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### Honors Contract Food Insecurity Paper

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### **Honors Contract Food Insecurity Paper**

Food insecurity is a complex, multifactoral issue that affects millions of Americans each year. Food insecurity is the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient amount of nutritious foods, leading to a disruption of food intake or eating patterns. This issue affects a wide range of people such as children, seniors, rural communities, African Americans, and Latinos. The social determinants of health that can lead to food insecurity are poverty, low-income, level of education, employment status, age, and environment (Asadi-Lari, 2019). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, food issues have only gotten worse and we've had to learn how to adapt to this crisis. While it is not a simple issue to address, there are many programs and agencies that are trying to help those who are food insecure and it is extremely important that we educate the public on the availability of these agencies, and continue to make advancements within their programs. Within North Andover and Lawrence, there are at least five excellent agencies that are addressing the issue of food insecurity while also adapting to the food issues caused by COVID-19.

According to the Greater Boston Food Bank and many other locations, food insecurity has always been a problem, but now it is significantly worse due to the pandemic (The Greater Boston Food Bank Covid-19 Response, 2021). COVID-19 has created an even more limited access to resources and sources of food for food insecure households in the United States. With unprecedented spikes in unemployment as well as widespread school closures, the already

limited resources of food are being further exacerbated. “In 2018, 11% of Americans reported experiencing some form of food insecurity. Alarming, the estimated proportion of food insecure households has more than doubled in the aftermath of COVID-19. The weekly Household Pulse Survey (HPS), conducted by the US Census Bureau, indicates that 25.2% of respondents and 29.6% of respondents with children experienced conditions of food insecurity between April 23rd and June 30, 2020” (Harris- Lagoudakis, 2020). By closing the schools, there has been a large decline in nutrition assistance programs such as the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program that would usually supply eligible students with free and reduced meals. In addition, with the rates of unemployment drastically increasing, we are seeing an increase in food insecure households which is resulting in the high demand for agencies specializing in food insecurity aid. Food insecurity agencies are needed now more than ever and it’s important to know what your local agencies are doing to solve the food issue and how they’ve been adapting to COVID-19.

### ***Greater Lawrence Family Health Center***

In Massachusetts, specifically North Andover and Lawrence, there are many agencies that address the community's needs surrounding food insecurity. For example, the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center really emphasizes the importance of listening to the community by looking into Lawrence’s “social determinants of health and promoting health equity so they can truly understand their target population” (Carpenter, 2018). In addition, to get a better understanding of the community needs through the perspective of someone struggling with food insecurity, they’ve used methods such as informant interviews, focus groups, and community needs assessments. The goal of their program is to, “describe how the use of informant interviews and focus groups, community needs assessment resources and stakeholder relationships helps to promote a community-driven movement that can tackle health equity”

(Carpenter, 2018). Many agencies focus on providing materials and food for these populations, but in order to create a successful program, the agency needs to know what the community's needs are. Greater Lawrence Family Health Center's focus on the needs of the community forms the basis of other food insecurity agencies in Lawrence and North Andover.

### *Neighbors In Need*

Another agency in Greater Lawrence that strives to help the food insecure community is Neighbors in Need. There are many concerns about the consequences of poverty and poor nutrition of families in Lawrence, and Neighbors in Need is an organization that is addressing these issues. "Access to good, healthy, affordable food is a serious public health issue in Lawrence--the incidence of obesity, diabetes, and premature cardiovascular disease are twice the state average. These significant health disparities are rooted in long-standing economic conditions in the area. We address these challenges every day by providing healthy food to over 850 families a week at our Food Pantries strategically located in the neighborhoods of Lawrence and Methuen" (*Neighbors In Need*, 2021). Knowing the needs of their clients, they provide food, diapers, formula, clothing, and other necessities all free of charge. They also work with their clients to make sure they are taking advantage of the appropriate services such as WIC and food stamps in order to try and motivate them to become more self-sufficient. Their food pantries are open in different locations every Monday through Thursday so people have many opportunities to get the supplies they need. Neighbors in Need has become extremely busy since the pandemic and they've had to make adjustments and updates to the program in order to follow the COVID-19 guidelines. The food pantries are still open, but clients are no longer allowed inside (*Neighbors In Need*, 2021). Instead they must wait outside making sure they are 6 feet apart and wearing masks, and pick up the bags that are being handed out by one of the employees. The

diaper pantry is also now operating remotely, and if someone needs diapers or formula they are asked to call in and order so they can figure out a pickup time and location.

