University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2015

Assessing Local Interventions in Food Insecurity

Rebecca Baylor
Sociology
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Lyndi Hewitt

Abstract

Previous research confirms that access to healthful foods is most limited among racial minorities and low-income populations, and that these same populations experience the highest rates of food insecurity. This investigation focuses on potential solutions, using a case study approach to document efforts that are already underway in Asheville, North Carolina to address food access. Specifically, this study examines a local mobile market initiative. The Healthy Living Program at the YMCA recently launched the Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen (HLMK), an initiative that began as an extension of the YMCA's food pantry with the goal of reaching communities that lack access to a YMCA facility. Drawing on participant observation, interviews, and review of organizational materials, the successes and challenges of this food access intervention are examined. Findings suggest that although large quantities of food are being distributed in the local community, better funding and more staff may be necessary to make a lasting impact that goes beyond service provision and toward structural change.

1. Introduction

Studies throughout the U.S. expose inequalities in terms of access to healthy, local food.[1,2,3] There is often a correlation between race, class, and access to food. In the Asheville area in particular this correlation is evident. Despite Asheville's nickname "Foodtopia," the reality is that one out of five people cannot get enough to eat, according to Susan Garrett of the Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council.[4] In a 2012 report from the Food Research and Action Center, based in Washington D.C., North Carolina was listed as the 10th-hungriest state in the country. The same report listed the Asheville metropolitan area as the ninth-hungriest in the country. Even within the Asheville city limits there are food deserts, and they often align with public housing developments. According to the Asheville Housing Authority, 57 percent of the city's public housing is located in south central Asheville, one of the most food-insecure parts of town.

In her study on local food availability in Asheville, Leslie Pierce found that fewer food retailers exist in low and moderate income census tracts than in middle and high income census tracts.[5] Her findings indicate a positive correlation between level of income and local food availability. In addition, she found an association between race and food availability as it intersects with income. Because racial minorities tend to live in lower income areas, there is likely to be an association between race and location of supermarkets. Building on previous research about the relationship between race, class, and access to food, what kinds of local food interventions can help close racial and class-based disparities in Asheville? This study addresses this question through exploratory research of existing food justice interventions in the Asheville area.

2. Theoretical Background

According to the USDA, food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.[6] Food insecurity remains a pressing issue in the United States, despite the fact that a surplus of food exists.[7] The existence of food insecurity is less about scarcity than about the inequitable distribution of resources. Research has shown that there are patterns in food access related to income, race, and gender. Households that live substantially above the federal poverty line, white populations, as well as households with a married couple experience much lower rates of food insecurity than households living below the poverty line, those from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds, and families headed by single females.[8] These patterns reveal the existence of systematic processes that create an inequitable food system. According to Freedman, the politics of food access are complex and intersectional but nevertheless discernible and most importantly changeable.[9]

As Hughes defines it, the concept of food justice situates the politics of food systems within the context of structural inequalities such as racism, classism, and sexism.[10] It also focuses on the effects of these inequalities across spatial scales. Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.[11] Reframing food security as food justice shifts the focus from service provision to systemic change and highlights the necessity for engaging in political and policy processes. Allen emphasizes the importance of adopting a food justice framework, arguing that without a focus on creating social justice, local food systems may replicate the same power dynamics as global food systems.[12] Many community-based food networks fail to recognize broader structural inequalities that contribute to disparities in food access and thus face challenges in building truly inclusive, empowering and transformative food systems.[13] Because food insecurity is not the result of a lack of food, but rather a lack of access to food caused by various inequalities, attention to these inequalities is essential to affect change. The food justice framework also takes an approach that places communities in charge of their own solutions by providing them with the tools they need to address disparities.

