

INVESTIGATING FOOD INSECURITY IN TRENTON AND IDENTIFYING KEY FACTORS IN ACCESS TO FOOD FOR TRENTON RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen once aptly wrote that “starvation is a matter of some people not *having* enough food to eat, and not a matter of there *being* not enough food to eat.” Today the US has produced more than enough food to sustain the nation’s population but in the past year alone, over 40 million Americans have lived in food-insecure households. The nascence of the term “food security” occurred in the 1970’s and has since continued to develop into a large-scale public health phenomenon demanding immediate attention to our investments in education, infrastructure, economy, and status of health and well-being. In this paper, we present the reality of food insecurity in the proximate and historically significant city of Trenton, New Jersey, as it has transformed for Trenton residents over the past 50 years. The capital of New Jersey, once a booming metropolitan and home to several essential industries such as steel and pottery, has been reconditioned to steady population loss and economic decline as a result of political and residential shift from urban to suburban. These changes have fueled poverty and job losses, which further impact public education, safety, and access to basic resources. While national programs such as SNAP have been implemented to alleviate food insecurity due to poverty, the question that remains is how systemic inequalities have translated to the city level and how public health guidelines in collaboration with SNAP can lead to revitalization of the quality of life for Trenton residents. In order to ensure food security for the population, we must not only fortify existing institutions but also foster new partnerships that are centered around Trenton residents and provide the opportunity to strengthen their own health status.

BACKGROUND

Health disparities in the United States are widespread, and are the most pressing issues facing Public Health. The USDA defines food insecurity as “a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all members of a given household, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.”¹ In 2016, 41.2 million people in the United States lived in food-insecure households. In the same year, more than 0.9 million people of those individuals resided in food-insecure households in the state of New Jersey, about 10.8% of the state’s population.² Obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, as well as other nutritional disorders which are prevalent among lower socioeconomic classes, can trace their roots back to food insecure households in urban areas; over 40% of low-income citizens rate their neighborhood in New Jersey as “fair or poor” when it comes to a place to buy healthy food³. Furthermore, low-income citizens are “nearly 1.5 times more likely as middle income adults and nearly twice as likely to rate their neighborhood as fair or poor place to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.”⁴ In Mercer County, specifically, 43,760 individuals were food-insecure, comprising 11.9% of the county’s population.⁴

It is important to note that the definition of food insecurity includes a finite amount of food (“limited”) but also includes a lack of guaranteed access (“lack of access...uncertain availability”) of food at any time. In addition, the food needs to be “nutritionally adequate,” which suggests that unhealthy

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foods, such as those full of added sugars, trans fats, and refined grains cannot form the basis of a healthy, food safe diet. Therefore, even if a household has an endless supply of fast food from Burger King or McDonald's, it may not be food secure⁵. Safe food, therefore, is not all food – and thus the problem of food insecurity also comes down to which food is readily available for those living in urban areas. Furthermore, the definition lacks context of other expenses – medical and housing bills represent major trade-offs which low-income households need to prioritize when budgeting for food. Therefore, nutritional programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have been created to “permit low-income households...obtain a more nutritious diet...by increasing their purchasing power.”⁶ SNAP been evaluated through the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) in monthly increments labeled “waves” to assess participation and effectiveness, and has been proven to reduce households’ food-related hardships (reduces likelihood of being food insecure by 31.2%, and likelihood of being very food insecure by 20.2%).⁷

At the same time, however, initiatives undertaken by the new presidency and Congress include a budget resolution that will take over \$150 billion away from several poverty and food insecurity programs, including the SNAP, arguably the largest food assistance program, which has already been passed by the House of Representatives. While the incidence of food insecurity locally, regionally, and nationally is on the rise, the restrictions placed upon impoverished families and children and their access to food ironically increases at an exponential rate. Thus, the heightened responsibility of ensuring food access to hunger-ridden individuals increasingly falls on the shoulders of multiple food assistance programs and volunteers working collectively to ensure that the health of communities does not diminish as regulations of programs that have historically helped millions become stricter.

