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Access to Culturally Appropriate Food in Chittenden County: A Program Evaluation of the Vermont Foodbank's Fresh Food Distribution



Caroline Gilman
Food Systems, University of Vermont
Food Systems Master's Degree Candidate
April 26, 2022

Committee Members

Dr. Pablo Bose, Food Systems Faculty, Project Mentor
Dr. Teresa Mares, Food Systems Faculty, Project Advisor
Martha Caswell, Co-Director of the Agroecology & Livelihoods Collaborative,
Project Advisor

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Access to Culturally Appropriate Food in Chittenden County: A Program Evaluation of the Vermont Foodbank's Fresh Food Distribution

Introduction

The Vermont Foodbank, and community organizations statewide, have been working towards creating systems in which community members who receive produce have their cultural preferences taken into consideration. The Janet S. Munt Family Room, a non-profit organization that provides programs and services to parents and young children, is the main distribution site for the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program. Every month, thousands of pounds of fresh, local vegetables are distributed at their programs. In addition to gleaned produce, the Family Room was a recipient of the Vermont Foodbank's culturally appropriate community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares in 2021, which distributed targeted, responsive, local produce to organizations and families in Chittenden County. My project aims to gain insight into how families involved with the Family Room programming and produce distributions utilize their fresh vegetables, the ways in which cooking classes can be a catalyst for increased vegetable consumption, and if receiving produce significantly contributes to a family's overall food security. Interviews with participating families includes questions about how they cook with the vegetables, how they store the vegetables in their home, and how the Vermont Foodbank's vegetable selection and distribution outlets could be improved to meet their needs. With the information gained through a mixed-methods approach, this paper will be shared with the Vermont Foodbank and community partners, aiming to list recommendations for improving programs and services for community members in Chittenden County.

Project Context

Food Insecurity in Vermont

The state of Vermont has experienced an increase in food insecurity rates from 2019 to 2021. A survey of 3,251 Vermonters was conducted by the University of Vermont and John Hopkins University researchers to assess food access and security during the Covid-19 pandemic. The key findings included a 33% increase in food insecurity since the inception of the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, 18.3% of respondents were food insecure, shifting to 24.4% since the outbreak (Niles et al, 2020). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food-secure household as one that has access to enough food to achieve a healthy and active lifestyle. Specifically, a household must have nutritionally adequate and safe foods readily available (USDA, 2021). The pandemic has increased food insecurity in the United States and disproportionately affected people of color (Hake et. al. 2021). Individuals suffered the loss of income and purchasing power during the series of lockdowns, making it difficult to obtain appropriate food (Béné, 2020). Community organizations and programs throughout Vermont are working to assist individuals and families with accessing food.

Within Vermont, there are 14 counties, with Chittenden County being the largest, and among the 17 towns in Chittenden County, Burlington is the state's largest city. According to Vermont's Department of Health and Feeding America, 12% of residents in Chittenden County are food insecure (Feeding America, 2017; VT Department of Health, 2014). Within Chittenden County, there is a thriving local food movement, working to promote local producers, restaurants, and community organizations. Although there are barriers to accessing local food, hunger-relief organizations in Chittenden County have implemented programs to address the rise in food insecurity, as well as create access to local food for everyone, including low-income communities. In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, the local food movement in Chittenden County has effectively utilized programs such as the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program to create stronger community engagement, connection, and food security.

Gleaning and Vermont Foodbank's Fresh Food Distribution

In the United States, 40% of food produced ends up in a landfill (Sewald, 2018), and yet at the same time, an estimated 42 million Americans are experiencing food insecurity (Hake et al., 2021). Gleaning tackles two major societal issues: food insecurity and food waste (Lee et al., 2017). Feeding America, the umbrella organization for all major food banks and food pantries in the United States, defines gleaning as the act of harvesting extra crops from farms and gardens to give to individuals facing hunger (Slupski, 2021). Gleaning programs have become widely adopted because they can increase the amount of fresh food being consumed by charitable food recipients (Sonmez et al., 2015). A case study done in Washington state found that food-insecure participants reported that gleaning increased their access to fresh vegetables and dietary adequacy (Hoisington et al., 2001). Vulnerable populations are at an increased risk of nutrition and food insecurity due to geographical isolation or low-income jobs. (Mukoya et al., 2017). Gleaning programs can create access for vulnerable populations and have been shown to increase fresh food access for recipients, encourage community engagement, and build stronger community food systems.

Food banks and food pantries exist to provide food insecure communities with access to free food with the objective of achieving food security (Hardcastle et al., 2020). Access to nutritional and safe food is a major aspect of the USDA's definition of food security (USDA, 2021), yet most food banks and pantries operate based on donations that often lack significant nutritional value due to the benefits of shelf-stable products. Nutritional value is often prioritized second to the accessibility of shelf-stable products such as canned goods and processed foods (Mukoya et al., 2017). A review of existing literature on the relationship between gleaning and food security, reveals the need for further research to fully examine the effect on individual food security levels. Existing gleaning research focuses on the nutritional and health benefits of receiving gleaned vegetables and the overall outcomes of gleaning operations. Additionally, many published articles on the subject are outdated, reflecting a pre-pandemic food system, and provide observations and solutions for wildly different circumstances.

In Vermont, there are several gleaning programs statewide, all with the collective goal to provide fresh and local vegetables to participants and reduce food waste (Vermont Foodbank 2021; Intervale Center, 2021; Vermont Gleaning Collective, 2021). The Vermont Foodbank has the largest statewide gleaning program, operating out of three major hubs in the state: Burlington, Rutland, and Brattleboro. Each year, over 465,000 pounds of fresh local produce, that would otherwise go to waste, is given out to Vermonters at distribution sites such as hospitals, schools, and low-income housing sites. The program is seasonal and relies on farmer and volunteer participation, with over 80 participating farms statewide (Vermont Foodbank, 2021). In Chittenden County, the gleaning program operates in a unique way from Rutland and Brattleboro. Each week, the gleaning team, comprised of two full-time Foodbank staff members, four University of Vermont interns, and rotating volunteers, glean produce at farms throughout Chittenden County. The farms range in size and operational structure, some organic and some conventional. All produce is harvested by the glean team and stored at the industrial cooler space in Burlington, Vermont. Once in the cooler, the thousands of pounds of vegetables are distributed through various channels, either through direct tabling distributions or community partner drop-offs. All produce is given out to the community for free.

Culturally Appropriate Food

The definition of culturally appropriate food varies amongst people and organizations. Cultural norms are everchanging therefore defining culturally appropriate food can be challenging (Sampson et al., 2013). The definition of culturally appropriate is when services are responsive to an individual's cultural background, knowledge, and preferences. In the context of food, culturally appropriate means that individuals have access to food that meet their cultural preferences. Cultural preferences and norms are different for each individual or group of people so instead of making decisions based on stereotypes, allow individuals and groups to define what culturally appropriate means to them (Sampson et al., 2013).