Food justice is often constrained in actual practice, regardless of good intentions, because of the need to work within the constraints of the current political economic system.[14] As a result; sometimes the alternatives being developed are more accessible to privileged people. This can lead to a gap between intent and outcome. Outside of actually changing social structures, it is important to change the way that social conditions are perceived and understood. In consideration of race, food production and distribution must be understood in the context of racial inequality.[15] In order to address racial inequality in food systems, new strategies based on a collective understanding of racism must be created, because transforming power structures requires that they are first acknowledged. With food justice as an organizing principle, local food interventions can go beyond the provision of service and move towards structural change. To do this, it is crucial to make social justice a focus, rather than one of many organizational outcomes.[16]

Several local food interventions exist around the country and achieve success through various strategies. Freedman, Bell, and Collins studied the development of a multi-component environmental intervention designed to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in four low-income, minority, urban communities.[17] "The Veggie Project," centered in Nashville, Tennessee, involved an on-site farmers' market, a shopper voucher program, and a youth leader board. Although not everyone accessed the markets, The Veggie Project increased access to healthy foods, particularly among youth. Another successful initiative originated in the UK, where a Mobile Food Store was created to improve access to fruit and vegetables by making cost-price produce available to targeted communities.[18] The Mobile Food Store travelled to the communities each week, and store use resulted in a significant increase in consumption of fruit and vegetables. Interventions such as these promote social justice not only by bringing food into areas of need, but also by promoting community engagement.

Mobile food interventions are emerging in popularity as a way to address food insecurity. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, a Mobile Market debuted in 2012, bringing an 80-item grocery aisle to low-income neighborhoods each week. The market is housed in a trailer and pulled by a pickup truck, and travels to 11 high-need spots across Chattanooga. The market consists of healthy foods such as fresh produce and whole-grain breads at prices comparable to a grocery store. The Mobile Market is run through the YMCA in conjunction with the Chattanooga Area Food Bank.[19] Similarly, West Michigan's YMCA Veggie Vans serve as year round mobile farmers markets. The vans make daily stops in urban neighborhoods throughout Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Ottawa County. The vans sell locally grown fruits and vegetables at reduced prices, ensuring access to fresh produce for people with limited means. They also accept SNAP, WIC, and other benefits.[20] These types of interventions have been successful in reaching low-income communities and providing healthy food, most notably fresh produce.

This research investigates similar interventions that currently exist in the Asheville area, with a focus on mobile market initiatives. Examining potential solutions, this study explores what is being done locally to address racial and class disparities through mobile food interventions. Through exploratory and descriptive research, interventions are documented and further work needed to bridge the gap for low-income communities is illuminated.

3. Local Context

Three local mobile interventions started up at the time this research originated. Each intervention takes a somewhat different approach, but shares the goal of feeding people with limited access to local food.

Ujaama Freedom Market, co-founded by Olufemi Lewis and Calvin Allen, began when Lewis and other women who lived in public and low-income housing in Asheville became concerned about the lack of healthy foods available in their communities. Their mobile market was designed to change that by bringing produce, free-range organic eggs and pre-made sandwiches into low-income communities. Ujaama also provides cooking demonstrations, nutritional information and books on self-empowerment. The market is not exclusively organic, but does label GMO foods as a way to increase education and allow for choices. Ujaama is unique in that it is not grant funded and the food is not free. Lewis and Allen decided on a model that is a cooperative-based, work-owned business tied to a relationship with its employees and the community it serves, funded through the sale of its products and community donations. Lewis says, "the idea is to be a model for individuals that look like us and come from similar backgrounds. We want to show that if you're not accepted in the institutions that are out there, then you can create something new that is your own and supports you and that you will continue to be a part of." [21] Although the researcher had hoped to work with Ujaama, scheduling difficulties impeded the establishment of research collaboration.

Bounty and Soul, founded by Ali Casparian, is another local organization with a mobile market in the works. Bounty and Soul provides fresh produce at three market locations in Black Mountain, as well as offering wellness classes, cooking demonstrations, and recipes. The organization also has a program called U Grow, which provides families with gardening supplies to start their own gardens. Food is sourced from MANNA Food Bank, community gardens, and other local growers. The markets are based on an honor system, meaning that those who come need food, and are not taking advantage of free food they could otherwise afford. The goal is to go mobile in order to reach the communities who have the most difficulty accessing food. The organization hopes to purchase a refrigerated food truck that will allow them to deliver food to clients in bad weather or help them overcome transportation barriers. "I know the food is out there," Casparian says. "Forty percent of the food on any grocery store shelf is wasted. I need a way to be able to store that food and then get it to the people who need it."[22] Casparian notes that funding has been the biggest obstacle for them. They applied for three grants, which would give them enough to purchase the truck. From there, fundraising of $15,000-20,000 was still needed in order to retrofit the truck. Currently, Bounty and Soul is still working on raising enough money to get its mobile market running. As discussed below, the researcher worked in a limited capacity with Bounty and Soul throughout the summer and fall of 2014.