### ***North Andover & Lawrence YMCA***

One of the most popular organizations known for helping with food insecurity are local YMCA's. "Across the United States, more than 500,000 business leaders, community advocates, parents, teens and individuals who want to give back and support their neighbors volunteer at the Y" (YMCA of the USA, 2021). Not only does the Lawrence and North Andover YMCA have food drives and food pantries to increase access to healthy foods for kids and their families, but they also encourage youth involvement for these programs. Community and volunteering are huge values for all YMCA's and by taking a youth-based approach to food security, they are educating these kids on real world problems. Through hands-on experiences, they can learn how to help themselves and others in the future. For example, a pilot project was launched through Ohio State University in order to address the challenges of youth engagement and food insecurity through multiple YMCA's. The vision was to, "Improve urban food security and positively develop youth in the Sister Cities of Columbus, Ohio and Accra, Ghana through agriculture & cross-cultural exchange" (Homan, 2018). The kids learned how to garden and harvest fruits and vegetables and take home some more nutritious food options to their families while also leaving their communities with multiple gardens. The Lawrence and North Andover YMCA have similar youth-based programs focusing on food insecurity such as the youth global leaders council and the cooking class programs where it has a positive effect on the development of youth members and their education and understanding of the food insecure community. Due to COVID-19, the YMCA has been doing "Food Drive and Drop" programs as well as offering grab and go meals. People can drive into the parking lot and drop off food items such as pasta, peanut butter, rice, canned vegetables or tuna, and granola bars and the volunteers will put these donations into the

grab and go boxes for clients to pick up. The combination of youth-based volunteering and learning alongside regular food drives and donations is what makes the YMCA a popular food insecurity aid.

### ***Food For The World***

Food For The World in Lawrence is a special and very beneficial agency because while they do offer food pantries and accept donations, they also offer health screening programs and diet and nutritional counseling. This is something different we are seeing from a food insecurity agency and it is extremely beneficial for this target population. “We offer quarterly health screenings for our clients to promote better health and wellness through our partnership with the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center Clinic and the City of Lawrence. These screenings are for cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases and are available 4x a year to all of our clients free of charge” (*Food For The World*, 2021). Health screenings are extremely important especially for those in this target population who may not be able to afford to get one. Alongside the health screening program, clients are also offered nutritional counseling where a certified nutritionist conducts classes on healthier lifestyles, dieting, and exercising. Both of these programs are still operating, but clients must have a negative Covid test result, and only a certain number of people are allowed in the nutritional counseling class. Food For The World has five food pantries in the areas of Lawrence, Merrimack Valley, and Essex County of Massachusetts. These food pantries are operating weekly and are following the COVID-19 guidelines by setting up times for clients to pick up their pre-packaged food boxes outside.

### ***Veterans Food Security Program***

Finally, the Veterans Food Security Program at the North Andover Farmers Market addresses the food insecurity problem among a specific population. “Over one in four veterans reported past-year food insecurity with 12 % reporting very low food security. Food-insecure

veterans tended to be younger, not married/partnered, living in households with more children, earning lower incomes, had a lower final military pay grade, were more likely to use tobacco, reported more frequent binge drinking and slept less, compared with those who were food secure” (Widome, 2015). The Farmers Market launched the Veterans Food Security Program in conjunction with the North Andover Veterans Services in order to provide low-income veterans access to healthy food options from the market (North Andover Farmers Market, 2021). This program uses vouchers donated from the market to eligible veterans and when they come to shop at the market, they can purchase items using the vouchers. The vendors collect the vouchers and they are reimbursed using funds from the food security program. This program has been extremely successful as they receive many donations through their PO box. In response to COVID-19, they’ve used the funds from the program to purchase and donate \$2,500 in gift cards from local restaurants to the Veterans Service office who will then distribute them to the local North Andover military veterans so they can order delivery or take-out from home (North Andover Farmers Market, 2021).

Food insecurity has become a much more relevant issue due to the impacts made by COVID-19. It can create serious effects such as health complications or damaging a child’s ability to grow and develop. Fortunately, there are many programs and agencies that have done so much to help those who are food insecure. They incorporate community needs assessments, food drives and pantries, youth-based programs, health screenings, nutritional counseling, and vouchers for those who are eligible. There are so many local agencies where people should donate or volunteer because it really helps those who are struggling with food insecurity. Urban Institute says, “we highlight solutions that speak to major challenges families face—such as finding affordable housing, accessing needed health care, and increasing earnings and

assets—that can also affect their ability to afford a healthy diet. The most effective strategies leverage opportunities to bring these different domains together. This is not an exhaustive list of strategies but rather a starting point as communities consider how to take action” (Ratcliffe, 2019). There are many sources like this that address solutions of food insecurity through community involvement and charitable organizations and it’s important that we recognize them. Every agency offers different services, but the goal they all have in common is to end hunger for everyone, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Harris-Lagoudakis, Katherine. *Federal Food Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

Iowa State University Digital Repository, 2020,

[www.card.iastate.edu/ag\\_policy\\_review/pdf/fall-2020.pdf](http://www.card.iastate.edu/ag_policy_review/pdf/fall-2020.pdf).

