no matter how small. It was not until I began to take a more critical perspective that the flaws of community service organizations surfaced in my mind. At weekly meetings of a student organization called GlobeMed, for example, we have had extensive discussions on the value of community service and the credibility of nonprofit organizations. We have often found service and nonprofit organizations struggle with establishing a sustainable structure.

In the issue of food insecurity, sustainability also seems to be the main problem service organizations face. After an introduction into food security, it is clear that the lack of it stems from ingrained subsidies and policies that perpetuate rising costs of healthy foods, the push toward processed alternatives, and economic and social stratification. These causes are on the federal level. In their book *The Stop* Nick Saul and Andrea Curtis explain that when food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens make it their responsibility to provide a meal to someone, "the result is government - supposedly responsible for the health and welfare of its citizens - is let off the hook. Instead of regarding food backs as the embodiment of a good deed...we should view these small, ephemeral, volunteer-run

places...as symbols of the breakdown of our social fabric" (Saul and Curtis, 2013). While this may be true, it also discouraging to take this point of view.

Community emergency food providers may not solve the root of the problem. This, however, does not mean that we should remain indifferent to our social responsibilities. We should be working towards bringing a more sustainable structure to community organizations, because they do have a positive impact on many individuals in need. Elijah's Promise, for example, has expanded its soup kitchen to address the growing needs of New Brunswick. Jim Zullo detailed the story of a woman who was able to turn her life around after struggling with drug abuse through their culinary program. With the culinary training program, she gained applicable skills, demonstrated them at the soup kitchen, and eventually applied them at a restaurant job. Yes, Elijah's Promise is not a sustainable solution to the problems of food insecurity, but is a start and kind of place from where, with enough momentum, change is possible.

Critical Perspective on Service: Volunteers

Service organizations and volunteers face many roadblocks and challenges that question intentions. The first roadblock is approaching a field where people will question your intentions and wonder whether you have enough background knowledge to understand the community. Therefore, there has been a paradigm shift from community service to service-learning initiatives. The change represents many of the challenges in deciding to work as an advocate and fighter against social inequalities. Service-learning models place a greater emphasis on the learning process of service. It ensures volunteers gain a deep understanding of and connect with the community they serve. Furthermore,

service-learning initiatives allow volunteers to work on projects within the community, building sustainability and a more knowledgeable base of engaged citizens.

The word service also clouds roles and positions in community work. However, those engaged in service work should take a step back to realize they are no better than the community they are 'serving'. The Blue Sweater tells the journey of Jacqueline Novogratz, the author, discovering her own roles as a global citizen in Africa. As Novogratz explained in her book, realizing that we are not a position of power is the most important step to helping a community. Yes, we may have the tools, knowledge and resources, but we cannot truly know the experiences and needs of a community without collaborating and listening to people first. To create an empowered community able to sustain itself, we must give members of the community need the upper hand and opportunity to contribute and succeed. One of the African women in the novel, for example, expressed her disapproval of Novogratz, because Novogratz was not an African woman who could relate to and communicate with members of the community due to language barriers. Although Novogratz had good intentions, she realized the locals would have a better understanding of not only the language but the dynamics of the community. With this in mind, she had to take her initiative in a new role: listening.

Similarly, the first step in dealing with food security in New Brunswick is to find out what the community needs, according to them and not us. Only the soup kitchens and food pantries in the city will understand both their needs and the needs of their clients. For example, while education is an important factor in making healthy choices, incorporating educational programs on nutrition at food pantries and soup kitchens would not change outcomes if there access to those choices does not exist. Providing New

Brunswick residents with food coupons might be similarly ineffective if there are no providers within their reach. Within FNBN, some food pantries have expressed a need for a reliable connection with knowledgeable volunteers to help them during their operating hours. Therefore, although multiple problems contributing to food insecurity exist, we must collaborate with FNBN pantries to meet their specific goals.

Assessing Community Initiative Outcomes

Once a community voices and determines their needs, they can develop projects and initiatives to address them. Assessment provides either quantitative or qualitative data evaluating programs that may suggest any further changes and improvements. However, nonprofit organizations, particularly those with limited resources, often struggle measure the success of their programs.