The YMCA's Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen is a former 72-passenger bus turned into a fully equipped kitchen. The idea for the HLMK came from a desire to expand the services of the food pantry at the Beaverdam Youth Services Center. The Youth Services Center is a branch of the local chapter of the YMCA. The mission of the center is to build on a tradition of strong youth programming and transform the property into a community resource. Although the organization's primary mission is not food security, alleviating hunger is a tenet of the Healthy Living Program. The Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen was funded by a grant from the Walmart Foundation, allowing YMCA staff to offer on-site free food, cooking demonstrations, nutrition education and food stamp assistance. The bus also offers local produce from community gardens, including the garden located on the Beaverdam premises. The goal is to reach communities with limited access to YMCA services. The focus over the summer was providing meals to children and visiting summer camp locations. According to Cory Jackson, Senior Director of Youth and Community Development, they want to ensure consistency and regularity in terms of the communities visited. Cory explained that the overarching goal is to eradicate hunger for low-income families by providing holistic services that directly address the problem: access to healthy, fresh, local food and the means to ensure further access through food stamps.

4. Methods and Data

Using a case study approach, data were obtained through participant observation and interviews with two local organizations engaging in food justice interventions. These methods of data collection were chosen because working closely with organizations provides valuable insight that cannot be obtained from an outsider's perspective. Through participant observation, the researcher was able to experience first-hand how the organizations operate and observe their interactions with the larger community. Interviews provide detailed information about organizational staff's perspectives on their program. The qualitative nature of this project necessitates methods that provide in-depth information in order to truly assess the interventions being studied.

Fieldwork began in May of 2014, with the goal of connecting with at least two local organizations. The first contact was the YMCA Youth Services Center, which recently launched its newest initiative: the Healthy Living Mobile Kitchen. The YMCA was very receptive to interest in its program and was eager for the assistance of volunteers. Fieldwork with the YMCA began by helping with distribution from its food pantry, which is open every Wednesday evening.

Bounty and Soul, a non-profit based in Black Mountain that holds open markets for people with limited access to fresh, local food, was also contacted. According to Ali Casparian, the founder of the organization, Bounty and Soul's next goal was purchasing and retrofitting a truck in order to take fresh produce on the road. The organization planned on setting up mobile markets in both rural and suburban areas that have limited access to fresh food. Fieldwork with Bounty and Soul was relatively limited due to the organization's needs. Time was spent mainly on administrative work, including data entry. While the work enabled the researcher to gain familiarity with the practices and philosophy animating the organization, the substantive findings are minimal. Thus, this study focuses primarily on the YMCA's intervention, discussed below.

As the summer progressed and the research became more focused on the YMCA, and the majority of fieldwork involved serving lunches to children through the SFSP (Summer Food Service Program). SFSP was established to ensure that low-income children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. Free meals, that meet Federal nutrition guidelines, are provided to all children 18 years old and under at approved SFSP sites in areas with significant concentrations of low-income children. Every week, Monday through Thursday, we traveled to Hall Fletcher Elementary, a designated "open feeding site," to deliver lunches. Time was also spent helping out with pantry distribution on Wednesday evenings. The researcher spent 15-20 hours a week doing fieldwork with the YMCA. This work also included leading cooking demonstrations and traveling to MANNA Food Bank to pick up food. Detailed field notes documenting information about the setting and the interactions among staff, volunteers, and program participants were recorded by the end of each day of participation.

A typical day serving lunches through SFSP went as follows: At 11am we left the YMCA and headed to Woodfin Elementary to pick up the lunches, prepared by the cafeteria staff. We typically arrived at Hall Fletcher Elementary around 12 pm. If we were serving on the bus, the seats and counter space were cleaned before setting up food to be served. Next we recorded the temperatures of all perishable lunch items. From 12-1 pm we were "open" to serve lunch. A log was kept of how many lunches were served every day, and at 1 pm we began packing up to leave. Back at the YMCA the bus was unloaded and extra lunches were thrown away. The day usually ended around 2 pm.

At the close of each day, the researcher wrote up extensive field notes and reviewed all prior notes to assess patterns and identify themes. Field notes documented what the researcher observed through working with the organizations, including interactions among staff and volunteers and interactions with the communities being served.

