



**FEEDING**<sup>®</sup>  
**AMERICA**

Eastern Wisconsin

# SNAP-Ed

Food Leaders Lab  
Graduate Project  
Report



# 2023

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# WELCOME

Welcome to the 2023 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) Food Leaders Lab Graduate Project Report. In the spring of 2022, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin launched Food Leaders Lab to connect local residents with advocacy, policy, and communication coaching to solve hunger in their community.

This is the first year graduates of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's Food Leaders Lab received funding to pursue grassroots systems change on personalized projects to promote food security in their community. This report seeks to highlight the work accomplished by these outstanding food security advocates across Milwaukee county, and seeks to lay the foundation for future work of Food Leaders Lab graduates.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin extends appreciation to the Milwaukee Food Council and all engaged partners for their hard work in creating this groundbreaking report.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Food Council
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services- SNAP-Ed Program
- USDA-FNS SNAP-Ed Program
- Glenda at GM Creative Photography

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# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Milwaukee has a history of systemic racism that directly impacts Black and Latinx residents' access to fresh and healthy food. Many majority-Black neighborhoods, specifically, have faced disenfranchisement, including redlining and abandoned investment projects. Due in part to this, Milwaukee has high rates of food insecurity and poverty, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Further, disproportionate numbers of Black and Latinx residents live below the poverty line. In Milwaukee, 34% of Black residents live in poverty, along with 27% of Latinx residents. Data has shown that Black and Latinx communities are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, whether it's through illness, job loss, evictions, or other situations made worse by racism and poverty.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin is the largest food bank in Wisconsin. While Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's emergency food network in Milwaukee is strong, there exists a gap in grassroots, community-based leadership around food insecurity and food systems change among our partners and throughout Milwaukee. Especially in neighborhoods of color so directly impacted by food insecurity and poverty, resident voices and leadership are vital to build power and take action.

In 2022, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin convened ten City of Milwaukee residents for a new leadership development program oriented toward supporting collective action to solve hunger in their community. Objectives of Food Leaders Lab included:

- Supporting local anti-hunger organizations' (such as: food pantry, meal programs and shelters) staff, volunteers and direct clients who seek to elevate their existing leadership skills and strengthen their advocacy for their community
- Increasing the number of grassroots representatives serving in leadership roles within anti-hunger organizations
- Building resident leadership and influence

Participants met monthly for shared learning; leadership development around building community power, public speaking, and organizing; and co-creation of project plans. The first cohort of Food Leaders Lab graduated in November 2022. Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin and the graduates of the first Milwaukee cohort of Food Leaders Lab are partnering to continue the work that started in 2022.



# PURPOSE

To build leadership and capacity related to local food system change, Food Leaders Lab convened a talented cohort and fostered collaboration and innovation in an inclusive environment. Food Leaders are passionate about their community and interested in both food access and developing policy solutions to address Milwaukee’s food system challenges. This next iteration of the Food Leaders Lab seeks to support Food Leaders Lab Graduates in advancing their projects. Food Leaders Lab Ambassadors are continuing to learn and engage in the real work of change making.

# ROLES

Feeding America of Eastern Wisconsin’s (FAEW) role is to facilitate the execution of projects developed and led by graduates of FAEW’s Food Leaders Lab program. We listen to, advocate with, and invest in emerging leaders to better understand what our neighborhoods need and how to best join together to advocate for solutions. We aim to build community among the cohort, while developing leadership and knowledge-sharing skills to elevate community priorities to stakeholders, decision makers, and elected officials.



**Milwaukee  
Food Leaders  
Graduation,  
2022**

*Special guests: Representative Sylvia Ortiz-Velez, Assembly District 8 (second row end, left)  
CEO of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Patti Habeck (second row end, right)  
Appleton Food Leaders Lab Cohort 2023, Graduate Sunday Goode (front row, second from left)*