This present paper discusses the history of food insecurity in Trenton, one of the most historically significant yet economically disadvantaged cities in New Jersey, as it has grown over the past twenty years. In addition, we discussed the access to food, and lastly, we proposed public health guidelines that targets health education focusing on Trenton populace.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty as a Driving Factor of Food Insecurity

Trenton is the capital of New Jersey and the second-largest municipality in Mercer County, containing 84,913 people; however, the median income of the city is nearly \$40,000 less than the median income of Mercer County (\$72,417) according to the 2010 United States Census.⁸ Therefore, poverty is the driving factor of many of the problems which Trenton faces: homelessness and unemployment all contribute to the growing problem of insecurity. In a recent article, Greg Wright of NJ.com highlighted that the problems that Trenton faces not only rests on the projects which have to be done to rebuild the city as they relate to housing, development, and education, but also rests on converting millennials, retirees, and other groups of people to residents. In fact, the article mentions that Trenton does not suffer from a dearth of jobs, but rather an educated populace: “current Census Bureau data shows that just 10.7 percent of Trenton residents 25 years and older have a bachelor's degree or higher -- 20 percent below the national average.”⁹ Therefore, it is important to understand the historical perspective of Trenton's fall from the post-industrial age, and of further import to analyze the origin of food assistance programs such as SNAP in the city. Finally, the implementation SNAP in different neighborhoods of Trenton today must be investigated to propose further suggestions to access to food for residents.

History of Trenton

During the 1800s and the 1900s, Trenton was a major manufacturer of steel, ceramics, and other goods. It was also known as the heart of the American pottery industry from the 1850s until the Great Depression in 1930.¹⁰ The foundation of the pottery industry led to the success of the Roebbling's Sons Company, which “manufactured the steel cables...[of]...the iconic Brooklyn Bridge.”¹¹ Nothing embodied the essence of Trenton's mission more than the “Trenton Makes Bridge,” formerly named the Lower Trenton Bridge, constructed in 1806 but renovated with the current slogan, “Trenton Makes, the World Takes,” in 1935.¹² After the Great Depression, however, industry has declined which has led to population loss –

Trenton's population of nearly 85,000 people today has declined from 124,000 in 1950.¹¹ As a result, Trenton's place as a "company town" had declined because after the industrial demand generated by World War II, the city has suffered a sobering realization that urban industries "maintains a significant but decreasing share of economic activity, replaced as an engine of economic growth by the production of various types of services, from producer services, to medical, educational and governmental services, to consumer services."¹² Therefore, because Trenton had failed to keep up with the shifting definition of a city, it had driven away its middle class and introduced a spatial distance within the urban region and differential access for the well paid versus the working poor. Looking at examples such as Newark and Camden across New Jersey, when the richer residents flee to the suburban sprawl outside of Trenton, the poor "compress inward" and remain in the urban squalor, resulting in the compounding of already inherent problems with infrastructure, education, and most relevant to this project, public health.

Origin of SNAP in Trenton

SNAP, and its corollaries such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the National School Lunch and School Breakfast (School Meals) Programs, was formerly called the Food Stamps Program (FSP) and was established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in order to increase food security across the U.S. The FSP traces its origins to the pilot programs of the 1960s and the Food Stamp Act of 1977.¹³ In the decades preceding the 21st century, the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 and the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 established the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) which is a market based model of dieting which sets the maximum level of SNAP benefits. Since then, the SNAP program has been rewritten to adjust for cost-of-living and alleviating economic stress for most households after the 2008 Great Recession.¹⁴ In Trenton, 22% of total households receive SNAP allotments, and New Jersey has created the New Jersey Food Access Initiative (NJFAI) to provide better access to healthier foods for low-to-middle income families, and New Jersey has also instituted Urban Enterprise Zones (UEZs) which reduce sales taxes to 3.5% to help increase purchasing power and stimulate industrial growth.