The literature considers how food banks are tailoring their food purchases, donations, and food recovery choices to meet the cultural needs of recipients. Thompson et al. (2018) studied the health and wellbeing challenges food banks to face in London. Specifically, the authors highlight how the limited availability of culturally appropriate food at food banks leads to food waste. People receiving food from the foodbank do not want to waste food as they are food insecure, but often foods received are not culturally appropriate or significant. Furthermore, Hardcastle et al. (2020) conducted a study on food choice at food banks and found that different groups of people have varying lifestyle, cultural or behavioral norms that influence their food consumption. When making choices at food banks, the Australian study by Mukoya et al. (2017) discusses how migrants or asylum seekers would often choose unhealthy shelf-stable projects such as instant noodles, as the packaging was similar across multiple countries, creating a sense of familiarity and trust.

When discussing food choice and agency based on cultural preferences, the food sovereignty framework must be considered. The food sovereignty movement is a global food

movement with the goal of strengthening communities, improving farmer and community member livelihoods, and creating sustainable environmental and social frameworks (Desmarais et al., 2014). The food sovereignty movement is everchanging and can be defined differently across groups of people and cultures (Desmarais et al., 2014). Amongst Indigenous communities, food sovereignty definitions vary across groups of people but emphasize land rights and identity (Grey et al., 2014). Amongst farming communities around the world, the grassroots food sovereignty movement established by La Via Campesina, pushes for land reform, woman's rights, and the inclusion of agroecological practices (Grey et al., 2014). Overall, the goal of food sovereignty is to create systems where stakeholders have autonomy over their own food system. Food sovereignty aims to shift the definition of food security to include ensured access to nutritionally adequate and culturally appropriate food (Menezes, 2001).

Agroecology is a set of principles with the goal of strengthening resilience and sustainability in food and farming, while creating new systems in agriculture, processing, distribution, and consumption. The movement engages with the social and political aspects of the food system and enhances the relationships between society and nature. (CIDSE, 2018). In relation to the charitable food sector, agroecology can promote trust and connection between the producer and consumer. Value chains become shorter and more localized, which creates a relationship between the producer and consumer. Core principles of agroecology include providing communities with nutritious, healthy, and culturally appropriate food. The frameworks and principles of agroecology and food sovereignty work together to create systems where root problems for hunger and poverty are addressed. The result is that charitable food recipients have greater choice over the food they receive (CIDSE, 2018).

There is emerging research at the University of Vermont on the effectiveness of the state's hunger-relief organizations and their ability to provide recipients with culturally appropriate foods. Pablo Bose, a University of Vermont faculty member and researcher defined culturally appropriate as being open to diverse and changing needs and desires of various communities, not assuming you already know what someone likes, wants, or needs to eat, and achieving the best outcomes for food security, food sovereignty and health (Bose, 2020). Furthermore, local, and statewide non-profits, such as the Vermont Foodbank and Feeding Chittenden, are listening to the needs of the community and changing systems to provide culturally appropriate food to recipients. Bose created a comprehensive report prepared for the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) and the Vermont Foodbank, examining the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on food security within refugee communities. The study reported that home deliveries are preferred by most households and that increased availability of desired culturally appropriate foods would lead to better outcomes (Bose, 2021). Home deliveries have been an effective method of distribution throughout the pandemic; however, a barrier is obtaining home delivery volunteers. Obtaining and retaining volunteers is time-consuming, requiring background checks, paperwork, and screenings of each person. With the information provided through Bose's study, the Vermont Foodbank has begun making new purchasing decisions.

One new purchase has been large quantities of dried beans and rice, that are being distributed at Feeding Chittenden (E. Palermo, personal communication, September 3, 2021). In addition to purchasing suggested dried goods, during the 2021 growing season, Vermont Foodbank piloted a culturally appropriate CSA program for New American families and migrant farmworkers. This program was free to participants and contained targeted, culturally appropriate, local vegetables, grown by Digger's Mirth Farm located at the Intervale in Burlington, Vermont. Digger's Mirth Farm used suggestions from Bose's study and community organizations to grow and package shares that contained culturally appropriate food. Within the program, there were three shares: A Nepali share, a general family share, and a migrant farmworker share. The shares were delivered to the Vermont Foodbank's cooler at the Intervale, and then picked up and delivered by volunteers. Volunteers were recruited through partnering organizations such as Winooski Mutual Aid and UVM Extension. Feedback from families and partnering organizations was positive, noting the excitement at the presence of familiar crops such as *molokhia* (E. Palermo, personal communication, November 12, 2021). *Molokhia* is a leafy green vegetable described by recipients as binding agent, meaning it is used to thicken soups and stews. For older recipients, the presence of *molokhia* was nostalgic as many did not have access to it since coming to the United States.

This master's research project aims to build off the work being done in Chittenden County by community organizations and University of Vermont researchers. The goal is to speak directly to community members who attend the Janet S. Munt Family Room program and receive vegetables through the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program to determine the current needs of the community.

Project Overview

This project was developed in partnership with the Vermont Foodbank and The Janet S. Munt Family Room. The central idea of this project was born from my work experience at the Vermont Foodbank, where I worked as a seasonal food access and gleaning intern between June 2020 and March 2021. As an intern, I developed a love for working with the local farming and greater Burlington community. My internship was extended through the spring semester, and I was soon asked to come on as a Foodbank employee and assist the gleaning program coordinator, Elena Palermo, in running the gleaning program for the 2021 season. In this position, I coordinated the distribution aspect of the program and developed meaningful relationships with community members and organizations throughout Burlington. As I was developing my Master's project in the fall of 2021, I knew I wanted to continue working at the Foodbank and Family Room. I started by talking to my supervisors at the Foodbank to gain insight into their needs as an organization. Additionally, I discussed my ideas with multiple food systems faculty members and ultimately connected with Dr. Pablo Bose through the Food Systems Synergy Grants. I learned about his continued work with the Vermont Foodbank and gained valuable feedback to develop my project.

The Janet S. Munt Family Room is a non-profit organization in Chittenden County that provides programs and services to parents and young children. The Family Room is a network

partner and main distribution site for the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program. Located in the Old North End in Burlington, Vermont, the Family Room serves mothers, fathers, and children ages zero to five years old. Its mission is to build healthy, connected communities by offering programs including family play, English classes, postpartum assistance, and computer classes. The Family Room serves a diverse population, including many New American and refugee families. At the Family Room, there are fridges and freezers full of vegetables, meat, canned goods, and household items. Families are welcome to take home any amount of food and household items at any time. During the growing season in Vermont, the vegetables come from the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program. Otherwise, donations come from the Vermont Foodbank's larger distribution services, Hannaford's, Feeding Chittenden, and other local community organizations.

During the summer and fall, the Family Room offers their family play programming at the Ethan Allen Homestead gardens, where families can grow their own food on a small plot of land allocated to them. In addition to providing gardening space and assistance, outdoor family play is meant to connect families, build community, and have educational opportunities for children. When I worked at the Foodbank, I coordinated tabling events at network partner sites, one of which was the Family Room gardens. I loved working with the Family Room, so I assigned myself the responsibility of tabling weekly at the gardens. It was at the gardens where I formed relationships with Family Room staff and families and decided to dedicate my Master's project to working with the Vermont Foodbank and Family Room.