NBCFM has been slowly expanding and working on listening and meeting the needs of New Brunswick. Sara Dixon, the Senior Program Coordinator, provided incredible insight regarding the New Brunswick community and the projects on which she and her colleagues at NBCFM work, as well as the barriers they face in assessment. She presented data on the food insecurity issue in New Brunswick through the lens of Farmer's Market. The data depicted percent sales, as well as who was making use of their services. However, Sara highlighted the flaw in their data collection given the unavailability of information on people who pay cash at the farmer's market. The data Sara presented also demonstrated inconsistencies over the years, and she did not seem to have a reason as to why this was. For NBCFM, it would be important to assess why large inconsistencies exist (e.g. change in vendors, fewer volunteers, growing seasons,

advertising, change of locations, pricing or selection of produce etc.) so that the organization can target specific areas of need or concern.

After learning about the Market Bucks program (recall page 12), I thought data would show a majority of visitors with SNAP benefits. However, data shows that only 3% of residents buying from the NBCFM are SNAP recipients (Dixon, S., Lecture). Again, it would be important to assess these reasons, especially if residents qualifying for SNAP could obtain double the produce for the same price at the farmer's market. Some reasons I think might come in play here include permanent residency status, since eligibility for SNAP benefits depends on this status. Other factors that might contribute to the lack of participation may include location of the market and a lack of knowledge of the Market Bucks program.

Community Initiative Setbacks

In addition to improving the methods of capacity evaluation, Sara also pointed to the importance of improving relationships among community organizations. She highlighted this need through an example of the Buy Back program, a service that allows food pantries to buy leftover produce from the farmer's market at the end of the day. Although originally the idea sounded great, what seemed like a lack of communication with community organization derailed the idea from complete success. Only after implementation was it found that food pantries, namely churches, lacked resources of transportation and storage to adequately buy and handle produce. In the end, the program only had success with Elijah's Promise, pointing to need for direct collaboration with community food pantries before decisions are made (Dixon, S., Lecture). This presents

communication and collaboration as some of the most important factors in ensuring the success of community programs.

Collaborative Efforts

Over the semester, we also tossed around the words collaboration and partnership constantly. Collaboration occurs at all levels in a community. Relationships among corporate professionals, city leaders, and the community establish and maintain the vitality of New Brunswick. The speakers, from Jim Zullo to Sara Dixon, outlined the efforts of all organizations in New Brunswick to move the city forward. However, they did so in a relatively more isolated manner, in other words, a little more confined to the goals of their organization. Sara Dixon, for example, focused on the Farmer's Market, and Jim Zullo focused on Elijah's Promise. What is interesting is that both of these speakers mentioned setbacks in their organizations because of miscommunications with other organizations in the city. This does not mean the collaborative efforts are obsolete in the New Brunswick community. Partnership is the very reason New Brunswick has experienced significant progress over the years. Although, there is still much to do.

New Brunswick, once a symbol of urban decay, is now a model of urban revitalization for other cities across America. However, New Brunswick is a unique city in that it is home to both a huge research university and corporation. This may lead us to believe that other cities, facing urban decay, would not be able to move their communities forward without the same facilities and support from such prominent entities. After all, Rutgers University and Johnson & Johnson have played important roles in the progress of the city. However, Mayor Cahill emphasized that while not every city will have the same set of resources from which to draw support, cities must be able to

leverage the resources that are available (Cahill, J., Lecture). After all, Rutgers and Johnson & Johnson have been in New Brunswick for hundreds of years, but change was not possible until these entities began cooperating with each other and the city. A huge part of this cooperation is making sure there are cohesive goals for the city. Organizations, big or small, must know who is doing what. This avoids wasting time and resources and allows organizations to work together toward a common goal or approach an issue differently.

Keith Jones, Community Organization Specialist (COS) of the city of New Brunswick, and New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT) are, respectively, great examples of people and organizations that oversee collaborative efforts among different entities in the city. The COS position was created a little over a year ago for the very purpose of connecting resident needs to government. NBT, established on July 1975, addresses social issues in the community by identifying and convening stakeholders and local social programs to collaborate. Prior to bringing public/private partnerships into the picture, NBT determines needs with the use of community forums, focus groups, and task forces. Their goal is to secure sustainable funding since many local social programs struggle to finance their projects long-term. NBT also makes sure they identify similarly minded organizations that can work together and share ideas for a common cause (Santiago, J., Lecture). This allows for a better allocation of scarce resources.