As the SFSP program came to a close, participant observation began to wrap up. Work continued with the food pantry for as long as possible, until classes started up again. Participation in special events on the HLMK also continued, namely produce distributions. The YMCA took produce to several locations, including Bethel Baptist Church and AB-Tech, turning the mobile kitchen into a mini-market. Some data entry for Bounty and Soul went on throughout this time, but hours were soon reduced in lieu of a busy class schedule. The next step was to conduct interviews with staff and volunteers at the YMCA.

Interviews were conducted in February and March of 2015. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and interviewees were not asked about any personal issues. Interviewees were asked about their thoughts on the following questions:

1. What sorts of values and goals led to the project?
2. In what ways has the project been successful so far? In what ways has it fallen short?
3. How would you describe the community's greatest needs?
4. Do you believe the program could be reaching more people? If so, how?
5. How has the community responded to your efforts?
6. What are some of the challenges you've encountered?
7. Where do you see the project going from here?

Three interviews were conducted, each about 20 minutes long. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The interviewees were Nicole Coston, former Healthy Living Manager, Kasey Telfer, current Healthy Living Manager, and Wally Moneyhun, Property Director. Information gleaned through these interviews was used to illuminate what further work regarding local food access would be helpful in the future. After the interviews were completed, thematic analysis of the data collected from participant observation and interviewing was conducted.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. YMCA Healthy Living Program

This section details the specifics of the YMCA's program in particular, as this was the organization from which the majority of data were collected. The program is assessed in several different ways, starting with the successes and challenges as identified by YMCA staff members. The staff's perceived disconnect between program execution and community needs is also considered, which emerged as a notable theme from both observations and interviews. Following this is a discussion of next steps for the YMCA, in terms of what the organization is planning in order to increase its outreach in the community. Lastly, the YMCA's program is compared to Bounty and Soul and Ujaama Freedom Market. The organizational strategies of the three interventions are compared and contrasted.

5.1.1. strengths and successes

Through observations over the summer and from interviews with YMCA staff, information was gleaned about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. In terms of strengths and successes, Kasey Telfer, Healthy Living Manager, noted that 80,000 pounds of food have been distributed in the past year. Nicole Coston, the former Healthy Living Manager, agreed that the amount of food distributed is a notable success. The YMCA also consistently serves 30-50 families a week through its pantry distribution. Cooking demonstrations, carried out on the bus during pantry hours and also at open feeding sites, are successful in introducing people to new foods and giving them the tools they need to cook the meals themselves. Wally Moneyhun, Property Director of the YMCA, also sees the program as highly successful in terms of the amount of food being distributed. He also noted that the YMCA now gets food donations from Trader Joe's, which gives the organization access to more high-quality produce for distribution.

Wally sees the positive community response as a strength as well. The mobile kitchen is often in high demand and creates good public relations for the YMCA. Kasey agreed that the community response has been overwhelmingly positive, and explained that valuable connections are made through MANNA Food Bank. Because so many local organizations source food from MANNA, they often have a chance to network and have conversations while picking up food. One significant connection the YMCA has made is with Bounty and Soul. According to Kasey, they had conversations about how to distribute food most efficiently, with the least amount of waste. As Nicole emphasized in her interview, it is critically important that organizations work together to address food access issues and support one another. It is certainly a positive development that these conversations are beginning to happen. Kasey also noted that connections made at MANNA gave the YMCA the opportunity to reach out to more communities. In her interview she explained, "Last week we went to Bartlett Arms and also Aston Towers, and those are both low-income housing areas, and I wouldn't ever have been able to get in if I hadn't had those connections at Manna."[23]

There are also benefits to being a chapter-based, professionalized organization. The YMCA has paid staff and therefore does not have to rely entirely on volunteers, although volunteer work provides an added strength. The YMCA also does not have to fundraise in the same way as a smaller organization like Ujaama because it is funded primarily by grants. In addition, the organization has established physical space in the form of its centers. The

ownership of land and buildings gives the YMCA tangible places from which to address the logistics of running its programs. Access to technology such as computers is another strength.