My project aims to gain insight into how families involved with the Family Room are utilizing the fresh vegetables they receive and how cooking classes can assist with the integration of fresh vegetables into families' diets. In collaboration with Family Room and Vermont Foodbank staff, we developed a plan that would benefit both the families and organizations involved. The Covid-19 pandemic, specifically the rise in cases early in 2022, impacted the project timeline and plan. Originally, a greater number of interviews with families were planned, but with the rise in cases and organizational closures, the Family Room staff, and I decided to pivot to cooking classes. The change in plan turned out to be mutually meaningful and valuable for the research, all participants, and each organization. The interview questions aimed to gain feedback and learn about vegetables and food preferences, storage capabilities in the home, and food security concerns during the pandemic. In addition to interviews, the Family Room wanted to implement cooking classes, where I would cook with families and teach them methods of integrating vegetables into easily prepared meals. To implement the project, I have spent Thursday mornings at the family play programming, while the interviews were completed directly following the cooking classes on Thursday or on Friday mornings.

The project was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is the current Vermont Foodbank vegetable selection meeting the cultural needs of community members at the Family Room?

2. What vegetables do families want to receive?
3. How are families utilizing and storing gleaned vegetables?
4. Are cooking classes a method for increasing food security?

Methods

I used a mixed-methods approach for this master's research project, specifically utilizing participant observations, cooking classes, and interviews. The plan for the research project was developed in collaboration with the Vermont Foodbank and Family Room to meet the needs of each organization.

Participant Observation

The first method used for this research project was participant observation. Participant observation is a qualitative method with the objective to assist researchers in the understanding a population or community (Duke University, 2022). This project used participant observation to understand the Family Room community and inform research questions. Participating in programming and immersing myself in the experience of a family attending the program was valuable in understanding the Family Room's systems in programming, food distribution, and overall organizational dynamics. I was able to observe and understand each participant and hear their stories. The result of the process was the co-creation of research questions, cooking classes, and interview protocol (Culhane, 2017). The co-creation process made sure that the project would benefit the participants the most. After understanding the systems, I was able effectively tell the stories of the participants in a way that will inform organizations on program shifts, future research, and food choice.

I have been using participant observation as a method for this research project since its inception. I immersed myself in the Family Room programming on Thursdays for nine months, volunteering in various areas of the organization. When working at the Foodbank, I attended the garden programming on Thursday mornings where I set up a table and handed out vegetables to families. I participated in the reading and singing circle each week and talked with families and staff. After my job at the Foodbank ended in November 2021, I attended the indoor family play program on Thursday mornings. At the indoor family play, I cooked the shared meal in the kitchen, sat, talked, played with families, and handed out food at snack and lunchtime. After each program on Thursday morning, I took field notes, and utilized this gathered information to inform project creation, research questions, and other methods.

Cooking Classes

For the research project, I offered three cooking classes. The classes were taught during the Thursday morning family play program in the Family Room. Each week at the family play

program, snacks and lunch are offered as part of the programming. The shared meal changes each week, and I chose the meal for the cooking class with the help of the kitchen staff, taking into consideration limitations such as preparation time and ingredient price. Additionally, all meals were vegetarian to avoid conflicts with dietary restrictions and religious preferences/exclusions, as well as to remain conscious of the fluctuating, and often high prices of meat. All ingredients were donated by the Vermont Foodbank and Hannaford's or purchased by the Family Room. Families came to the family play program and were offered to participate in the cooking class. No prior registration was necessary. The participants joined me in the kitchen or behind the window into one of the playrooms. We prepped and cooked the meal together while engaging in conversation about previous cooking experiences, shared skills, and offered recipes to one another. The cooking classes were a form of participant observation, as they were not recorded. I was immersed in the activity with the families participating and in-depth field notes were written after the cooking class. The field notes included scratch pictures, descriptions, reflections from the day.

Interviews

I interviewed six community members who are deeply rooted in the Family Room and the greater Burlington community. Each participant receives food donations from the Family Room and the Vermont Foodbank such as gleaned vegetables or the culturally appropriate CSAs. The interviews were done at the Family Room in Burlington, Vermont. With the consent of the participant, the interview was recorded and developed into a transcript utilized for my analysis. If there was a language barrier, I asked each participant if they would like to use the interpreter services provided by AALV, which I had previously used before in work settings at the Vermont Foodbank. I did not have to use AALV's services for any interview. A participant was eligible to participate in the research project if they had ever received Vermont Foodbank's food donations through the Family Room programming. I recruited potential participants through the program coordinators at the Family Room, by attending weekly Family Room events and teaching the cooking classes. I provided all participants with a information sheet outlining the research process and the participant's right to withdraw at any time. In the fall of 2021, I completed the International Review Board (IRB) process which ended in a decision by the research review analyst to reference this work as a program evaluation. Additionally, I had multiple meetings with Family Room program coordinators and Vermont Foodbank staff to develop a plan for the interview process and distribution of gift cards. The Vermont Foodbank provided \$25 Hannaford's gift cards for interview participants.

The interviews were conducted over the span of two months. In addition to community members, I interviewed two Family Room staff members. Both staff members are involved with programming and kitchen operations. The two staff member interviews were intentionally done at the conclusion of the research project to learn more about their expert perspective on the population sample and future program needs. All participant names are recanted from the transcript and this paper to protect their identities. I designed the interview questions with the

goal of meeting the research goals of partnering organizations and my own curiosity from my work at the Foodbank and food systems education.

Family Member Interview Questions

1. Do you participate in any of the Vermont Foodbank's food distribution programs? If so, what programs? Do you receive fresh vegetables from the Vermont Foodbank through participation in local community organization's programming (Family Room, Winooski Mutual Aid CSA shares, etc)?
2. How long have been receiving vegetables from Family Room?
3. What vegetables do you enjoy receiving the most?
4. What is your favorite meal to cook with the vegetables?
5. After receiving the vegetables, do you supplement at the grocery store?
6. When you receive vegetables from the Vermont Foodbank, how do you typically store them? Do you have enough food storage in your home?
7. Are there any vegetables that you wish were available through Vermont Foodbank programs or services?
8. Are the vegetables provided through the Vermont Foodbank's programs or services meeting your cultural preferences?
9. Would you be interested in having access to Halal goat meat?
10. Are you interested in home delivery? If you have received food through home delivery, has it been beneficial?
11. Has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your ability to access fresh and local vegetables?

Family Room Program Coordinator

1. Have you seen a difference from before the pandemic with the need for food assistance?
2. Are there any vegetables/food that you hear families request often?
3. How did the CSA distributions go last summer? What are your thoughts on the program?
4. Is there any way the Foodbank could be of assistance to the Family Room programming?
5. How did you think the cooking classes went?
6. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Family Room Kitchen Staff Member

1. How has the pandemic effected how you cook for programming?
2. Are there any vegetables/meals families request often? Or you wish were available through the Foodbank?
3. How do you think the cooking classes went? Do you find cooking classes as a valuable tool for families?
4. Is there any way the Foodbank could be of assistance for your cooking programs?
5. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Findings

Participant Observation

Prior to starting my research project, I worked at the Vermont Foodbank for one year where, among other responsibilities, I distributed gleaned vegetables at the Family Room and their gardening program. In addition, before starting my cooking classes and interviews, I spent six weeks volunteering at the Family Room, where I immersed myself in the community and observed the systems and dynamics of staff and families. When I am at the Family Room, I feel welcomed into the community by staff and families. Each family member is grateful for the program and community and is eager to talk and share stories.