This article, by author Katherine Harris-Lagoudakis, addresses the food policy response during the Covid-19 pandemic. It talks about how Covid has created a limited access to resources and sources of food for food insecure households in the United States. This article summarizes trends in food insecurity, nutrition assistance program participation and the food policy responses that have been implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will likely serve as either an introduction or conclusion paragraph of this paper as it does a great job summarizing and addressing the food issues that Covid has created as well as solutions.

Carpenter E, Nohria R, Meyers S. (2018). Greater Lawrence Family Health Center Food Insecurity Campaign: Building Partnerships within Communities to Address Social Determinants of Health and Promote Health Equity. *Community Engagement and Research Symposia*. <https://doi.org/10.13028/891d-9657>. Retrieved from [https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/chr\\_symposium/2018/program/7](https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/chr_symposium/2018/program/7)

Authors Elise Carpenter, Raman Nohria and Shannon Meyers discuss what the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center has been doing to address the high levels of food insecurity in the area. By building partnerships with other communities, looking into the social determinants of health, and promoting health equity, they can start to meet the needs of the Lawrence population who is struggling with food insecurity. Some communities they've partnered with are the Mayor's Health Task Force of Lawrence, Greater Boston Food Bank, and Groundworks Lawrence. In order to truly understand the community's needs through the community members perspectives or experiences, they've used methods such as informant interviews, focus groups, and community needs assessments. This material will be very useful for my topic because it talks about an agency that addresses food insecurity and includes what type of methods they've been using to understand the communities needs and what they can do to address the issue. They also mention several other agencies/communities that they've partnered with. This could serve as one of the beginning paragraphs as it gives a good overview of Lawrence's food insecurity issue.

<http://www.needfood.org/home>

This source gives an overview of the agency Neighbors in Need in Lawrence. The goal of their agency is to serve at-risk families and youth in Greater Lawrence by providing food, diapers, formula, clothing, and other necessities. The site also provides a schedule and times for

food pick up and delivery. They also give information on measures taken to keep the community healthy and safe during Covid-19. This material will be useful for my paper because it gives a good summary as to what this agency does to help the food insecurity problem as well as provides necessities other than food. They also address the measures taken and how they've adapted to Covid and what their new plan is for the agency which is something I want to include in this paper as well.

<https://www.mvymca.org/pantry/>

<https://mvfb.org>

Homan, Dustin, et al. "Our Common Home: A Youth-Based Approach to Food Security."

*KB Home*, Ohio State University. Office of Outreach and Engagement, 1 Apr. 2018,

kb.osu.edu/handle/1811/84659.

These sources and journals talk about the YMCA's involvement with helping solve the issue of food insecurity. The Lawrence and North Andover YMCA have food drives and food pantries where the goal is to "fill the gap" and increase access to healthy foods for kids and their families. They list all the food items and personal care items that would be most helpful and beneficial and give a schedule so that people can "Drive and Drop." (Covid) They have a food drive, a food pantry, and "Grab and Go" meals as well. The journal I cited by authors Dustin Homan, Steven Blalock and Trevor Secord, talks about the importance of getting the youth involved with food insecurity programs. In my paper I can talk about some of the youth-based programs and connect the values of the YMCA with food insecurity to discuss how this is a very beneficial organization for multiple reasons.

<https://www.foodfortheworld.org>

This site talks about the variety of programs they have as well as food pantries to help serve those suffering from food insecurity. Food for the World in Lawrence helps alleviate hunger and malnutrition by providing free access to nutritious foods to the low and moderate income families, homeless, elderly, and individuals. They have five food pantries that serve food weekly, they offer health screenings to promote better health and wellness through their partnership with the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center Clinic and the City of Lawrence, and they provide diet and nutritional counseling. This is a great source to use for my paper because they offer a variety of different options that address social determinants of health. We are seeing something other than just a food pantry or a food drive.

Widome R, Jensen A, Bangerter A, Fu SS. Food insecurity among veterans of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Public Health Nutr.* 2015 Apr;18(5):844-9. doi: 10.1017/S136898001400072X. Epub 2014 May 8. PMID: 24806818.

<https://www.northandoverfarmersmarket.org/veterans-food-security-program>

In this article, authors Widome, Jensen, Bangerter, and Fu give an overview of the food insecurity issue specifically surrounding veterans. It gives representative data and national findings that there is very low food security in veteran households as opposed to non-veteran households. This article is useful for my paper because it goes into detail about a specific population and gives me accurate data and evidence about the low rates of food security for veterans and some reasons as to why that is. This can help me set up a transition into describing the Veterans Food Security Program which is part of the North Andover Farmers Market. Their goal is to provide North Andover's low-income veterans with assistance accessing the quality products available at the market. This will likely be my last agency I talk about.

### Additional Sources

Asadi-Lari, Mohsen et al. “Socio-economic risk factors of household food insecurity and their population attributable risk: A population-based study.” *Medical journal of the Islamic Republic of Iran* vol. 33 119. 9 Nov. 2019, doi:10.34171/mjiri.33.119 :  
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