5.1.2. weaknesses and challenges

In terms of challenges, Nicole and Kasey both noted that more staff is needed to reach more people. Nicole emphasized the importance of serving more people, rather than just increasing the amount of food distributed. Wally agreed that it is a challenge to reach everyone in need. He believes that the YMCA could be reaching more people, but outreach is limited by available funds. As he explained in his interview, "I'd say a drawback would purely be the ability to try to get out there to everybody that wants to see us out there. There's a limit to how far we can stretch ourselves."[24] He emphasized the importance of identifying the pockets of greatest need in the community.

In terms of SFSP, Wally attributed challenges to the locations of open feeding sites and the regulations the YMCA was bound to follow. In addition, technical challenges with the HLMK are an issue. There are various problems with kitchen function and maintenance, problems that are to be expected when running a mobile kitchen. The equipment on the bus is expensive and thus driving must be done very carefully to avoid damage. Some days over the summer the bus was not functional because of technical issues. Another challenge with the bus is the need for a driver, as Wally is currently the only staff member certified to drive the HLMK. I worked primarily with Wally throughout the summer, and we took the bus with us whenever he was available. On the days when he could not come, we had to take a box truck and set up a tent to serve lunch, which was not preferable. With only one staff member trained to drive the bus, the utility of the bus is limited.

Nicole, Kasey and Wally identified other challenges, such as getting regularly committed volunteers. The ability to get the mobile kitchen and mobile markets out into the community depends upon staff and volunteers. Obtaining enough fresh produce for distribution was also an issue the staff raised. Wally explained that helping people take advantage of the services offered can be a challenge as well. Kasey agreed, noting that is can be difficult to get people excited about eating healthy. She has also received some negative responses from communities who are reluctant to let outsiders into their neighborhoods. Kasey expressed the need to increase communication between the YMCA and the communities it serves. "I wish there was a way that we could also somehow get feedback from people that do participate, cause a lot of times it's like one and done," she explained. "Like you know, we go somewhere to distribute food and then never hear from those people again."[25] She believes that this feedback is crucial in order to truly assess how well the program is working.

5.1.3. disconnect between program execution and community needs

Several themes emerged during fieldwork with the YMCA, many of which were echoed in the interviews. Perhaps the most prominent theme is the disconnect between program execution and community needs. Despite the best intentions of the YMCA staff, their program was not able to reach the intended population. Overall, the turnout for SFSP was disappointingly low. It was the YMCA's first summer partnering with SFSP, so part of the difficulty was ironing out the details of how to best implement the program. Through our work at Hall Fletcher Elementary, the staff and volunteers came to the conclusion that the program was not reaching those children who most needed food. On the weeks with the best turnout, most of the children came from summer camps hosted by Hall Fletcher, accompanied by their parents. Through informal conversations with parents, the staff deduced that those participating were mostly middle class families. We distributed lunches to anyone who stopped by, but it was disheartening to know that we were not reaching low-income children who lived only blocks away.

Lack of transportation is one significant reason that the program was unable to reach its intended participants effectively. YMCA staff and volunteers speculated that many low-income children, for various reasons, could not make it to Hall Fletcher at the time we served lunch. For some, the walk in the summer heat may have been too strenuous, for others, their working parents may not have wanted them walking alone. Because of these reasons, the YMCA staff concluded that they needed to go directly into low-income neighborhoods and public housing developments. Unfortunately, that goal was not something that could be accomplished last summer due to a lengthy process of applying for the appropriate permits. Fortunately, by next summer the YMCA should be able to more effectively address food access by bringing lunches directly into low-income areas.

Another disconnect identified by YMCA staff was the provision of a short term solution rather than consistent outreach. Nicole noted that their program created a short term solution in many places, but failed to follow-up in order to make a large-scale impact. As Cory Jackson articulated in May 2014, the goal was to ensure consistency and regularity in terms of the communities visited. Nicole explained that consistent outreach is crucial in order to

truly eradicate hunger in the targeted communities, noting that "I would love to have seen a lot more follow-up."[26] She emphasized that distributing large amounts of food to various locations is not enough, because without follow-up the participants continue to face the same problems. From her perspective, the program should focus on providing consistent service to a smaller number of families, rather than trying to reach everyone and being unable to ensure follow-up due to resource constraints.

5.1.4. next steps

Interviews with YMCA staff members inquired about how they see their program expanding in the future. Overall, the interviewees hope to see the mobile kitchen serve more families and make a deeper impact. In order to achieve this goal, more staff and better funding are needed. Kasey also believes that the program can reach more people through better marketing. She explained that the YMCA does a lot of outreach through social media, but this strategy may not be reaching the intended population.