A Day at the Family Room

At 8:45 am on a Thursday I arrive at the Family Room and check in with staff to determine where I am needed for the family play program. There is the kitchen where shared snacks and meals are made for families and staff each day, run by one staff member and a varied number of volunteers depending on the day. There is the baby room, where families with children ages zero to two are welcome to come and play, as well a playroom for children ages two to five years old. Throughout the first few weeks of my participant research with the Family Room, I spent most of my time in the baby room, introducing myself to families, building trust, and observing the daily routines within the organization. I spent the remaining weeks in the kitchen, helping with meal prep, cooking, and teaching cooking classes. The kitchen is busy and full of delicious smells. There are many tasks, and each staff member and volunteer are always moving around, prepping vegetables, packaging food. There is a sense of urgency each week, as the snack is due in the event hall at 9:30 am and lunch is due at 11:00 am. Snacks and lunch change each week, but there is food needed for 30 to 40 people. The kitchen is central to each room in the Family Room, with many people coming in and out to get coffee, or tea, or join a conversation. Families comment on the aromas coming from the kitchen and are eager to eat the food being prepared.

At 9:00 am families are welcomed into the building. The number of families vary each week depending on school schedules, Covid-19 restrictions, and employment obligations. Families are placed in their respective playrooms but are free to roam around to eat, talk, and get food in the community fridges and pantry. These are located right when you walked into the building and are open to all families who come into the building. There is a sense of comfort amongst the families and staff. Family members come and go, get food as they need, and help themselves to coffee and food. An overall sense of community and togetherness pervades the space. Each week at 10:30 am, a volunteer comes and offers a book reading and singing circle in each playroom. The volunteer gets books donated by a local non-profit library and gives them out to all families. He teaches the families songs and reading techniques. All staff members join in, and there is a sense of overall joy during this activity.

Around 11:00 am, families gather in the event hall for lunch. In January and February 2022, families were asked to take their meals to go due to Covid-19 restrictions. In March 2022, the Family Room once again began community meals, which was exciting for everyone involved. The meal is distributed to families and is enjoyed together at tables in the event hall. At 11:45 am, there is a goodbye circle where the community would once again sing together. After the goodbye circle, around 12:15 pm, the family play program ends, and all families leave. When leaving, families are welcome to take more of the meal to go or shop in the fridges and pantry. Throughout the family play program, staff members are stretched thin; There are many families with pressing needs, some including food assistance, car seat help, and home visits. While all the staff members care deeply about the families with whom they work, and have cultivated close relationships with them, their roles require an incredible amount of work. While I was there, I witnessed staff members constantly bouncing from task to task, helping families, answering phone calls, or on their way out the door for a home visit.

Cooking Classes

February 17, 2022: Red Lentil Soup

The first cooking class acted as a trial run to determine the most effective systems and methods of operating during the family play program. There were two participants who volunteered to join the class. The two participants and I gathered around the large kitchen table and began to chop onions. We delegated the tasks based on preference and skills. We worked as a team, talked about how we each learned how to cook, and shared stories and recipes with one another.

One participant explained how the women he grew up with influenced his cooking methods and preferences, sharing that his mother first introduced him to cooking beans. The other participant explained how she learned to cook from her mother, and how she cooks with her young daughter watching her every night. There was a sense of accomplishment when the soup was ready to be distributed to families. Due to Covid restrictions in February 2022, families took the meal home instead of eating together in the event hall. Despite this, participants were eager to share the recipe and new skills with the community. The next week, feedback from families included that their whole family enjoyed the meal and that they learned a new method of cooking and utilizing red lentils.



Figure 1

March 2, 2022: Coconut Chickpea Curry

Due to the success of the trial cooking class, the second cooking class involved preparing a coconut chickpea curry with four participants. We gathered in the kitchen and delegated tasks based on experience and skill. Many participants cut onions and others drained cans of chickpeas. As a group, we discussed our favorite recipes to cook, our families, our favorite food to eat, and restaurants we enjoy going to in Vermont. In between conversations, we would start a new task and I would teach the group a new skill. After I would teach the skill, I would ask the group if they did it differently and if they could teach us. We all learned from each other and got to know each other's backgrounds and interests.



Figure 2

Covid-19 restrictions were still in place during this class, so the meal was not able to be eaten as a group. Families were able to take the curry and enjoy it at home. At the end of the class, participants were excited to go home and make the recipe for their family and alter it to meet their preferences. As a result of their children enjoying the curry, parents identified that their families increased vegetable consumption.

March 31, 2022: Kale and Vegetable Soup

The final cooking class was done in collaboration with the English class that meets during the family play program. The English teacher and I decided it would be mutually beneficial to combine classes to teach basic cooking skills in English. This class was special because it was the first cooking class where the class participants could see the families eating and talking about the meal. The event hall was full of families gathering to eat and participants took pride in having cooked the soup and seeing people eat it. It initiated conversations of family knowledge, recipes, and each family's variation of vegetable soup. Many families asked for the written recipe because they were excited to see their children eating it. A common theme I observed amongst families cooking and eating the soup was that if their children enjoyed the meal, they would come and ask for the recipe. Participants expressed that without the introduction of kale and vegetable soup at the Family Room, they would never have made the soup. The cooking class educated them on new recipes and methods of cooking that they were able to bring home and use while preparing meals for their family.



Figure 3

Interviews

Over the course of two months, six interviews were conducted using the following interview questions. Participants were recruited after attending a cooking class and with the help of Family Room staff. Each participant received a \$25 Hannaford gift card which was funded by the Vermont Foodbank. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participant and used for analysis purposes. The identity of each participant is confidential and is not shared during this paper. All interviews were conducted with children present and lasted an average of twenty minutes. Three interviews were done at the Family Room the day after the cooking class and without programming occurring. The other three interviews were done directly after the cooking class and during the family play program. The differentiation between setting and location was due to childcare restrictions, time restraints, and availability.

Family Interviews

Q1: Do you participate in any of the Vermont Foodbank's food distribution programs? If so, what programs? Do you receive fresh vegetables from the Vermont Foodbank through participation in local community organizations' programming (Family Room, Winooski Mutual Aid CSA shares, etc)?

All participants accessed vegetables and dried goods at the Family Room. In addition to the Family Room, two families accessed food at Feeding Chittenden and through the Vermont Foodbank's community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares. One participant occasionally attended the Winooski Veggie Van Go event operated by the Vermont Foodbank and noted that the outdoor event is difficult to attend due to weather, childcare, and time commitment.

