

# The Basic Blessings Express

“Take as you need, Give as you can.” This original proverb was the inspiration used during the creation of The Basic Blessings Express. In theory, this Express can transform the way New Jerseyans deal with food insecurity. After being selected to represent NJ as a delegate at the National Healthy Living Summit this past February, I was exposed to numerous issues in our community; one of them being food insecurity. Google defines food insecurity as “the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food”. I had always associated food insecurity with those living in poverty or who were malnourished. While that may be true, food insecurity affects many more lives locally than I ever could have imagined. In NJ, about 500,000 (roughly 70%) of school-age children receive free or reduced lunches, signifying that the need for free food banks is necessary and in high demand.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to note that the stigma around food insecurity is equally as important to address. For a community to truly be motivated to fix a problem, they must recognize several: 1) This problem is real and is affecting people 2) Why and how this problem occurs 3) What can they do to help their fellow community members.

The Basic Blessings Express can tackle all three of these ideas on a local scale, which I believe is the most effective way to combat food insecurity. Programs on a national scale, although they do have a farther reach, cannot help specific families or target areas that require immediate support. Through this project, my goal is to locally battle this problem by distributing food to those in need while educating the former and the community about these issues. This Express will be made up of two different parts: the first will be a connection of food pantries in various counties across the state of New Jersey including Somerset, Salem, Mercer, and Atlantic

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<sup>1</sup> “Digest of Education Statistics, 2017.” National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education, [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_204.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_204.10.asp).

county. These pantries will be small (4 x 6) and portable so that it will be easy to move them from one place to another, depending on the need. Pantries that are placed throughout the state of NJ will allow for greater accessibility and a more widespread effect of these food banks. All of these food pantries will be managed by the local 4-H centers in the area. 4-H is a leadership program that takes place all across the US to encourage leadership and community service in youth. By partnering with these clubs, I will not need to worry about the inventory and day-to-day management of each pantry which will instead be handled by 4-H clubs. That way, I can focus on the second part of this Express which is virtual webinars through Zoom. Near the opening of each pantry, I will travel to public schools, libraries, and community centers in each of the individual counties to advertise these webinars that will inform the parents and students about the opening of this Express not only for them to utilize but also how they can help contribute to it. These virtual webinars will feature guest speakers, such as those working in jobs that deal with solving food insecurity and people who have personally been food insecure. At the culmination of the webinars, I will send out flyers throughout the county to encourage people to donate.

The Basic Blessings Express is a project that can better the lives of not only those in need but to bring the community together. There are areas in the northeast of the state where the level of food insecurity is higher than the state and national averages. There have been so many closures and partial reopenings that small local businesses are going out of business. Due to Covid-19, about 2 million people have become food insecure.<sup>2</sup> “Food banks do so much more than feed people — they help all members of a community receive the fuel they need to be their best” (Impacting Our Future).<sup>3</sup> This Express does not only combat the problem of food insecurity

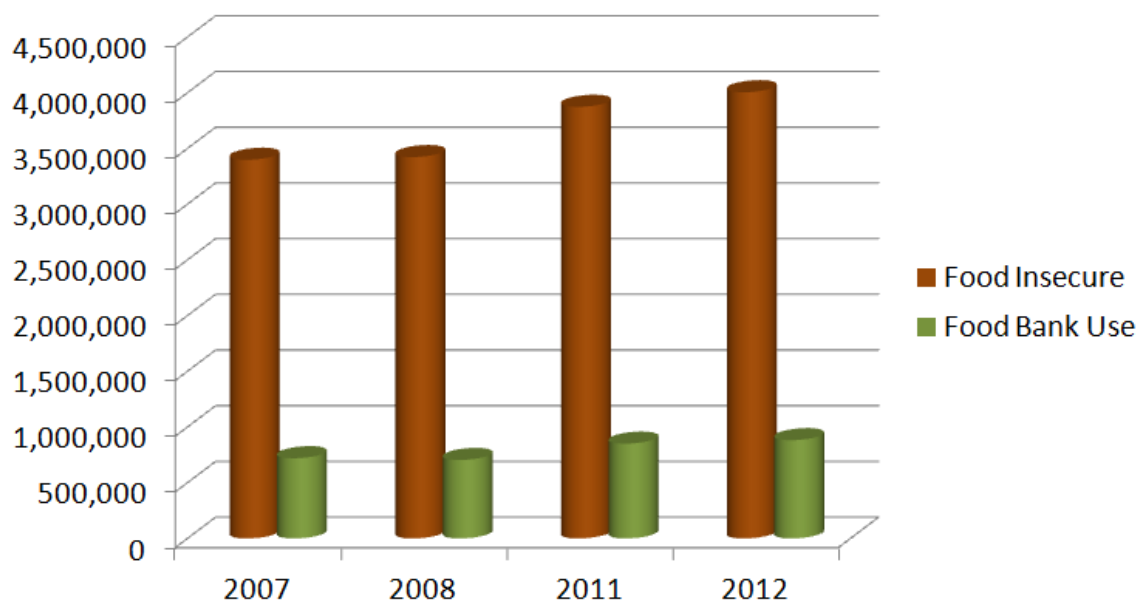
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<sup>2</sup> “Promoting Nutrition Education.” *Hunger and Health*, [hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/](http://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/).

<sup>3</sup> Author Mediaplanet, et al. “The Power of Food Banks in the Fight Against Hunger.” *Impacting Our Future*, 15 Aug. 2019,

but brings together communities that have been torn apart from this pandemic. “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then feed just one” (Mother Teresa).

### Number of people living in food-insecure households vs. number reported to be helped by food banks in March of respective year.



Data Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012, and Food Banks Canada, HungerCount, 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012.