# METHOD/PROCESS

## Food Leaders Lab Recruitment

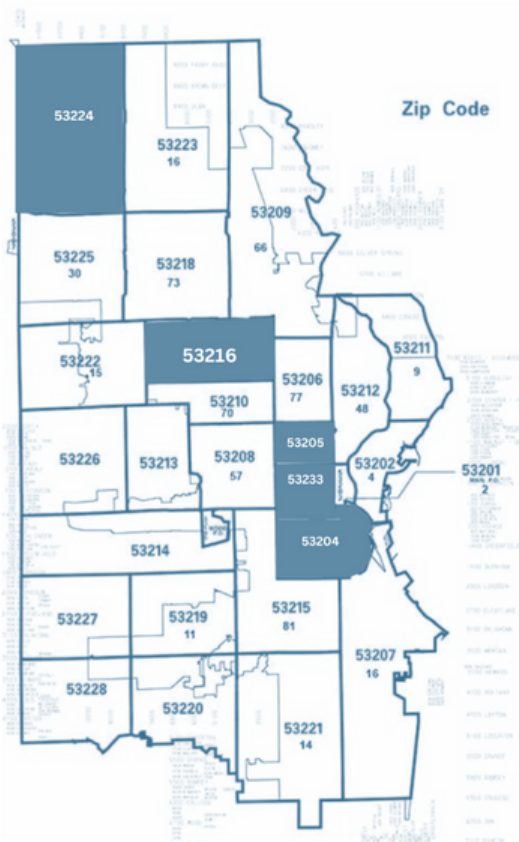
Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin is the largest food bank in the state, serving 35 counties with nearly 400 hunger relief partners. We have warehouses in Milwaukee and Appleton, Wisconsin. We chose Milwaukee to launch our first Food Leaders Lab cohort.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin has a network of more than 100 hunger relief partners in Milwaukee and a strong network of additional intersectional partners. We focused on casting a wide net across all partners, recruiting candidates through emails, network and partner calls, referrals, and web and social media promotion.

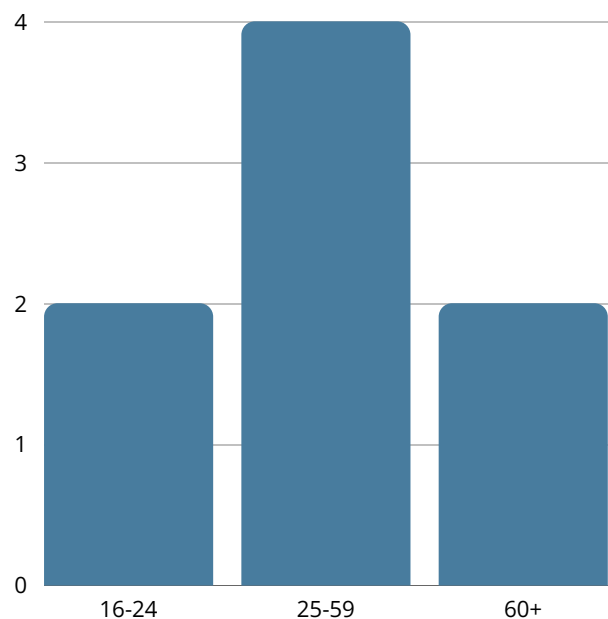
Additional recruitment sources included:

- Local elected officials
- Local Colleges and Universities
- Health system partners
- Intersectional non-profit partners

Our 2022 cohort of Food Leaders Lab graduated 8 of the 10 original participants. Our cohort was represented across the northwest side of Milwaukee, near westside, and southside.



## 2022 Graduate Age Demographics



# PROGRAM CONSTRUCTION

Food Leaders Lab “Ambassadors” met in-person for two hours, one time each month from May through November of 2022. An additional meeting in November was held for a graduation ceremony. The second Food Leaders Lab cohort began in Appleton in October 2022.

Sessions are designed to guide Ambassadors through the process of building a campaign to address hunger, nutrition, or food security piece-by-piece.

Ambassadors are compensated \$1,000 for providing their expertise, time, and energy to the program. Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin invited local issue experts to contribute additional expertise and guidance to the Ambassadors as guest speakers and mentors.

## Sessions topics included:

- **Introduction to Food Systems and identification of food security issues**
- **Communications**
- **Advocacy and policy change**
- **Building an ask and creating sustainable solutions**
- **Organizing and network building**
- **Mentorships and one-on-one support**

Each Ambassador chooses a topic to work on throughout their time in Food Leaders Lab. From that topic, Ambassadors create a campaign and an "ask."

Each Ambassador presented their campaign to the full cohort in November of 2022. Ambassadors supported each other by offering up their network and contacts to each others' campaigns. Graduates left Food Leaders Lab with a detailed campaign, along with a strong network of supporters.



# INDEPENDENCE & AUTONOMY

Food Leaders Lab is intentionally designed to encourage Ambassadors to build a campaign on their chosen issue, rather than guide them to a specific project or dictate what they work on.

A strong element of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's solve hunger strategy is to be unapologetically collaborative and to build equity in the communities we serve. We recognize that the best way to advance local solutions to hunger is to work with community leaders to help us identify the biggest problems and support the work that is already being done to provide hunger relief or promote community health. Food Leaders Lab is an example of this work.

# GUIDED & INTENTIONAL SUPPORT

Once Food Leaders Lab Ambassadors identified specific food system or food security issues in their community, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin designed and facilitated the monthly workshops to help construct a campaign to advance a policy or systematic solution to their issue.