Jamie Santiago, Vice President of NBT, also provided invaluable insight on the concepts about collaboration in the city of New Brunswick. He also questioned whether New Brunswick could serve as a model for other cities facing urban decay given its unique position. Mayor Cahill emphasized that New Brunswick could serve as a model

for any city as long as it is able to leverage the resources it has. Jaime, however, suggested we think about Perth Amboy, a city with very similar disparities and needs as New Brunswick. The major different between the two cities is the presence of Rutgers University and a corporation like Johnson & Johnson (Santiago, J., Lecture). This difference makes Perth Amboy a resource desert, making it much more difficult, although not impossible, to address the needs of the city. The lack of resources, mostly financial assets, also makes it difficult for Perth Amboy to lift itself toward progress as a city. This makes logical sense. A city cannot develop the programs, build the infrastructure, or hire the personnel to improve the wellbeing of its residents without financial resources.

Nevertheless, partnership is key is building a strong foundation of not only financial resources but also ideas. The collaboration models in New Brunswick are unique just as they are unique in every other city across the world. Cities can serve as models for each other. Bogota, Colombia, for example, inspired the open street event, Ciclovia, in New Brunswick (Santiago, J., Lecture). Identifying needs and creating partnerships takes time. Non-profit work is a slow but productive process. Whether New Brunswick, Bogota or Perth Amboy, grassroots organizations must keep in mind the sustainability of their initiatives. Organizations need both resources to get moving and sustainable initiatives to allow the success and growth of long-term projects.

Looking Ahead

During the first semester of ACD, I gained a more critical perspective on my roles in the community. Service should not be a black and white concept, where one person gives and the other person takes. It should be a mutual relationship with each party giving and taking feedback and learning from each other. We are all equals. When we grant this

respect for each other, we create a more connected and civically engaged community. Whether working with other ACD students, FNBN pantry coordinators, Johnson & Johnson mentors, or pantry clients, looking ahead, we must value and use our existing differences in a collaborative advantage.

ADVANCING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: Project Phase

With a background on New Brunswick and a new perspective on civic engagement, we began working in collaboration with Johnson & Johnson mentors to develop projects within the Feeding New Brunswick Network (FNBN) with the aim of improving their organizational capacity to serve New Brunswick residents. As previously mentioned, FNBN is a coalition of soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency food providers in the city, working toward understanding their needs and strategizing resource allocation. Throughout their own discussions, FNBN identified the need for a reliable connection to knowledgeable volunteers. Therefore, during the project phase, two of four ACD initiatives were dedicated to bringing volunteers that are more knowledgeable to the pantries within the network. The two projects dedicated to building on volunteer resources included a volunteer manual and volunteer recruitment kit. I worked on the volunteer recruitment kit team with three other ACD students. I will briefly describe the volunteer manual to explain how the two separate projects merged at the the end to expand on volunteer resources for the FNBN coalition members.

Volunteer Manual

The volunteer manual informs potential volunteers about the history of soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency food providers in New Brunswick, as well as provide them with a background on the issue of food insecurity. To help volunteers

understand their role in the pantries, the manual includes a description of the emergency food system. Other components of the volunteer manual include information regarding the specific tasks at each pantry within FNBN, as well as information on how to be a "good volunteer" (i.e. cultural sensitivity and commonly used words and expression in Spanish). In the manual prospective volunteers can also find contact information for each of the coalition members. In addition, it currently hosts links to two volunteer registration forms created for the volunteer recruitment kit.

Volunteer Recruitment Kit

The volunteer recruitment kit connects more knowledgeable volunteers with both general and target coalition members of FNBN. The general target aimed to create outreach materials through a public relations platform. FNBN decided that the best outreach outlet for them would be a Facebook page. Therefore, we worked on creating a Facebook page for FNBN, which included the creation of a cover photo for the coalition. Through the Facebook page, we raised awareness about the newly founded coalition and their need for volunteers. Outreach began with the the identification of Rutgers student organizations, where a huge pool of potential volunteers exists. Collectively, we sent these organizations more information about FNBN. However, our reach was not exclusive to Rutgers students. We were also in contact with the coalition members and Johnson & Johnson regarding FNBN.

The Facebook page was a simple start to FNBN's public relations platform. A way for the the surroundings communities to learn the 'who' and 'how' about FNBN. The most essential part of the volunteer recruitment kit was finding and creating a volunteer registration form for two target pantries: Vanessa's Food Pantry and Christ

Church Hospital Food Pantry. Each of these pantries within FNBN expressed their need for a simple, user friendly way that volunteers could sign up to register for shifts. The creation of the volunteer registration forms encompassed several phases: (i) interviews with target food pantries; (ii) identification of a user-friendly registration platform; (iii) creation of the forms based on needs; (iv) creation of a guide; (v) reviews of the forms with the target pantries.