ACCESS TO FOOD

The majority of food assets in Trenton are comprised of corner stores, bodegas, and convenience stores. Grocery stores and supermarkets are rare in the Trenton food scene – there are only 2 major chain supermarkets in Trenton, 1 of which is technically in Ewing. Convenience and corner stores dominate due to their relatively cheap prices and lack of food preparation necessary. At the same time, these prepared foods are often high in sodium and high in cholesterol. In Trenton, 49% of the city's children are obese, and 16% of residents are diabetic. Healthy dietary choices are expensive and impractical for those on a low budget. As consumers choose to buy cheaper food, their ability to sustain health deteriorates, leading to unhealthy living and increased rate of chronic diseases. Food pantries, soup kitchens, and food services/delivery are essential to Trenton, providing free food for many eligible individuals. However, the reality of traveling to such locations or even acquiring the information to determine if one is eligible for getting free healthy food is often daunting and difficult to get through. For the average Trenton household, dividing time and energy towards work takes greater priority over buying healthy food. The cycle of either eating unhealthily or relying on welfare and constantly working to provide a living gives residents little opportunity to improve upon their health. It is both the city's duty to provide more affordable healthy eating options and the duty of residents to take advantage of the city's current programs to sustain a relatively healthy diet in the face of economic pressures.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

In order to fully understand the dynamics of food insecurity within the Trenton area, it is necessary to form and distribute comprehensive reports of the resources available to Trenton residents. In this section, we have compiled a list of the major food resources within Trenton that include food pantries, soup kitchens, grocery stores, religious organizations, and programs in general that offer food assistance to the public:

Food Pantries:

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- Arm in Arm
- Habitat for Humanity Trenton Area – East Trenton Center
- Mt. Carmel Guild of Trenton
- Phoebe’s Pantry
- Princeton Deliverance Center
- United Progress

Religious Organizations:

- Cadwalader Asbury United Methodist Church
- Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
- Primera Iglesia Pentecostal Alpha and Omega Inc.
- Samaritan Baptist Church
- Trinity Cathedral Food Pantry
- Turning Point United Methodist Church
- Sacred Heart Church
- Elyon Bible Church
- Greater Word for the World Ministries
- Catholic Charities
- Bethel Seventh Day Adventist

Soup Kitchens:

- Trenton Area Soup Kitchen

Other Organizations Near Trenton in Mercer County (5-mile radius):

- Homefront (Lawrenceville)
- Lawrenceville Neighborhood Service Center (Lawrenceville)
- First Haitian Church of God (Hamilton)
- Hamilton Neighborhood Service Center (Hamilton)
- Bromley Neighborhood Civic Center (Hamilton)
- St. Raphael – Holy Angels Food Pantry (Hamilton)
- Celestial Church of Christ (Ewing)
- Concerned Citizens of Ewing, Inc. (Ewing)
- New Bethel Holy Church (Ewing)
- Abundant Life Christian Fellowship (Ewing)
- Faith Deliverance Cathedral (Ewing)

Local Food Services/Delivery:

- Meals on Wheels
- Arm in Arm
- Mercer County Food Stamp Office

Supermarkets:

- Trenton Food Bazaar Supermarket
- Super Foods Supermarket
- ShopRite
- Save-A-Lot
- Los Amigos Supermarket
- Aldi
- Selecto Supermarket
- Fernandez Supermarket

Bodegas/Corner Stores:

- Tony’s Deli and Grocery
- Santana Groceries
- El Aguadillano Deli and Grocery
- Torres Deli Grocery