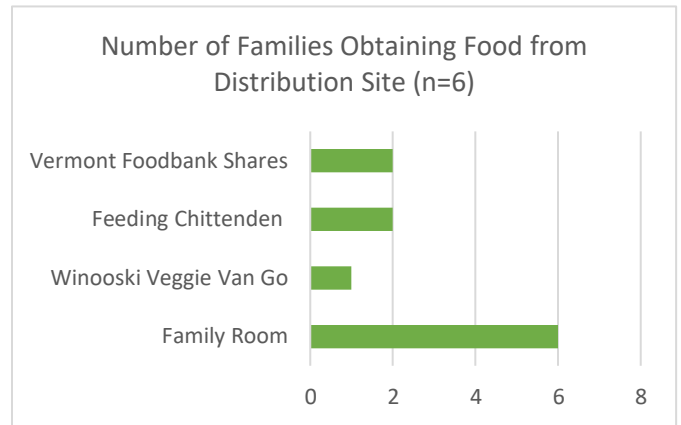


Figure 4

Q2: How long have been receiving vegetables from the Family Room?

The number of years a participant had received vegetables from the Family Room varied. Amongst the six participants, each family had time periods where they were not able to attend Family Room programming for an extended period due to Covid-19 restrictions and employment obligations. Each participant explained their personal connection and gratitude to the Family Room, noting their love for community and connection between staff and families. Additionally, participants' attendance at the Family Room programs depended on their children's ages, as the Family Room programming is for children ages zero to five years old.

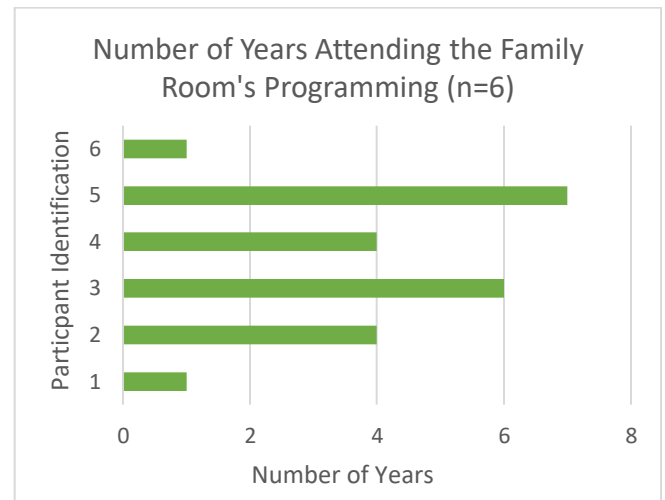


Figure 5

When answering question 2, all participants took time to explain their appreciation for the Family Room programs, staff, and community. One participant explained that the Family Room allows her family to feel a part of the Vermont community, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic:

“We feel loved, we feel welcomed, we feel connected. Without the family room I feel like we would not have a connection with the Vermont community. The family room is awesome.”

Another participant explained her gratitude for the Family Room, especially regarding food distribution. Throughout the pandemic, the Vermont Foodbank's vegetable distributions

were essential in feeding her family. The Family Room provides an escape from her stressful life and is helpful to her family. She said:

“Yes, it’s so welcoming. It’s like a breath of fresh air to come here. And they provide a lot of stuff, especially in the summer. They provide fresh fruits and vegetables and it’s very nice. And yeah, they have that little garden program. It’s really nice.”

Q3: What vegetables do you enjoy receiving the most?

Based on the responses to question 3, Figure 6 is a comprehensive list of vegetables that participants enjoy receiving the most. Many of the vegetables listed were repeated by multiple participants. Cilantro, spinach, peppers, kale, and onions were the most requested and enjoyed vegetables. Participants expressed that they would enjoy larger amounts of the popular vegetables listed.

Kale	Onions
Squash	Salad greens
Sweet potatoes	Peppers
Carrots	Cabbage
Tomatoes	Basil
Cilantro	Potatoes
Scallions	Herbs
Eggplant	Broccoli
Small beets	Cucumber
Spinach	Zucchini

Figure 6

Q4: What is your favorite meal to cook with the vegetables?

Each participant indicated that they cook vegetables using a method their children will enjoy. Examples include serving each meal with rice, adding condiments that are available in school, and roasting the vegetables instead of steaming them. Additionally, they had different level of familiarity with cooking vegetables therefore recipes varied. Participants were eager to share family recipes with other people who attend Family Room programs, especially methods of cooking rice and vegetable soup. The dishes that are commonly made using vegetables are pasta, rice, beans, soup, and baked vegetables.

Q5: After receiving the vegetables, do you supplement at the grocery store?

As shown in Figure 7, 33% of participants indicated that they need to supplement vegetables and food at the grocery store after receiving available food from the Family Room and Vermont Foodbank, 50% of participants indicated that they sometimes do and 17% indicated that they never need to supplement. Common stores participants purchase groceries at include Hannaford, Price Chopper, the two Somali stores and the African Market. The participants who responded “sometimes” for question 5 explained that that both the need to supplementation and amount varied week by week, as food choice and availability are never known or guaranteed. The participants who responded “yes” to

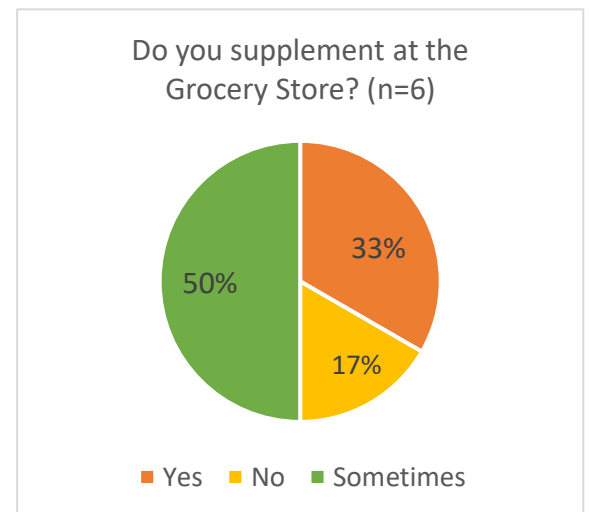


Figure 7

supplementing at the grocery store have large families therefore are unable to get the appropriate quantities at the Family Room. The participant who responded “no” has a two-person family including herself and her daughter, making it easier to get everything she needs at the Family Room.

Q6: When you receive vegetables from the Vermont Foodbank, how do you typically store them? Do you have enough food storage in your home?

As shown in Figure 8, 50% of participants responded that they have enough storage in their home while 50% responded that that they sometimes have enough storage in their home. The participants who indicated “yes” had smaller families and younger children, requiring smaller amounts of food in their homes. They take enough for the week and felt comfortable in their storage capabilities. The participants who indicated that they sometimes had enough storage in their homes had varying reasoning behind their answers. One participant lived in a small apartment with many family members which limited their storage capabilities. If they took enough food for one week, there was enough space but if more food was available there would not be enough storage space. Furthermore, two other participants have similar experiences which included feeling nervous about food availability week after week. If there was a certain vegetable or food available for one week, they would want to get a large amount for a long period of time as they are not aware of availability the next week. This causes storage to be a problem occasionally.