Throughout the semester, I maintained contact with Vanessa Dunzik, the pantry coordinator at the newly renamed Vanessa's Food Pantry (formerly called Emanuel Lutheran Church Food Pantry). Vanessa Dunzik is not only the food pantry coordinator but also the Parish Administrator at Emanuel Lutheran, responsibilities keeping her busy and always in need of extra helping hands. During my first interview with Vanessa, I aimed to learn more about the pantry (clients, volunteers, hours, etc.), previous volunteer registration systems, and the technology available to her (see Appendix A). Throughout our conversation, Vanessa made it clear that the pantry currently lacked reliable volunteers. Most of the volunteer resources at the time were from the church. Although volunteer affiliation is not a problem, it does become an issue when her volunteers show up late or leave early. Overall, she rated the current volunteer reliability a five out of ten. Furthermore, Vanessa explained previous efforts connecting her to volunteers through a site called CheryIvy. She compared the site to VolunteerMatch, highlighting that the platform was something she could not easily handle and maintain. At the point of our interview, my team and I were considering two platforms to use for the registration forms: Wufoo and Google Forms. Vanessa never heard about Wufoo and never used Google Forms (Dunzik, V., interview). However, based on our preliminary research, we

found that these two platforms were the most user-friendly options for our target pantries. After identifying volunteer hours and needs and simple technology capacity, we took the information gathered during interviews to create the registration forms.

The original plan was to create a centralized system (link) volunteers could access for the target pantries. Google Forms was the best option for this goal. However, on creating a registration system on Google Forms, we encountered a problem: individual pantries would not be able to receive pertinent e-mails regarding newly registered volunteers. Many of the pantries, although now part of FNBN, run independently and, therefore, need their own individual communication methods. Using Google Forms would have necessitated a collective e-mail for the pantries to receive notifications, sending unnecessary notifications to pantries, who are already struggling to keep track of information. Therefore, after exploring Google Forms, we decided it would not be the best option given the needs of the target pantries.

Wufoo, an online form builder, was our next choice. It turned out to be the best choice and the platform we used to create the registration forms for the target pantries. Through the Wufoo platform, each pantry can edit their own forms and set up their notification preferences, and the pantries do not have to worry about the content or notifications from other pantries in the network. Therefore, we abandoned the idea of a centralized link for the pantries in the coalition. An alternative solution to the issue of centralization is a website. A simple website hosting more information on the coalition and volunteer registration forms would provide FNBN another outlet for awareness and centralized connection to volunteers. Although we wanted to create a preliminary site for FNBN, the coalition decided they wanted to wait until their organization achieved a little

more structure. As always, it is important to take into consideration the needs and input of the organization first.

The content and layout of the forms are a product of collaborative efforts mainly between the target pantries and the team. We presented the initial drafts of the registration forms to each of the food pantry coordinators along with a "how to" guide. During my presentation of the form and guide to Vanessa, I did a mock sign-up. It allowed Vanessa to see how volunteers filled the form out. More importantly, it showed her how she would receive notifications on newly registered volunteers. With the help of the guide, we reviewed how Wufoo works, specifically how she could make changes to the form. Vanessa thought it was a simple site and was excited to move forward (Dunzik, V., interview). The forms themselves highlight how we took into consideration the specific needs of the target pantries in creating them. Each form has a different layout and requirements as suggested by the pantry coordinators (See Appendix B).

To ensure we considered all sides of utilization of the forms, we received input from potential volunteer sources as well. During class meetings, other ACD students provided their input since we all volunteered with the pantries in New Brunswick. We also set up a meeting with Hilarina Casie-Chitty from the Volunteer Support Program of Corporate Contributions at Johnson & Johnson. Hilarina, who coordinates volunteers at the company, mentioned a group sign-up option would be a good addition to the form. Many volunteers, such as those at Johnson & Johnson and Rutgers, often choose to volunteer in groups. With this option, it would also be important to state the maximum number of volunteers the pantry can handle in a given shift (Casie-Chitty, H., interview). A group volunteer option was already a component of the Christ Church Food Pantry.

We modified Vanessa's Food Pantry form to include a group volunteering option. In both cases, we catered the options as per the needs of the pantry coordinators, hence the slight difference in layout of the forms.

