

Addressing Food Insecurity across Berks and Schuylkill Counties

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 Community Preceptors: *Santiago Castaneda, Helping Harvest; Alexis Fick, Helping Harvest; Lori Lowery, Helping Harvest; Jess Umbenhauer, Helping Harvest*

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Helping Harvest is an organization that feeds Berks and Schuylkill counties. They supply food to over 300 local food program partners, including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, after-school programs, Mobile Markets and senior housing facilities. They also run daily Mobile Markets at 22 sites throughout Berks and Schuylkill counties, with an emphasis on distributing both non-perishable and perishable food items. They also offer a senior box program, which provides additional food for individuals over the age of 65. They offer a Weekender program, which provides food for school-aged students to take home.



BACKGROUND

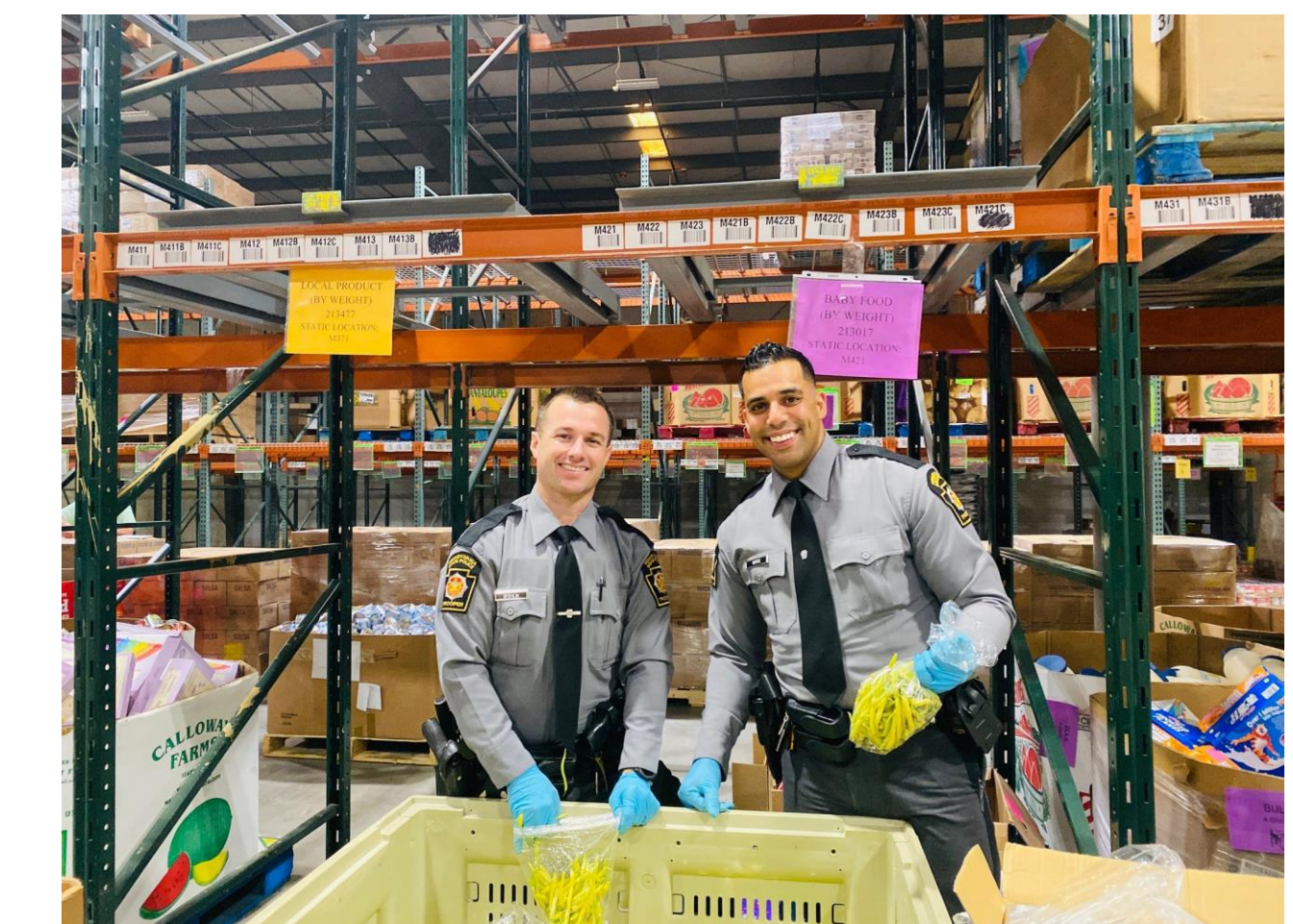
- In 2022, Helping Harvest distributed over 9.6 million tons of food to organizations in Berks and Schuylkill counties, with over 40% of the food distributed perishable (fresh or frozen)
- Each month, nearly 2,300 families are served through Helping Harvest's mobile market program

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- As mentioned above, Helping Harvest provides food to over 300 local organizations. As part of the partnership between Helping Harvest and the local organization, Helping Harvest visits the site once every year to ensure guidelines are being followed, food is stored safely, the organization is distributing food in a sensitive and ethical manner, and that the clients are treated respectfully and with dignity. The intern primarily helped with these monitoring visits.
- Helping Harvest is also in the process of working with its partners to transition pantry registration to an online system through a portal called Service Insights. Service Insights refers to collecting basic administrative and demographic data from the neighbors Helping Harvest serves, through a digital intake platform. The intern helped with this transition by going to partner organizations and working with volunteers to train and assist with the technology.
- The intern also helped with the senior box program by making phone calls to clients to remind them of pick up dates, times and locations.
- The intern also helped distribute food and register clients at mobile markets in Berks county.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

- Learning about the many different organizations in Berks and Schuylkill counties aimed at addressing gaps in the social determinants of health
- Making connections with community members and leaders



REFLECTION

During my time at Helping Harvest, I learned a great deal about what goes on behind the scenes at a huge non-profit organization. I learned that addressing many of the gaps pertaining to the social determinants of health inevitably comes with administrative burden, and by taking that responsibility, we reduce the burden of that on smaller local partner organizations, who are focused on getting food out to community members. Ultimately, this experience opened my eyes to the true interconnectedness of the many organizations in Berks County who are focused on providing support for community members.