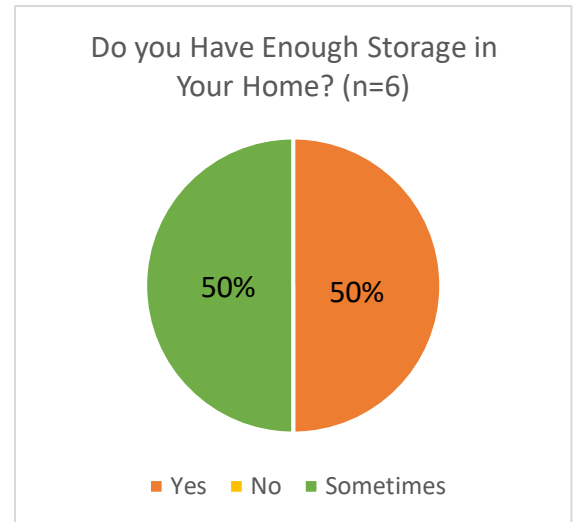


Figure 8

Q7: Are there any vegetables that you wish were available through Vermont Foodbank programs or services?

Participants indicated the listed vegetables, as seen in Figure 9, as ones that they wished were available or available in larger quantities. The most requested vegetables were okra, cilantro, and spinach because they are widely used and enjoyed by all family members. The availability of these vegetables at the Family Room would improve participants’ food choice and satisfaction.

Plantains	Kale
Okra	Tomatoes
White sweet potatoes	Cilantro
Eggplant	Watermelon
Spinach	Cantaloupe

Figure 9

Q8: Are the vegetables provided through the Vermont Foodbank's programs or services meeting your cultural preferences?

100% percent of participants indicated that the Vermont Foodbank's vegetable selection is meeting their cultural preferences. Many participants indicated that living in Vermont and raising children in American school systems have shifted their cultural preferences. One participant explained how cultural preferences can change based on location and availability. Her family has moved away from cooking traditional dishes, as her older children are in school and receiving school lunches. This has made her children prefer what she called "Americanized" meals. Although she would enjoy receiving more vegetables and food than she grew up eating, the choices are meeting her family's needs at this moment in time. Her mother had grown up in Africa and her family grew their own food, which has caused her to dislike many American dishes and vegetables such as mushrooms. Furthermore, participants noted that the increased number of vegetables listed in Figure 9 would improve overall satisfaction and food choice.

Q9: Would you be interested in having access to Halal goat meat?

100% of participants indicated that they would be interested in having access to Halal goat meat. All participants answered this question with a smile on their faces and with enthusiasm. Currently, 83.3% of participants purchase Halal goat meat from the two Somali stores and African Market in the Old North End. One participant explained her method of accessing Halal goat meat, which included paying a friend to drive a long distance to obtain a larger amount of meat for her family. She emphasized how expensive it is and noted that access through the Family Room and Vermont Foodbank would be helpful to her family.

Q10: Are you interested in home delivery? If you have received food through home delivery, has it been beneficial?

100% of participants indicated that they are interested in-home delivery and that it would be helpful. Home delivery would benefit each participant, specifically because of childcare trouble when grocery shopping. 100% of participants have received home delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic. This allowed families to have access to vegetables and food during the lockdowns in 2020. Many participants expressed that home deliveries mitigated stress and anxiety about leaving children at home and potentially getting sick with Covid-19. All participants indicated that the option for increased home delivery would be extremely beneficial.

Q11: Has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your ability to access fresh and local vegetables?

80% of participants indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted their ability to access fresh and local vegetables, and 20% indicated that the pandemic has not impacted their ability to access fresh and local vegetables. In spring 2020, supply chain problems caused stress and the inability to access certain food and vegetables. Additionally, early in the pandemic and during the surge of the Covid-19 Omicron variant in early 2022, the Family Room and local food shelves closed, causing families to be unable to access free food. In recent months, the spike in food prices has caused participants to rely more on Family Room and Vermont Foodbank services to access vegetables. Additionally, the rise in Covid-19 infections amongst Vermonters has caused families to be isolated, limiting their access to food.

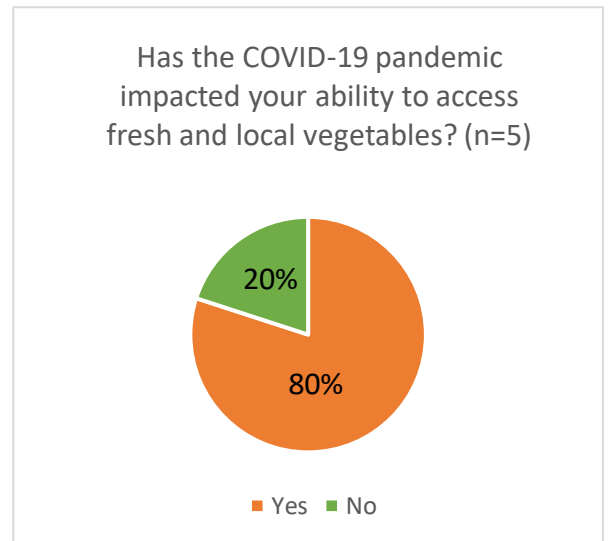


Figure 10

The participant that indicated that the pandemic has not impacted their ability to access fresh and local vegetables explained that the Family Room deliveries during the lockdowns in 2020 were the reason for her access. The home deliveries allowed her family to be able to eat vegetables during that time. One participant was unable to answer this question because childcare needs arose and caused the interview to end after question 10.

Family Room Staff Interviews

A small number of questions were asked to two Family Room staff members with the goal of obtaining feedback on the cooking classes and gain insight into the needs of the community from their perspective. As experts in the field and employees at the Family Room, there was a lot to learn from each of them.

Family Room Program Coordinator

The Family Room program coordinator emphasized that the number of people who need food assistance at Family Room has increased since the beginning of the pandemic, stressing the already increasing need they were observing prior to its onset. The major reasoning behind this is rising food and gas prices, as well as supply chain problems and shortages. The Family Room has a smaller amount of available food in the winter months due to seasonal availability, which affects how much food can be given out to families. She explained the importance of providing food for families at the Family Room, emphasizing the critical role that communal meals and food distribution facilitated by the Family Room play in community

Cilantro	Lemons
Okra	Oil
Garlic	Pineapple
Ginger	Strawberries
Dried beans	Plantains
Spinach	Collards
Herbs	Molokhia

Figure 11

building for families in Burlington. The availability of food and meals has been the core of programming since the opening of the Family Room.

“Breaking bread together. You know that’s how you really build community. I think that was a hard piece over the pandemic that we couldn’t eat together.” (Program Coordinator, 2022).

Based on her experience and expertise in working with families, an additional list of suggested vegetables is found in Figure 11. The additional list of vegetables is combined with community member interview feedback in the analysis sector of this paper. The Family Room is worried about processing and storage capabilities as Halal goat meat becomes available. The Family Room is not able to staff enough employees and volunteers to process Halal goat meat themselves if farmers were unable to. She explained that the amount of meat each family would need would be too much to be stored safely in each home. This is a barrier that needs to be researched and discussed further amongst community organizations.