The YMCA is now focusing on new additions to its program, and has recently purchased a food truck dubbed the "Healthy Living Mobile Market" that goes directly into low-income communities and distributes produce. This mobile market serves as a support vehicle for the mobile kitchen. SFSP will be implemented again in the summer of 2015, with lunches being delivered to four low-income sites. The YMCA will be going directly into several public housing developments, including Pisgah View, Lee Walker Heights, and Hillcrest. While the school system will still be providing the lunches this summer, Wally explained that in the future the YMCA hopes to prepare fresh meals themselves rather than serving cafeteria lunches. In order to make this happen, there are plans to break ground on a kitchen on the YMCA premises.

Other goals involve the creation of two additional mobile units that will serve Henderson and McDowell counties, where the YMCA has identified a need. Kasey wants to partner with grocery stores in those counties in order to increase distribution. Kasey also hopes to transform the Beaverdam Garden from a learning garden into a high-yield food source. Wally discussed plans to establish more pantry locations in order to reach more people, and also the establishment of a dedicated driver for the mobile kitchen. Nicole explained that she sees breaking down the transportation barrier as the most important issue for the program to address. Without transportation, clients cannot access the food pantry or open feeding sites. The goal of the HLMK and the new food trucks is to help ensure physical access to food for those who need it most. Wally summed up this goal in his interview: "There's so much that can be done, but you can only do so much, so you've got to focus on where the biggest benefit is going to be, and I think that's where we're at."[27]

5.1.5. comparing organizational strategies

The YMCA, in contrast to organizations like Bounty and Soul and Ujaama, relies on a pre-existing organizational structure, rather than local, autonomous leadership for decision-making about its initiatives. This entails certain advantages but also poses challenges. As a national organization, the YMCA is bound by certain rules and regulations that smaller, locally-led organizations are not. During fieldwork with the YMCA, bureaucratic barriers were often faced. The YMCA also depends upon grants from large corporations like Walmart. Grassroots organizations tend to be more self-sustaining, and Ujaama serves as an example. After struggling with the grant-application process and being denied the money they needed, Ujaama founders Lewis and Allen chose to create a business model that is cooperative-based, reliant upon a relationship with its employees and the community. Ujaama's food is sold at low-cost but is not free, because the endeavor is funded through the sale of products and community donations. This means that the organization is not a non-profit, but in theory it is self-sustaining. One of the signifying characteristics of Ujaama is that the project arose directly out of community need, from the experiences of people within that community. Oftentimes larger organizations attempt to enter a community without first asking what the community's needs are, and this method is often ineffective. From a food justice perspective, Ujaama is successful in placing the community in charge of their own solutions.

Bounty and Soul does not take quite the same autonomous approach as Ujaama, but it is also very community oriented and does its best to respond to perceived community need. It is a non-profit, like the YMCA, meaning that funding comes primarily from grants. Community donations, however, are also an important source of funding. By involving its clients in things like nutrition education classes, Bounty and Soul makes an effort to create a community among those who attend markets. In addition, the no-judgment policy helps establish trust between volunteers and clients. Bounty and Soul's connection to local growers is also a part of its grassroots ideology. The

organization is currently using an online funding campaign to raise money for its food truck, bringing the greater community into its endeavor.

The YMCA, while not as community oriented as Ujaama or Bounty and Soul, benefits from its stability. The organization is supported by a larger organizational structure, which includes grant funding and other resources. Though its program is effective in terms of the amount of food they are able to collect and distribute, the YMCA could integrate a more local, community-centered approach into their program in order to more adequately address food insecurity. Kasey articulated the belief that some communities are reluctant to accept the help of outsider organizations like the YMCA, and this seems understandable given that these communities may not have been asked what it is they need. Kasey speculates that they may be wary about outsiders coming into their community and not really understanding what their lives are like. As mentioned previously, she stressed the importance of making connections at MANNA that allow the YMCA to communicate with low-income communities and obtain their trust. In any service provision endeavor, it is crucial to understand the population you are serving and ask them what would be most helpful. Adopting a food justice framework may help the YMCA to better navigate structural inequalities and therefore improve its ability to successfully address disparities in food access.

