

Mitigating Food Insecurity in Southeast Fort Worth

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Introduction

All across the globe there are plenty of people who are suffering from food insecurity. Food insecurity, according to the Department of Agricultural is when households are unable to acquire healthy foods due to their low-income status and any other reasons (Caspi, 2021). Food insecurity is being seen all across the globe for many years now. This is such an important topic because there are many health concerns that come with food insecurity. Some of these include malnutrition, mental health problems, health problems, and many more. There have been plenty of interventions that have been created to try to mitigate the problem of food insecurity.

The articles that are mentioned in this review include interventions such as food pantries, urban farming, and transportation. The articles discuss how these interventions play a role in mitigating food insecurity and if there is a visible change. Food insecurity can be seen in neighborhoods in Southeast Fort Worth and by reviewing the material in the articles they can then be used to help the problems that are occurring in the area. This review will first begin with discussing what exactly the interventions are, some pros and cons for them, and lastly how they can be used to help the food desert in the Southeast Fort Worth area.

Food Pantries

Recently, food pantries have been seen across many neighborhoods as solutions that can help families in the community who do not have food security. The article, “Food Pantry Use Increased in 2020 for Most Types of U.S. Households”, by Coleman-Jensen and Rabbitt states that households who suffer from food insecurity may participate in federal assistance program pantries or community program pantries. This articles main focus is discussing what food pantries are. It states that most of the food pantries that are created are free of cost to those in the

community who will be using them. These food pantries are often times worked by volunteers and also some church organizations. Food pantries can consist of many different things, it often times depends on the location of the pantry and what types of foods are needed by those in the community. If a certain community is in needs of fruits and vegetables, then that means that the pantry will mostly try to get fruits and vegetables for them.

Some ways that these food pantries will get the food that they need is by donations from others in the community, some stores, and also any federal assistant programs. Food pantries are growing by the second and are being used more frequently by those who need them. In 2020, 6.7% of all U.S. households reported using a food pantry (Coleman-Jensen & Rabbitt, 2021) which is more than what has been recorded over the past few years. The question that then comes from this is if the food pantries are making a difference at all in regard to food insecurity.

Pros and Cons of Food Pantries

When it comes to food pantries there are many benefits for them to be used in communities that may have residents that suffer from food insecurity. The main benefit for food pantries would be the simple fact that it allows for those who may have a low-income to save on money while still getting items that they may need. This could include perishable and nonperishable items. Another benefit of food pantries are that it allows for members of the community to get together and help each other out. When it comes to the ways that a food pantry may be ran it could be through a church, university, or any other way. It does not matter who is running the food pantry, because there will always be opportunities for members of the community to volunteer. This could be simply by organizing the food that is being donated or helping out in the kitchen if the food pantry has one. This is another positive to food pantries

because it will not only help those who need it, but it will also educate other members of the community on the issue that they may have not been aware of.

Even though there are plenty of positives to a food pantry, there are some cons and one of those would have to be that some of the food that is being sold/given away may not technically be the healthiest of option. The food that is donated to the food pantries may not include nutritional options that you would see at a food market, but it is the only thing that was donated to the pantry. This means that even though it is available for those who need it, it is still not going to be the healthiest option. Another concern for food pantries deals with the organization and management of the pantry. If the organizer of the pantry starts to neglect their role, then that means that the food pantry could start to lose the items that are given. Despite the possible concerns that could arise within a food pantry, in the end it will still end up being beneficial to the members of the community who may need it.

Urban Farming

Another intervention that is currently being used to try and mitigate food insecurity is urban farming. Urban farming is when the planting of fruits and vegetables, any other plants, or the raising of livestock is occurring within or around cities (UWA, 2021). Along with the pantries, most urban farms will plant and take care of things that are needed in the area. Urban farming can be seen in many different ways. Some of these include beds of plants in someone's backyard, a small balcony of an apartment, a rooftop of a building, and many other things as long as it is within the city. Urban farming can be done by anyone in the community, even those who may be suffering from food insecurity can plant stuff in their very own backyard.

However, most of the farms are being run by certain organizations so that they can then partner with other organizations in the community so that what they are growing can be sent to those who may need it (UWA, 2021). Not only do some of these farms have partners so that they can send out what they are growing, but they may also have partners that will send them compost or stuff to fertilize their compost. In the end, the main focus of these farms is to grow plants and food and that those in the community may need.

Pros and Cons of Urban Farming

Eating healthy is something that everyone struggles with, especially those families who are middle or low-income. Most of these families do not have the funds or resources to eat healthy so they tend to go for the more convenient, premade food, which is typically less nutritional (McCauley, 2021). This is why urban farming can be seen as a positive thing. As mentioned in an earlier article, urban farming can be as small as a plot on an apartment balcony. This is a positive because then it would mean that members of the community could potentially create a garden in their own homes based on fruits and vegetables that they may need. Another benefit of urban farming can be seen from cultural to the environment as well as economic payoffs (UWA, 2019). When it comes to social and cultural benefits this can include the fact that it could bring the entire community together.