Family Room Kitchen Staff Member

The Family Room has been preparing shared meals using an increasing number of fresh ingredients due to the Vermont Foodbank’s deliveries. There has been an increase in the amount of food being given to the Family Room from the Foodbank and the demand for more nutritious food from families is rising. Cooking classes are a good way to get families involved in the cooking process, but it would be more beneficial in the bigger kitchen. In the building that the Family Room shares with other non-profits, there is a large industrial shared kitchen. This would be an ideal space to operate cooking classes because families were often distracted in the smaller kitchen during the cooking classes conducted for this project. This was due to childcare obligations. Childcare was offered to families prior to the pandemic but has not been since the programming returned. If the cooking classes were eventually a larger program, access to childcare would be an important consideration.

Analysis

Cooking Classes

Based on the findings, cooking classes are a method of increasing knowledge, skills, and vegetable consumption. The first theme from the findings is generational knowledge. All participants learned cooking skills and knowledge from their elders and were eager to share stories and recipes with fellow classmates. Generational knowledge has been lost in many communities, but participants noted how sacred it is to their families. It is a way to preserve traditions and pass them on to the next generation. Community cooking classes are a way to share knowledge with one another and increase community resilience.

Another theme from the cooking classes was community building. At the core of the Family Room’s mission is building stronger communities, which is exactly what the cooking

classes were achieving. The participants were able to come together with the common goal of cooking a meal for their community. Participants shared stories, recipes, skills, and knowledge with one another. The classes introduced parents and children to new ways to cook and eat vegetables, which resulted in increased vegetable consumption. When children enjoyed the meal, parents were more willing to try it and were excited about their child’s increased vegetable consumption. Especially after the Covid-19 lockdowns, participants are seeking community and connection more than ever. The cooking class was a method of bringing the community together and increasing vegetable consumption, therefore should be continued by the Family Room.

Interviews

The community member interviews provided context and insight into the direct impact the Vermont Foodbank’s vegetable distribution is having, specifically on increasing food security. The participant observations assisted in the creation of the interview questions. Without understanding the systems and dynamics at the Family Room, the interview questions would not have been tailored to the current needs of families.

Based on the findings from community member and Family Room staff interviews, a complete list of culturally appropriate items is shown in Figure 12. Additionally, the list includes dried beans and oil which have been repeatedly requested by families. The Vermont Foodbank should consider using this compiled list to inform gleaning program pick up decisions. Additionally, the list could be used to assist farmers in understanding the wants and needs of the community members they are serving.

Cilantro	Lemons
Okra	Cooking oil
Garlic	Pineapple
Ginger	Strawberries
Dried beans	Plantains
Spinach	Collards
Herbs	Molokhia
Cantoloupe	Tomatoes
Kale	Eggplant
White Sweet Potatoes	

Figure 12

The Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted participants’ access to fresh and local vegetables. Rising food prices and supply chain problems have caused participants to rely more on charitable food from the Family Room and Vermont Foodbank. The Family Room home deliveries and the Vermont Foodbank’s gleaning program were effective in mitigating food insecurity for families in the short term. Based on the findings, providing home delivery services to families in Chittenden County would be beneficial to families. Families would have increased access to fresh and local food, especially when isolated or sick. Home delivery services provided during the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 were successful in increasing access to fresh and local food. Given that a large barrier to scaling home delivery is relying on unpaid volunteers, creating paid delivery positions would be an effective use of funding within hunger-relief organization. Home deliveries will increasingly be needed by the Burlington community throughout the next phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. Participants face stress and anxiety over food reliable and predictable food availability at grocery stores and at the Family Room. This is

shown in the findings from question 5. 83% of participants always or sometimes supplement food at the grocery store, as there is not enough availability through the charitable food outlets.

The Family Room was specifically interested in the amount of storage each participant had in their home for fresh food. Based on the findings, families are strategic with the amount of food collected or purchased in order to store it correctly. If increased storage such as fridges and freezers were available, participant families would be able to take more food, therefore increasing food security. Furthermore, home delivery services would be less frequent, creating an opportunity to put staff and resources elsewhere. The barrier to this is capacity as many participants indicated that their home is small for their family. Additionally, participants' food storage and processing practices vary and have been passed down through generations. Many participants learned processing practices from family members and cook based on cultural preferences and practices.

Access to Halal goat meat would be beneficial to participants. Based on the interviews with community members and Family Room staff, Halal goat meat is requested by most families that attend Family Room programming. The current methods of obtaining Halal goat meat, at Somali stores and paying friends to drive long distances, is not sustainable or equitable for families. The Vermont Foodbank should consider storage and processing capabilities when partnering with local goat farmers. Based on feedback from interviews, the Family Room and families do not have appropriate storage capabilities for large quantities of meat. The Vermont Foodbank should move forward with its plans to partner with local farmers to purchase Halal goat meat but consider requesting farmers to package it in smaller quantities.

The Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program is creating shorter and more localized value chains for both producers and consumers. Farmers in Chittenden County who donate excess vegetables to the gleaning program value agroecological practices and can use the findings to inform growing decisions. The food sovereignty framework can be used by organizations to address root issues communities face in Chittenden County. This starts with research that is listening to the community members and learning about their individual struggles and needs. This research has given community members a voice to share their cultural preferences and family needs, allowing for increased food choice and agency.

Recommendations

Vermont Foodbank

1. Focus efforts on increasing availability of desired vegetables and Halal goat meat
2. Expand home delivery services to more families
3. Reintroduce cooking demonstrations and taste tests at network partner sites, as a method of introducing gleaned vegetables to community members.
4. Fund a larger research project evaluating food choice amongst recipients across network partners and community organizations.

Family Room

1. Implement cooking classes into programming, as a driver to increase vegetable consumption and share knowledge amongst families.

Limitations

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has played a large role in the limitations of this research project. I personally got Covid at the end of December, making me unable to attend the Family Room programming for two weeks. After I recovered, the Family Room shut down its indoor programs for a few weeks in January due to the surge in cases in Vermont. After the Family Room reopened in mid-January, it took some time to settle into the new systems in place. These systems included wearing face masks, not eating together as a community, and limited capacity. The staff, volunteers, and families were all stressed and worried about the state of the pandemic and were collectively wishing for some normalcy.

Due to the rise in Covid cases early in 2022, my project had to pivot and focus on cooking classes instead of conducting a greater number of interviews. This was due to the uncertainty of family attendance, shutdowns, and protocols. This change ended up being a very positive and welcomed addition to the research project, as it provided a much richer experience for participants and families. Scheduling interviews was an ongoing barrier, due to the uncertainty with family attendance, sickness, childcare, and protocols. Interviews would be scheduled, and participants would not come, due to a variety of circumstances. This research project was conducted over the course of the pandemic and under emergency systems which is important to recognize. The Family Room and Vermont Foodbank serve vulnerable and food-insecure communities, which were affected, and still are affected, the most during this pandemic.