6. Discussion

The limitations of this study include the fact that because it is a case study, the results may not be generalizable to other cities or regions. Asheville is unique in terms of food politics, because food insecurity is widely considered to be one of the most pressing social issues the city faces. Many residents of Asheville are well-versed in food issues and thus push for policy that addresses disparities in food access. Despite Asheville's relatively small size, many food justice interventions have been developing in recent years, making the city a unique and interesting case study. In terms of methodology, the small number of interviews conducted is a limitation. Due to time constraints and difficulty communicating with organizations, only three interviews were conducted. Additional interviews would add depth to the data by providing more perspectives. Another limitation is the limited amount of time spent with Bounty and Soul. Though I had anticipated splitting my time equally between the YMCA and Bounty and Soul, the YMCA had a more immediate need for hands-on fieldwork and so the focus shifted to their program. Thus, a great amount of information was gleaned from participant observation with the YMCA, but less was learned about Bounty and Soul's program. Future research could continue this work by following up with Bounty and Soul as they prepare to launch their mobile market.

Despite these limitations, this research succeeded in documenting the successes and challenges of the YMCA's food intervention. The biggest success of the YMCA's program is the amount of food they have distributed, up to 80,000 pounds in the past year. The staff views positive community response as a success as well. The organization's major challenges arise from a lack of staff and funding. Staff members believe they would be able to reach more people and make a deeper impact with more resources. Bounty and Soul, although its mobile market has not launched yet, faces similar challenges. Funding is a major barrier in getting their food truck ready for distribution. The organization is also dependent upon the work of volunteers. To date, Bounty and Soul has distributed 304,241 pounds of food and served over 30,000 people, which is a major success for the organization. In order to expand the program through a mobile market, more resources are needed.

In addition to the material needs of the organizations, their approaches ought to be considered as well. Because the YMCA is a national organization funded by grants from large corporations, there are bureaucratic limits to what actions it can take. As a grassroots non-profit, Bounty and Soul has relatively more freedom in how it chooses to run its programs. The way these two organizations interact with low-income communities is an important measure of effectiveness as well. The YMCA goes into communities to drop off food but do not necessarily work with members of the communities on long-term solutions. Bounty and Soul attempts to be more community oriented by holding workshops and nutrition classes. The organization has also established its markets in low-income areas, making it easier for individuals to access the services provided. Neither organization, however, utilizes the local methods of Ujaama Freedom Market, which emerged from a low-income community, for that community.

It is worth considering which methods are the most successful in getting to the root of the causes of food insecurity. In terms of combining local, autonomous methods with centralized structure, is it more effective to add organizational structure to local, grassroots methods, or to insert local methods into existing organizational structure? The reality is that both kinds of work are needed. Service provision is needed to address the immediate needs of people living in food-insecure areas, but structural change is necessary to eliminate the inequalities that

create food insecurity. The YMCA focuses on service provision, while Ujaama takes a more structural approach by working to change communities from within.

Adopting a food justice framework is a crucial part of this process. Previous evaluations of food justice interventions suggest the need to acknowledge larger structural inequalities, a critical part of which is addressing the intersection of race, class, and gender. Attempting to combat food insecurity without consideration for race misses a large part of the problem. Large organizations often take a "colorblind" approach, which means that the issue is addressed without explicit attention to racial disparities. As Billings writes, racial analysis is crucial if organizations hope to understand the causes of food insecurity.[28] He explains that we must know the causes in order to develop the solutions. Food justice also prioritizes the involvement of communities in creating their own solutions. Rather than outsiders coming in with food, which creates an unequal power dynamic that privileges service providers, a food justice framework puts communities in charge of their own solutions.[29]

7. Conclusion

By documenting the nature of several local mobile market initiatives, this research found that although large quantities of food are being distributed in the local community, better funding and more staff are necessary to make a lasting impact that goes beyond service provision and toward structural change. Comparing these local interventions provides insight about the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches. The potential of mobile food interventions is great, especially if organizations can adopt a food justice approach that strives for structural change. This approach, coupled with adequate funding, has the potential to create lasting impact in low-income communities. With more resources, the YMCA will be able to create more mobile units and reach more people. In addition, adequate staffing will allow the organization to ensure follow-up in the communities it serves. The results of this study are particularly relevant to the local organizations studied, but the information gleaned can also inform other food justice interventions across the country. Further research is needed to elucidate how mobile food interventions will change the landscape of food. Although they may not be the solution to structural inequalities, mobile initiatives provide services that help alleviate racial and class-based disparities. For individuals with an immediate need for food, this service provision is of critical importance.

8. Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the National Research Initiative of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA.

The author wishes to express their appreciation to Dr. Leah Greden Mathews, Jessica Speer and all other members of the 2014 Summer Local Food Fellowship. Special thanks to Dr. Lyndi Hewitt for her assistance in all stages of this research.

9. References

1 Darcy A. Freedman (2008). "Politics of food access in food insecure communities." Unpublished dissertation. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

2 Paula Jones and Rajiv Bhatia, "Supporting Equitable Food Systems through Food Assistance at Farmers' Markets," *American Journal of Public Health* 101, no. 5 (2011): 781-3, http://wncln.wncln.org/docview/871497319?accountid=8388

3 Chery Smith and Lois W. Morton, "Rural Food Deserts: Low-income Perspectives on Food Access in Minnesota and Iowa," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 41, no. 3 (2009): 176-187, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2008.06.008

4 Jonathan Ammons, "Hidden in plain sight: Asheville's food deserts," Mountain Xpress, 2014, http://mountainx.com/food/hidden-in-plain-sight-ashevilles-food-deserts/

5 Leslie Pierce, "Local Food in Asheville: Income and Availability," University of North Carolina at Asheville, *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, May 2014

6 United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Definitions of Food Security," 2014, http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx

7 Freedman, "Politics of food access in food insecure communities."

8 M. Nord, M. Andrews, and S. Carlson (2007). *Household food security in the United States, 2006* (No. ERR-49). Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

9 Freedman, "Politics of food access in food insecure communities."

10 Laura Hughes, "Conceptualizing Just Food in Alternative Agrifood Initiatives," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 33, no.1-2 (2010): 30-63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23263226

11 United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Food Security in the U.S." 2014, http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx

12 Patricia Allen, "Mining for Justice in the Food System: Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilities." *Agriculture and Human Values* 25, no. 2 (2008): 157-161, http://wncln.wncln.org/docview/214180312?accountid=8388

13 Laura Hughes, "Conceptualizing Just Food in Alternative Agrifood Initiatives," 30-63.

14 Patricia Allen, "Mining for Justice in the Food System: Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilites," 157-161.

15 David Billings and Lila Cabbil, "Food Justice: What's Race Got to Do with It?" *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (2011): 103-112, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.103

16 Laura Hughes, "Conceptualizing Just Food in Alternative Agrifood Initiatives," 30-63.

17 Darcy A. Freedman, Bethany A. Bell, and Leslie V. Collins, "The Veggie Project: A Case Study of a Multi-Component Farmers' Market Intervention," *Journal of Primary Prevention* 32, no. 3-4 (2011): 213-24, http://wncln.wncln.org/docview/885915129?accountid=8388

18 A. Jennings, A. Cassidy, T. Winters, S. Barnes, A. Lipp, R. Holland and A. Welch, "Positive effect of a targeted intervention to improve access and availability of fruit and vegetables in an area of deprivation," *Health Place* 18, no. 5 (2012):1074-8, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22705164

19 Carey O'Neil, "Mobile Market quenching Chattanooga's food desert," Times Free Press, 2012, http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/news/story/2012/jun/19/chattanooga-mobile-market-quenching-food desert/80610/

20 YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, "Veggie Vans," https://www.grymca.org/community-programs/community-based-programs/veggie-van/

21 Carrie Eidson, "Crossing the distance: Mobile markets fight hunger in the deserts," Mountain Xpress, 2014, http://mountainx.com/news/crossing-the-distance-mobile-markets-fight-hunger-in-the-deserts/

22 Carrie Eidson, "Crossing the distance: Mobile markets fight hunger in the deserts."

23 Interview with Kasey Telfer, March 10, 2015.

24 Interview with Wally Moneyhun, March 10, 2015.

25 Interview with Kasey Telfer, March 10, 2015.

26 Interview with Nicole Coston, February 20, 2015.

27 Interview with Wally Moneyhun, March 10, 2015.

28 David Billings and Lila Cabbil, "Food Justice: What's Race Got to Do with It?" 103-112.

29 Patricia Allen, "Mining for Justice in the Food System: Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilities," 157-161.