- Leo Deli Grocery
- New Jersey African Caribbean Market
- Brunswick Deli & Grocery
- Yong's Deli
- James Corner Store
- D&W Convenience Store
- Joy's Corner Market
- Quick Stop
- Krauszer's Food Store
- Raymond Deli Grocery
- Martinez Deli
- Azcona Sanhican
- La Nueva Grocery
- Peralta Mini Market
- Pantry 1 Food Mart
- New Big Oak
- New Way Deli Market
- Cleveland Deli
- Big John's Deli
- Bienvenido Market
- Mena Rose Deli & Grocery

Farmers Markets:

- Trenton Farmers Market (open select times in a year)
- Trenton's Greenwood Avenue Farmers Market (open select times in a year)

FACTORS AFFECTING FOOD INSECURITY

Considering the numerous organizations provide food resources in Trenton, one must ask the question why the problem of food insecurity still exists for such a large amount of the Trenton population. In this section, we will be discussing key problems that impact the Trenton community as a whole and have led to the effect of food insecurity within the city.

Budget and Economy

As of the end of 2016, the unemployment rate in the United States was 5.16%, while the unemployment rate in Trenton was 7.10%.¹⁵ Additionally, the income per capita and household income in the United States are \$28,555 and \$53,482, respectively, while the income per capita and average household income in Trenton are \$17,021 and \$35,647 respectively. Based on these statistics, it is clear that Trenton as a whole faces less economic success than the national average. Additionally, those economic opportunities that are present to Trenton residents are constantly fluctuating, as shown by drastic 12-month percent changes in employment in Trenton compared to the United States.¹⁶ Although Trenton was once the 50th largest city in the country and the major developer of iron, steel, and rubber,¹⁷ the economy today has deteriorated since Industrial Revolution due to the migration of stable businesses to suburban areas, shifting the market for consumers away from the city. As such, although there are jobs available to Trenton residents, the lack of a stable economy with longstanding businesses is a key factor in preventing Trenton from recovering from its post-industrial downfall. The fewer secure jobs that are available to a population within the city, the fewer people there are to provide economic stability and lesser monetary gain for each family or individual.

Once again, the household income for Trenton is \$35,647 as an average for the entire state. However, the household income per zip code also varies drastically among its various regions. For example, the 08691 zip code, which represents primarily white residents of whom the majority have full-time earnings, have an average household income of \$74,924, much higher than the average household income nationally.¹⁸ In comparison, the 08608 zip code, which represents primarily African American and

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Hispanic residents of whom the majority have little to no earnings in the average year, have an average household income of \$17,083, significantly lower than the household income for either the city or country.¹⁸ The zip code region 08608 is specifically the Central West area of Trenton, while the 08691 zip code region is closer to West Windsor and Hamilton townships.

Considering a four-person family household of Central West Trenton therefore, an approximate division of income can be hypothesized to estimate a budget for food expenses within a year. According to the USDA, the lowest income bracket household spends on average \$3,862 annually on food, which for the Trenton household would be about 22.6%, or over one-fifth of their income.¹¹ Per month, this comes to \$321.83, and per week it is \$80.45. Per day, it is \$11.49, and per person that is \$2.87. Regardless of the number of meals per day therefore, \$2.87 per person for the entire day is an amount that must be calculated carefully while making food expenditures and represents a real challenge when deciding where to buy food from. "Fast" food from corner stores becomes a more feasible reality than buying perishable items and preparing one's own food from grocery stores, which is visibly evident in Trenton, as there are considerably fewer supermarkets than corner stores and bodegas. Thus, because many Trenton residents in the low-income bracket or no-income situation must search for alternatives such as food programs and pantries as listed above, food programs and pantries represent a crucial community resource to bridge the gap between economic instability and food security.