The article states, “working together on urban agriculture projects, people get involved in building their communities through organizing, advocacy, and collective action” (UWA, 2019). Another pro to farming is that it gets people to go outside and move around when farming. One final benefit would be that it is healthier and more accessible to members of the community. The obvious benefit is that the products are freshly grown which make them healthier than processed food, and they are right outside for people to gather when they are ready.

Even though there are all of these benefits to urban farming, it does not mean that there are not any disadvantages. One disadvantage is the simple fact that the garden could end up not being taken care of, which means that all of the money and resources put into it go to waste. Another disadvantage is a natural one, the weather. Being able to go out, plant, and harvest heavily relies on the weather. If it is too cold or rainy then that means that there is a chance that the crops could go bad or will not be able to get planted to begin with. One final disadvantage would have to be the risk of contaminated soil. This is a big one because tests show that some urban soil have arsenic, lead, and other heavy metals, meaning that the dirt/soil used in the farms will need to be purified or removed in order to plant (Epstein, 2015). Just like the food pantries, the benefits of urban farming are far too beneficial to the community to let the disadvantages of it to stop the community from proceeding with creating gardens.

Transportation

Although there are plenty of other interventions that are occurring to help fight food insecurity, the final intervention that was discussed in the articles was transportation. Transportation issues such as time and cost make it much more difficult for families who are suffering from food insecurity to have access to healthy foods (Arena & Salerno, 2020). Most of the time households suffer from food insecurity because they may not have the transportation that is needed in order to get to the places that they need to or they will need to take multiple busses to get to the grocery stores, and in the end, it is possible that the stores may not have what they need (Arena & Salerno, 2020). Even if the stores have everything that they need, it will be difficult to get it back home.

Some cities have created bus routes specific to grocery stores so that people will be able to use them to get to where they need to. Another way that transportation can help fight food

insecurity is to make the access to the busses much easier for those who may need it. One solution that is being used in Austin, Texas is the expansion of public transportation hours and routes so that it can accommodate those who work late, people with disabilities, and for people who live in neighborhoods with limited socioeconomic resources (Arena & Salerno, 2020). Transportation is one problem that can easily be solved if more funding was put into it by not only city, and state, but also by the government.

Pros and Cons of Expanding Transportation

By expanding transportation routes it is creating the opportunity for people to have access to not only grocery stores, but also food banks, pantries, and other sites that have city, state, and government assisted programs that provide free food to residents. This is one beneficial outcome that will occur if bus transportation is being expanded to neighborhoods that are in a food desert area. A benefit of expanding how long the busses will be able to run is that it will help those who work during the day and the only other option for them is to shop at night. Expanding the time and routes of busses has plenty of benefits, but it does have some disadvantages. One disadvantage would have to be the safety of those who would be taking the bus late at night. Some residents have stated that they would like to walk or take the bus to the grocery stores but feel unsafe with the lack of sidewalks and light posts in the surrounding areas (Arena & Salerno, 2020). Despite the disadvantage, just like the previous two interventions, the benefits of expanding transportation running time and routes will end up being beneficial to the community.

Using These Interventions in Southeast Fort Worth

Southeast Fort Worth is an area that can be described as a food desert. There are not a lot of grocery stores in the area, most of them are quite a bit away. The area consists of

neighborhoods, and plenty of fast-food places and some small convenient stores. There is some land in the area that would be able to be used for food pantries and urban farms. As the articles mentioned, most of the areas that already have food pantries and urban farms have seen a difference in helping members of the community. Creating food pantries in the local area will help those who do not have access to go out of their area to grocery stores to get what they need.

One urban farm that is being implemented in Southeast Fort Worth is Mind Your Garden farm. The benefit of this farm being located in the area is that it will allow the community to come together and be able to work on the farm, as well as be in communication on the owners of the farm so that they will have a better understanding on what may be needed in the area. Expanding transportation to this area will also be beneficial. There are plenty of areas where a bus stop could be added to where it is easy for members of the community to walk to so that they can go to the stores. By using interventions that are being created in other areas, it will help create a foundation on how to get started and what to expect.

Conclusion

Food insecurity is something that thousands of Americans suffer from every day. In order to help address this problem there are many things that can be done. Some things that have already been done and that have shown results of helping members of a community include creating food pantries in the area. Creating urban farms in areas classified as a food desert have also seen an improvement on mitigating the effects of food insecurity. Expanding transportation is one final intervention that has been used in areas, and it has shown that it makes a difference on residents being able to have access to healthy foods. With any form of intervention there will always be benefits and disadvantages to them, but in the end, it is important to make sure that they help the community have access to healthy foods.

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