In identifying an issue to focus on, the only requirement was that Food Leaders Lab Ambassadors choose an issue related to food systems, food insecurity or nutrition. Once Ambassadors identified their issue to focus on, the monthly workshops provided a dedicated space for Ambassadors to construct a campaign to advance a solution to their issue.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin staff worked with the Ambassadors to construct a campaign that advanced policy solutions, influenced food systems, or created structural, environmental changes to increase healthy food access.



GM Creative

*Milwaukee 2023 Food Leaders Lab Session*

# EMPHASIS ON EQUITY & INCLUSION

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin created a Google group and private Facebook group for Ambassadors to communicate, share resources, successes, and ask questions. Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin facilitated discussions and offered opportunities for Food Leaders Lab Ambassadors to share their expertise to additional audiences. Events included the White House Conference on Hunger, Feeding America National Office conferences, panel discussions, and other Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin programs.

## AMBASSADOR-LED REVIEW

Each of the seven sessions include an evaluation of the content and presenters. After graduation, we conduct individual exit interviews to identify areas of strength, deficits to address, and open-ended discussion about next steps and future opportunities. Upon graduation, 2022 Ambassadors co-created a new Food Leaders Lab program application, served as program mentors for a Food Leaders Lab boot camp, and helped select the 2023 Milwaukee Food Leaders Lab cohort.



*Denise Thomas, President and Owner of The Effective Communication Coach, LLC,  
Presenting to Food Leaders Lab, June 2022*

# SNAP-Ed PROGRAM

Select Food Leaders Lab graduates' projects fell within the scope of SNAP-Ed eligible activities. With the support of University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension, FoodWise, and Milwaukee Food Council, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin created a plan to work with Food Leaders Lab Graduates and partners to support their work on each of the eligible projects

The Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin SNAP-Ed program coordinated with six Food Leaders Lab graduates and one youth organization not involved with Food Leaders Lab, but doing work aligned with SNAP-Ed and Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin priorities. The program worked with each of the seven partners to establish a project goal, communication structure, budget, and project needs assessment to determine what support, collateral, and materials would be needed.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin worked with partners to establish program goals, and budget. Additionally, program partners were compensated for their time. Over the course of several months, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin staff worked collaboratively to connect SNAP-Ed program partners to key organizations and individuals, both internal and external who could provide guidance and support.

Staff created structured and regular check-ins to work one-on-one with program partners, providing technical assistance and addressing problems. However, it was critical that Food Leaders Lab partners had final say and autonomy over their projects.

Food Leaders Lab is a program created to support the existing hunger-relief and nutrition equity work being done in Wisconsin. Through Food Leaders Lab, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin acts as a convenor, coach, and connector. We continue this work to become more responsive to community needs and advance more effective solutions to hunger.





# INDIVIDUAL REPORTS

This SNAP-Ed program is a continuation of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin Food Leaders Lab Graduates work and passions. Participants of the program are provided with funding from SNAP-Ed to further their grassroots projects and promote food security throughout their communities.

Y.E.S. - Youth Empowered in the Struggle joined the cohort of FLL Graduates as a SNAP-Ed recipient to engage community members and raise awareness of and support for Healthy School Meals in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Here are the program participants and their projects included in this report:

- Maurice “Moe” Wince - Sherman Park Grocery: A Brick & Mortar Blueprint to Address Healthy Food Access in a Food Desert
- Stephanie Mercado - Increasing Fresh Food Access in Corner Stores
- Dee-Dee Davis - Food Pantry Sustainability, Supporting Small Nonprofits
- Julia Means - Trauma Informed Care, Engaging with Clients at Food Pantries
- Leatanya Dunn - Equitable Food Access for People with Disabilities
- Anita Garrett - Healthy School Meals for All, Voices from the Community
- Y.E.S. (Youth Empowered in the Struggle) - Healthy School Meals for All, Encourage Student Voices



*Special guests: CEO of Feeding America National, Claire Babineaux-Fontenot (back row end, right) CEO of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Patti Habeck (back row end, second from right)*

Milwaukee Food Leaders Graduation, 2022

# MAURICE "MOE" WINCE

*Sherman Park Grocery: A Brick & Mortar Blueprint to Address Healthy Food Access in a Food Desert*



## Acknowledgements

Moe Wince and his wife Yashica would like to give a special thanks to the individuals and organizations that partnered with him to establish Sherman Park Grocery Store. From financing, to mentorship, to technical support, the creation of Sherman Park Grocery is a successful example of public and private collaboration to advance positive change in the Sherman Park Neighborhood. (listed alphabetically)

- Bader Philanthropies
- City of Milwaukee Chief of Police - Chief Jeffrey B. Norman
- Danielle Nabak, UW-Madison
- Embassy Center MKE
- Fork Farms Hydroponic Farms
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- Milwaukee Alderman Khalif Rainey & Staff
- Milwaukee Business Council members
- Milwaukee Department of City Development
- Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation (Wisconsin - MEDC)
- National Christian Foundation Wisconsin
- Springbank WI
- United Healthcare
- U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin
- Wisconsin State Senator Lena Taylor
- With Movement

## Healthy Food Access in Milwaukee

With 13 food deserts in Milwaukee, many people struggle to find access to affordable, healthy food. The Milwaukee Fresh Food Access Report estimated that one out of three people in Milwaukee are more than one mile from a grocery store.