Technological Resources

If community food resources are essential in combating hunger in Trenton, one must ask how the average Trenton resident would find access to such resources. The answer is not simple; although local areas such as the library or municipality office may have flyers posted with certain contacts of information, depending on one's time, distance from these centers, and eligibility for such programs, it may be difficult to acquire all the information necessary to apply and receive the benefits of such food assistance programs. Indeed, building the relationship between public health and access to education is a critical component of one's ability to navigate healthcare and take advantage of available resources. The main such resource is inevitably the Internet. Facebook pages, SNAP, the New Jersey Department of Health, and food pantry and shelter websites all offer valuable contact information, including phone numbers, hours of operation, location, and program eligibility, usually on one convenient website for each food assistance program. Yet for no- or low-income Trenton residents, it may be practically difficult to either own a computer oneself or visit a local library and spending working hours trying to find resources on the Internet, especially when organizations have not updated their websites and/or redirect information to an email or telephone number. Thus, expecting all Trenton residents to have equal access to technological resources in order to learn about food assistance programs can be unrealistic and impractical. Other sources of information such as the Trenton Free Public Library, New Jersey State Library, or New Jersey State House are useful physical sources of information, where one can pick up flyers and forms for registering for a food assistance program or obtaining information on how to get to a food assistance program. Despite the relatively large amount of resources available for Trenton residents in terms of food security, without providing sufficient means of how to get information regarding food options diminishes the power of such organizations and demonstrates how important is it to utilize public health practices effectively.

Distance and Transportation

Once determining the available resources in the area, the household must determine how feasible it is to get to a food assistance location given the distance it is away from the home and the means of transportation available. One of the complications in living in a city is that, without a car, the most accessible transportation is public transportation. In Trenton, buses are part of NJ Transit, but there are no reduced fare programs or any other type of consideration for those who cannot afford to take a bus daily to get to their desired location. The expenses for getting to food add on to that of getting to work or other needs, which could potentially make taking the bus for food everyday unfeasible. The lack of reduced fare offers limits households from bringing their young children and/or seniors (under the age of 62, as over 62 and disabled individuals can opt into the reduced fare) to farther food locations, thus limiting the

distance range in which households can access food to walking distance. This makes the availability of a compiled list of resources and an easy way to learn about such resources even more important in that families must choose the most practical options to getting food considering their location and expenses.

SNAP Eligibility

As previously mentioned, the New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or NJ SNAP, is the upgraded food stamp program whose primary purpose is to help low-income families buy groceries they need to eat healthily. Qualifying for and applying to SNAP is thus a tremendously beneficial resource for families who are struggling to make ends meet. Eligibility to NJ SNAP is based on several factors such as gross monthly income, net income, household size, and assets.¹⁹ A simpler method of eligibility for NJ SNAP or other social service programs is through pre-screening, which can be done via an online application or via fax or mail to the local County Welfare Office, which for Mercer County is the Mercer County Board of Social Services located in Trenton, NJ.²⁰ Once the application is received, an interview is held to confirm applicant information and applicants must bring supporting documents, including proof of identification, social security numbers, proof of residence, resources, source of income, expenses, medical bills, and any child care/support. Completion of the interview will determine how much SNAP benefits an individual will receive. For a four-person household, the maximum monthly benefit from SNAP is \$640 for the fiscal year of 2018, and the estimated average monthly benefit for the same four-person household is \$465 in the fiscal year 2017. SNAP maximum monthly benefit is a situation in which the family has no income, and the actual monthly benefit is calculated by subtracting 30% of the net income from the maximum monthly income. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that “the average SNAP benefit per person is about \$125 per month, which works out to about \$1.40 per person per meal.”¹⁹ Families receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that can be used at authorized food stores as part of the federal food assistance program.

Clearly, SNAP has the potential to help families recover from no-income or low-income situations, save money, and save more time for work, with the eventual goal of making the transition from welfare to work more feasible. However, how easy is it for a family to find out about SNAP and follow through with the steps of applying to SNAP? As discussed earlier, those without access to Internet or personal computers may not be able to apply online. One of the major difficulties in applying for SNAP is the lack of communication between representatives of SNAP and applicants. This problem doesn't just apply to Trenton – SNAP has had this particular setback all across the United States, as applicants are redirected to phone numbers at which a call results in no reply back, or online applications fail and there is no follow-up for its completion by SNAP. Evidently, although SNAP offers many benefits, those benefits can only be reaped by those who have prior access to good resources such as Internet and a stable phone connection or those who have the time to continuously check up with SNAP to see the process of their application.