During our meeting, Hilarina also discussed the idea of a centralized platform from which volunteers could access the volunteer registration forms we created. Just as my team and I had discussed, she suggested creating a website containing basic information on the FNBN coalition members. A site hosting basic information would not need day to day, or even week to week, updates. It would only facilitate the volunteer search for potential volunteers (Casie-Chitty, H., interview). However, FNBN does not want to start a site until their organization has a better structure. After all, we do not want the website to get lost among their other current initiatives. We want to ensure its sustainability. It is, therefore, a better option to wait until FNBN designates a member working on the communications aspect of their organization. During our final project presentation, we recommended FNBN try to obtain an AmeriCorps volunteer to help them create a site to host pantry information, the volunteer manual and volunteer registration forms, as well as update the new Facebook page.

In the meantime, the FNBN Facebook page hosts the volunteer registration forms linked to the cover photo and pinned as a post to the top of the page. The "pinned post" feature on Facebook allows any visitors on the page to see a description of the coalition and the links to the registration forms first. Anytime visitors hover over the cover photo, they will also see the same information. Furthermore, coalition members can freely edit the description and links embedded to the cover photo as per their needs. In the future, the Facebook page itself can host the link to an FNBN website.

Furthermore, the Volunteer Manual also hosts the volunteer registration forms. Looking to include the manual in the connection between the pantries and volunteers, we wanted confirmation e-mails sent to volunteers to include the Volunteer Manual. However, the Wufoo platform does not allow the addition of attachments to the confirmation email. We also considered embedding a shareable "view only" link to a Google Doc but have to discuss this option with the pantry coordinators. Collectively, our hope is that potential volunteers will be able to access all the information we have gathered and resources we have created on a single site. For FNBN and their partners, our hope is that the Facebook page continues to spread awareness about their organization and that the registration forms start connecting more volunteers to the target pantries and serve as a model system for other pantries.

CONCLUSION

Food pantries and other emergency food providers have an integral and invaluable role in a community, providing sustenance to individuals and groups with either no or few means to obtain food for themselves and their families. These community organizations are desperately trying to expand to meet growing demand. In addition to expansion, these organizations are always looking for ways to provide safer, more nutritious and more culturally appropriate foods. Expansion and improvement for food pantries and emergency food providers with few financial resources would not be possible without the time and dedication of reliable volunteers. Raising awareness about the partners at the Feeding New Brunswick Network and connecting volunteers to two target pantries were only two start-up initiatives. Further work is needed to build on what the ACD students have started and address other obstacles food pantries and emergency

food providers face. I believe FNBN is off to a great start. The basic premise of their organizations is collaboration, working together to define common problems and strategize the allocation of their resources. Throughout my ACD experience, I have learned that collaborative efforts are key in moving communities forward, because it allows multiple groups to pool together their ideas and resources to make an impactful difference.

Over the past year, ACD has provided me an outlet to engage with New Brunswick residents, while learning about one of the most pressing issues faced across US and the world: food insecurity. Advancing Community Development has been a culmination in my work as an undergraduate and a first step into my involvement with communities beyond New Brunswick. Looking ahead, I know I will be putting to use many of the skills and knowledge I have gained from the ACD program.

APPENDIX A

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Graciela Cando
Interviewee: Vanessa Dunzik, Vanessa's Food Pantry Coordinator
Setting: Emanuel Lutheran church

(Start of Interview)

Volunteer Hours/Capacity/Needs

Interviewer: Can you confirm pantry hours?
Interviewee: We distribute every Wednesday from 10 am to 12 pm, but volunteers need to, ideally, be at the church at 9:30 am so that we get setup and assign roles. Then we have unloading of a food delivery truck from the Hillside Community Food Bank & pre-bagging every 3rd Thursday at 9 am. Every Saturday after the third Thursday we do distribution from 10 am to 12 pm. We also need volunteers to come at 9:30 am then too.

Interviewer: What are the roles of volunteers during these hours?
Interviewee: When we do bagging, volunteers are in charge of creating 5 types of bags: federal, state, snack, walk through bag (which contains nutritious foods) and produce. During our distribution times, volunteers register clients, complete paperwork, maintain the traffic flow, break down boxes and clean.
It would be great to have volunteer who could help with more of the administrative paperwork, because we have to keep a lot of records of our registered clients. Right now, one person does all of them. It would be ideal if the person had knowledge of Access, and we could possibly do it with arranged hours. Also bilingual volunteers. Many clients speak Spanish.

Interviewer: Where are most volunteers from (the church, community, Rutgers)?
Interviewee: Most volunteers are from the Church, friends of the Church or clients themselves. But, many of them do not come in on time or stay the entire time. It would definitely be beneficial to have Rutgers volunteers.

