

# Bridging the Gaps



DREXEL UNIVERSITY  
College of  
Medicine

## Understanding the Factors Surrounding Food Insecurity and its Impact on the Community in Reading, PA

Student Intern: *Ashini Patel, Drexel University College of Medicine at Tower Health*  
Academic Preceptors: *Holly Metzgar, DO, FACOG, NCMP, Program Director for Bridging the Gaps at Drexel University College of Medicine at Tower Health*  
Community Preceptors: *Christie Botterbusch, New Journey Community Outreach, Jeff Layton, New Journey Community Outreach*

### COMMUNITY PARTNER

**New Journey Community Outreach** serves ~250 lunches to the community daily and holds large food distributions on Wednesdays and Fridays of every week. They also provide emergency food through their pantry, allowing clients to select the foods they want.

Another main offering of this site is their donation-based clothing center, which allows clients to select clothing every month on an appointment-only basis.

<https://www.njcoinc.org>



### BACKGROUND

- **2 in 5** households in Berks County are unable to afford their basic needs.<sup>1</sup>
- New Journey has over **doubled** the number of people they serve since 2020.
- Due to inflation, food prices **increased 11%** from 2021 to 2022.<sup>2</sup>

### TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gap intern helped with a variety of tasks, both administrative and client-facing.

- Making, packaging, and serving lunches to the community
- Distributing food received from the food bank
- Organizing and sorting clothes in the clothing center.

Along with this, they helped with tasks such as creating posters and forms in both English and Spanish, creating templates for the social media, and building a workflow to create ID badges for the pantry's weekly food distributions.

The student worked to take multiple practices, which had previously been conducted on paper, to an online format to emphasize efficiency and accessibility.

### REFLECTION

"My time at New Journey helped me to understand how strong the sense of community is in Reading. I felt so welcomed by the staff and volunteers, who always shared stories about their experiences growing up in Reading and many of the struggles that they faced themselves. Having volunteered at a food bank in Berks County earlier in the year, and now at a large pantry for the summer, I felt that I was able to get a better understanding of how COVID has greatly increased the need in Berks County, and how food insecurity can impact one's health. I will carry the lessons and skills I learned from this experience with me into my career as a physician."

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/JOYS



### RESOURCES

1. United For ALICE. (2023). "ALICE in Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Pennsylvania." UnitedForALICE.org/Pennsylvania
2. Office, U. S. G. A. (2023, July 13). *Sticker shock at the grocery store? inflation wasn't the only reason food prices increased.* U.S. GAO. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/sticker-shock-grocery-store-inflation-wasnt-only-reason-food-prices-increased>