Trenton – Response to Politics and Community Building

Although the current presidency and political climate in Congress has leaned towards encouraging the scaling back of major food assistance programs such as Meals on Wheels and SNAP, the political and community climate in Trenton towards food insecurity has been productive. Mutually understanding partnerships between food assistance organizations and the individuals in the Trenton community is what drives the battle to diminish the gap in food insecurity. Evidence of growth of the community is shown through increased funding and grants for food assistance programs and the opening of new, creative healthy eating resources in local corner stores and bodegas. For example, the nonprofit Crisis Ministry of Mercer County received a \$40,000 grant in 2014, which resulted in aiding more than 5000 low-income families and individuals.²¹ Their upgrade recently culminated in 2016 with the changing of their name to Arm in Arm to better reflect their “respect for the dignity of the people [we] serve, as well as their own power in the process of regaining stability.”²² TASK, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, recently began their first phase of its “Building into the Future” expansion project, which includes renovations to the interior of the existing soup kitchen as well as a 3,679-square-foot addition at the organization's Escher Street campus; this is expected to greatly broaden the programs that TASK already offers,

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including adult education, computer and life skills classes, visual and performing arts, case manager services, as well as food, hygiene-product, clothing and holiday giveaways – open and free for anyone.²³ In terms of new programs, the Trenton Healthy Cornerstone Network, one of the latest food programs created in 2014 by the Food Trust, was designed to bring healthy choices to corner stores. In November 2017, the Food Trust expanded the Healthy Corner Store Network with support from Novo Nordisk and introduced Heart Smarts and Healthy Screenings in Trenton. Lucky Star Deli, one of the corner stores in Trenton enrolled in the Trenton Healthy Corner Store Network, was chosen as one of four Heart Smarts stores; these Heart Smarts now bring nutrition lessons directly to corner stores. Consumers can learn about how to select healthy foods such as heart healthy whole grains and taste recipes made from healthy products that can be directly purchased from the store. In addition, Heart Smarts also offer health screenings from the St. Francis Medical Center and Trenton Health team’s Mobile Health van to give free blood pressure screenings at the store. Alexsa Zayas, owner of Lucky Star Deli, says that the “blood pressure screenings really open eyes. Many customers have no insurance, so the screening is a way to make them aware of possible health issues. Heart Smarts is a great help to the community; it’s bringing knowledge about health to people who really need it”.²⁴ Similar demands for healthy and accessibly food has opened the Trenton Greenwood Avenue Farmers Market and the new farmers market in Ewing at The College of New Jersey, which boast over 4500 visitors and offer free health screenings and services that have been used by more than 900 residents, as well as free dinner programs in which 1200 children have participated.²⁵ Clearly, despite the national political pressure to cut down on funding for food assistance programs in recent budget proposals, the Trenton community is determined to find solutions for food insecurity and continues to create innovative and functional programs to assist its residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Residence in Trenton in Response to Increased Job Opportunities in the Area

Although the job market in Trenton is relatively less stable than the national average as evidence by Figure, the number of jobs in Trenton has increased by 3.17% as of 2016.²⁶ In addition, Trenton’s strategic location within the Northeast Corridor has the potential to attract residents to work in Downtown Trenton due to accessibility to good jobs. Capitalizing on this location and the strength of the regional metropolitan economy would allow Trenton to expand its own local economic base. Not only does this benefit transportation of people between major cities such as Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, Philadelphia, PA, New York, NY, and Boston, MA, it also encourages residents of New Jersey to take up jobs in Central Jersey, through linkage by US Route 1 and Interstate 95. Key industries that thrive along this corridor are pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, healthcare, business, and legislation/politics, hosted by companies such as Merrill Lynch, Capital Health Systems, and Bristol Myers Squibb.²⁷ Encouraging those residents who take up jobs in or near Trenton to actually move into Trenton and spur others to revamp the city life that was once so influential in the 1960’s and 1970’s would bring economy back to Trenton and allow growth.