Interviewer: How many volunteers are usually needed during these times?
Interviewee: Ideal: 5. Minimum: 4. Maximum: 8

Interviewer: Is there a centralized system for volunteer sign-up? How are volunteer resources obtained?
Interviewee: No. Right now, they're mostly from the Church

Interviewer: How would you rate the current reliability of volunteers on a scale of 1-10?
Interviewee: It fluctuates, but overall 5.

Interviewer: Are there any seasonal peaks of need for volunteers?
Interviewee: October-December are peak months of need, serving more than 200 families

Interviewer: Any seasonal lulls?

Interviewee: It changes. This past January was a slow month. Around 100 families were served.

Technology Capacity

Interviewer: Does the administration have access to computers?
Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: Are emails a good method of communication with ELC? emanuelnb.org@gmail.com?
Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: Are you familiar with VolunteerMatch, Google Forms or Wufoo?
Interviewee: I think Cheryivy is similar to VolunteerMatch. Emanuel Lutheran Church was trying to use something called Cheryivy. But it was a start-up site. I found it difficult to keep up with it in the long run. I've heard about googleforms, yes, but I have never used them. Never heard about Wufoo.

Interviewer: Is the ELC website (http://www.emanuelnb.org/) being kept up to date?
Interviewee: No. I would like to keep it up to date with a separate website for the pantry in the future.

Interviewer: Great, thank you! I'll be keeping in touch soon.
Interviewee: Sure, no problem.

APPENDIX B

Wufoo Volunteer Registration Form created for Vanessa's Food Pantry

Volunteer at Vanessa's Food Pantry

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at Vanessa's food pantry. Please read the following for more information.

Our location:
Emanuel Lutheran Church
New and Kirkpatrick Streets
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Church Office Phone Number:
732-545-2673

VOLUNTEER HOURS and DUTIES

Distributing food, signing clients in/maintaining traffic flow, breaking down boxes:
Every Wednesday 9:30am-12pm
Every Saturday after the 3rd Thursday of the month 9am-11am

Unloading food delivery truck and pre-bagging
Every 3rd Thursday of the month 9am-11am

Are you signing up with a group? * No

If yes, how many people are in your group?

Volunteer Affiliation

First Name *

Last Name *

Email *

Phone Number * ( ) - ( ) - ( )
####

Select time to volunteer *
- ☐ Wednesday 9:30am-12pm
- ☐ 3rd Thursday 9-11am
- ☐ Saturday after 3rd Thursday 9-11am

Date * / /
MM DD YYYY

Submit

Wufoo Volunteer Registration Form created for Christ Church Food Pantry

WUFOO

Volunteer at Christ Church Food Pantry

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at the Christ Church Food Pantry.

Address:
5 Paterson St, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Phone Number:
(732) 545-6262

Email:
foodpantry@christchurchnewbrunswick.org

AVAILABLE VOLUNTEER TIME SLOTS and DUTIES:

Assistance Needed for Setup and Food Distribution:
2nd and 3rd Wednesdays of the month (5:00-7:30pm)
Last two Fridays of the month (8:30-10:30am)
Last two Saturdays of the month (9:30am-12pm)

Assistance Needed for Unloading, Sorting, Bagging:
Every Wednesday (9:30-11:30am)
2nd Tuesday of the month (8:00-10:00am)

INSTRUCTIONS:
Fill out form below, and your responses will be forwarded to the Christ Church Food Pantry. PLEASE NOTE you must sign up for volunteer shifts at least 7 days in advance.

If anything in your registration changes before your volunteer date (cancellation, time change, etc.), you MUST notify the pantry in advance (contact info above), preferably at least 2 days ahead.

First Name *

Last Name *

Volunteer Affiliation

Email *

Phone Number *
___ - ___ - ____
####

Are you under the age of 16? *
- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

Select what time(s) you would like to sign up for: *
- [ ] 2nd Tuesday (8:00-10:00am)
- [ ] Wednesday (9:30-11:30am)
- [ ] 2nd Wednesday (5:00-7:30pm)
- [ ] 3rd Wednesday (5:00-7:30pm)
- [ ] Last two Fridays (8:30-10:30am)
- [ ] Last two Saturdays (9:30am-12pm)

Enter exact volunteer date(s) and time(s) of arrival based on the monthly times you selected above. Use (MM/DD/YY) format. *

Additional notes or things we should know:
(i.e. early departures, group sign-ups, etc.)

Submit

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