Furthermore, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the data set used in this research project is small and is not representative of the entire Chittenden County population who receives produce from the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program. Additionally, the research was conducted solely at the Family Room, which is one of many organizations in Chittenden County that distribute produce to community members from the Vermont Foodbank's gleaning program. Future research should include a data set including various organizations and groups of people, to get a better representation of Chittenden County. In total, there were six community member interviews, two Family Room staff member interviews, and three cooking classes. Despite these barriers, the data collected from the interviews, cooking classes, and participant observations will provide the Family Room and Vermont Foodbank with valuable feedback to inform future decisions and programming.

Childcare

An unanticipated limitation to this project was the need for childcare. Although it would have been a more cohesive and organized cooking class in the larger kitchen in the building, there was no way for parents to leave their children. Therefore, the cooking classes had to be

done in the smaller kitchen which was connected to the baby playroom. The limitations to doing the cooking classes in the smaller kitchen were space and distraction. Family members were not able to fully focus or engage with the class due to childcare needs including feeding, playing, or crying. Despite the barriers, the participants enjoyed and learned from the classes, and most importantly enjoyed a delicious healthy meal made with vegetables they have access to. With childcare present, the cooking classes would be more engaging for participants and should be considered for future classes.

Additionally, all the interviews were done with children present. This brought challenges for both the mother and me trying to fully ask and answer all the questions. There were many distractions and interruptions throughout the interviews, the largest one being feedings. Luckily each of their children were amazing, but there was an added barrier to communicating in the most efficient and effective way when interviewing. If the children were not present it meant that a Family Room staff member had to be present for the interview. This takes away a staff member from a program or another family which I did not want to do as a researcher. The lack of childcare is an ongoing problem that was expressed to me by many Family Room staff members. Prior to Covid, the Family Room staff offered childcare for programs such as computer and English classes. With a shortage of staff and energy needed for more pressing needs, there is no longer childcare offered. This creates barriers for the families both attending programs outside of family play and participating in the interviews.

Time

Another limitation during this research project was time. Families and Family Room staff are busy, especially during the pandemic. My research project is not the top priority for families or staff members, which creates barriers to scheduling and recruiting participants. This research project was done during a period where families and staff had increased stress and anxiety. Families were worried about the health of themselves and their children, while the Family Room staff were worried about having enough capacity to run their programming and serve the community. There was also increased demand for food assistance and the Family Room's services. Families were not guaranteed to be in attendance from week to week because of COVID-19 exposures, sickness, and fears. Due to the pandemic restrictions and my program timeline, changes needed to be made. These changes included fewer interview participants and implementing cooking classes.

Reflection

Over the course of my time working at the Foodbank and conducting this research, I have learned and grown as a researcher and young professional. Throughout my time working at the Vermont Foodbank, I was able to learn about and experience the charitable food system in Burlington. I was immediately integrated into the charitable food and farming community and was able to form meaningful relationships with co-workers, peers, community members, and organizations. The experience allowed me to dive deep into my research and seamlessly

transition from my job into the researcher position. I can interpret, understand, and relay the findings and recommendations to organizations using my unique perspective and expertise.

The cooking classes were my favorite part of the research project. Due to Covid-19 shutdowns and community needs, the cooking classes were a late addition to the project. They were added to integrate more of the Family Room community into the project and achieve a long-time goal of the Family Room staff. Staff members have been wanting to integrate programs where families are able to cook and share a meal together, as food is a large part of the Family Room culture. Although they were not initially planned, they turned out to be an integral aspect of the project.

Food was at the center of the relationships formed at the Family Room. I was able to build trust amongst the community by cooking and sharing a meal together. Food is central and essential to each person's life, so it is a connection that can always be formed. The cooking classes were essential in securing participants for the interview portion of the project. I planned and ran a cooking class during the family play program on Thursdays with varying numbers of participants. In the cooking class, the participants and I would talk about inherited skills, tell stories about our personal cooking journeys, and share new recipes and skills with one another. It was so valuable to have the time and space to talk and learn with families prior to the interviews and with no audio recording. When reflecting and comparing the cooking classes and interviews, participants were more willing to open up without audio recording. I did not go into the cooking classes with an agenda of questions I wanted to get answered, it was an unstructured time for all of us to learn and grow together. I believe this was the most valuable experience for all interview participants because it allowed us to build trust and a foundational relationship with one another prior to the interviews. By the time I interviewed the participants, we had a working relationship which allowed the conversation to be fluid, open, and comfortable. I think the method of having the cooking class prior to the interview was the best decision that was made for the research project, as it was an added experience for the participant.

The interview questions were developed in collaboration with the Family Room and Vermont Foodbank staff. I initially developed the interview questions after speaking with the organizations about their ideas and then had a meeting a follow-up meeting with two Family Room staff members. They informed me that my questions sounded too complicated and academic. I agreed and realized I needed to ask the questions in simpler terms and have definitions ready when interviewing. This was a learning experience for me because it made me take off my researcher hat and put myself in the position of the participant. After this experience, I continued to take a step back and make sure the plan made sense for each person involved. Another learning experience throughout this project was when developing a compensation plan for participants. The Family Room and Vermont Foodbank wanted to compensate using different methods, which caused a back and forth between myself and staff members. Vermont Foodbank staff wanted to provide gift cards for participants while the Family Room wanted to provide kitchen supplies to participants. The Family Room staff thought providing gift cards directly to participants in front of other families would not be a good idea. After discussing the topic with

Vermont Foodbank staff, it was decided that the items could not be purchased due to accounting restrictions. The problem was resolved by scheduling interviews outside of programming or providing participants with their gift cards in envelopes. I learned from this experience, specifically about non-profit dynamics and time constraints when asking to get a task done.

Additionally, as a new person entering an existing community and organization, I was aware of my positionality as a researcher throughout the project. Prior to forming my project, I was a part of the Family Room community when I would table at the garden programming, which allowed me to build trust and relationships with families and staff. When I created the project, I felt comfortable bringing my ideas to Family Room and Vermont Foodbank staff. They all offered guidance, opinions, and support throughout the process. I wouldn't have been able to do the project without my prior integration into these communities, and I am grateful that I have been able to be a part of them.

Conclusion

The Vermont Foodbank and Family Room are involved in important work within the charitable food sector in Chittenden County. This project aimed to gather and share feedback and information about the Vermont Foodbank's fresh food distribution programs such as the gleaning program. Using the information and feedback gathered in this research project, the Vermont Foodbank and Family Room can make changes to their programming that will benefit community members in Chittenden County. It is essential that community organizations in Vermont meet the needs of the community by providing culturally appropriate charitable food where it is needed, while also considering the food sovereignty and agroecology frameworks discussed throughout the paper. Funding for innovative programs such as the Vermont Foodbank gleaning and culturally appropriate CSAs should continue, as they are proven to increase food security for community members and organizations. The Family Room food distribution system and cooking classes are effective in providing families increased food security and increasing vegetable consumption. Using the recommendations listed in the paper, the Vermont Foodbank and Family Room can improve vegetables choice, distribution methods, and programs for families in Chittenden County.

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