Eliminating Physical and Educational Barriers to Access to Food

Based on the compiled list of resources of supermarkets, convenience and corner stores, food programs, food pantries, soup kitchens, etc., it is clear that food resources span the entire city of Trenton. However, how accessible those food resources are is limited by physical distance and educational knowledge. Considering that transportation by car is often unfeasible and transportation by bus consumes a significant portion of annual or monthly budget for a household, there needs to be more food assets within walking distance of residents. According to a study done by NYU Wagner School of Public Service, only 22.5% of residents live in a block group that is within a quarter-mile radius, or five-minute walk, of a grocery store or supermarket.¹¹ Thus, there is an increased need for a more effective transportation system which prioritizes residents in the low-income bracket and would provide them direct transportation to job centers, medical services and feasible retail options at an affordable or discounted price. Currently, only 23% of buses in Trenton service one supermarket, and thus building a program for the low-income bracket that would provide them more resources to food, jobs, and healthcare would greatly maximize Trenton’s profitability in providing better service to all Trentonians.

Additionally, educational barriers prevent Trenton residents from accessing a compiled list of resources if they lack access to Internet, personal computers, or cannot walk the distance to a local center that would provide them that information. A solution to this issue could be a free mail service that delivers a pamphlet of food assistance program information to Trenton residents once every 6-months, updated every 6 months to provide the most accurate information. This potentially represents an even more useful tool than individual food program websites, because all the information necessary for one to get into a food program would be available in one location and updated regularly. Providing Trenton residents equal access to knowledge is incredibly important in bridging the gap in health disparity because even if there are food resources present, they have no cumulative effect if the people who need the most are unable to access them.

Using State Funds to Increase SNAP Awareness

As mentioned previously, one of the critical issues with SNAP is its inability to reach maximum participation by those who qualify for its benefits, mostly due to the difficulty in communication between applicants and SNAP representatives. A solution is needed to increase SNAP awareness among individuals in Trenton. One of those ways is for SNAP representatives themselves to acquire state funding to call residents who may apply for this program. Additionally, there needs to be better organization of the hierarchical structure within SNAP itself, which may include more hiring of individuals, to make sure that as many residents are contacted as possible. The application process should be streamlined and provided with continuous check-ups to increase retention rate of those who start an application and those who follow through with the end of the interview. By making more SNAP more rigorous and thorough, it may encourage Trenton residents to apply more, knowing that the process is easier and convenient.

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, we can see that food insecurity in Trenton did not result from a real lack of food or food programs available for its residents. There is food available, but whether it is healthy food or not and whether it can be accessible to the majority of Trenton residents, even those of low or no-income, is the challenge presented to a city that must recover its economy and building capacity to meet the expectations of its dense population. Without proper education of healthy eating and the teaching of skills to navigate the systems that make up the city for Trenton residents, there is little room for improvement. Creating more food programs is beneficial, however the most beneficial resources is that of educating Trenton residents about how to use their community resources effectively. At the same time, the city and its infrastructure must adapt to give all Trentonians equal access to resources, regardless of their income bracket, to increase the growth of the city as a whole. Changes such as creating a public transport system for low-income residents or offering more health services in corner stores would give lower-income residents more equal access to resources compared to the higher-income residents, which would encourage more people to live in the city and increase community resources, which could potentially lead to a decrease in food insecurity. Thus, food insecurity is not a singularly faceted issue of just the lack of food – it is a combination of the history, economy, healthcare, and community of the city which has caused the overall health of the average Trenton resident to decline, and improving each sector of the city life may lead to an increased quality of life for each individual.

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