With over 40,000 residents and nearly four square miles of land, Sherman Park is one of Milwaukee's largest neighborhoods. In August 2016, the shooting of an African American man by a police officer triggered civil unrest in Sherman Park. While there were successful revitalization efforts, residents continued to live in a food desert. Neighborhood residents, entrepreneurs, Moe Wince, and his wife Yashica set out to address this problem by establishing the first brick & mortar grocery store in the Sherman Park neighborhood in years.

The vision of the Sherman Park Grocery Store is to create a thriving and sustaining grocery store. By offering the freshest groceries and teaching families how to make healthy delicious meals, Sherman Park Grocery is able to showcase the skills of local culinary artist entrepreneurs while supporting a neighborhood in need.

# BLUEPRINT TO IMPROVE HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

While Moe and Yashica are extraordinary visionaries and their success is difficult to replicate, **this report serves as a short blueprint of their journey toward increasing food access in their community through healthy food retail.** Sherman Park Grocery is a true example of public and private collaboration, perseverance, and innovation.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin is the largest food bank in Wisconsin. Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin provides emergency food to nearly 400 agency partners in 35 counties in eastern Wisconsin. While Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's emergency food network is strong, we seek to inform our work with grassroots, community-based leadership focused on food-insecurity and food systems change. Especially in neighborhoods of color so directly impacted by food-insecurity and poverty, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin seeks to partner with residents and persons with lived expertise in food insecurity to amplify their voices and leadership to build power and create change.

In 2022, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin convened City of Milwaukee residents for a new leadership development program oriented toward supporting collective action to solve hunger in our community. This leadership development program is called Food Leaders Lab. Moe Wince is a graduate of the inaugural Food Leaders Lab cohort. During the first Food Leaders Lab program, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin formed a partnership with the Milwaukee Food Council's Nutritious Food Access Collective Action Initiative (CAI).

With the support of the State of Wisconsin's Department of Health Services' SNAP-Ed program, the Milwaukee Nutritious Food Access CAI seeks to support and leverage the collective capacity of individuals and organizations working to increase access to and consumption of nutritious food. The Mission of the Milwaukee Nutritious Food Access CAI is to support Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) in Milwaukee neighborhoods through nutrition education and access, capacity building related to advocacy and organizing, and networking opportunities to improve the local food system and achieve health equity. The Milwaukee Nutritious Food Access CAI envisions a Milwaukee where all people in all neighborhoods easily access nutritious, affordable food. Health equity and racial equity are key values of this collective action initiative.

The SNAP-Ed partnership supports Food Leaders Lab graduates in advancing their local food system solution-driven projects. Food Leaders Lab graduates execute the projects they developed during their time in Food Leaders Lab.



Moe completed Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin Food Leaders Lab's first cohort in 2022 seeking to create a blueprint for establishing a brick & mortar grocery store in a food desert which could be applied to the 12 other food deserts in Milwaukee or countless other food deserts in the country. This document serves as that blueprint, including key partnerships, best practices, and pitfalls of Moe's multi-year journey from concept to his store's one-year anniversary.

## BACKGROUND

Moe Wince, a proud native of Milwaukee, is an influential investor, entrepreneur, and cornerstone community member of the Sherman Park neighborhood. Growing up with 10 siblings, he often went without food or had to personally contribute to the wellbeing of his family. This experience led him to seek out a career in which he could assist those who struggle to maintain a healthy and safe lifestyle. Moe has spent his career finding opportunities to support housing the un-housed, and has built community through investment, organizing, and collaboration.

Moe has more than 20 years business experience in the community, and Sherman Park Grocery is Moe's venture to create a company that is not only profitable, but also puts social conscience at the heart of its mission. Sherman Park Grocery seeks to provide fresh food options to thousands of City of Milwaukee residents and jobs for neighborhood residents.

*Moe says, "People should be able to shop in their own neighborhoods on a regular basis, and communities of color should have access to freshly prepared fruits and vegetables at reasonable prices."*

By building relationships with social service agencies, healthcare organizations, and workforce centers, Sherman Park Grocery will have the ability to help connect the community and transform the lives of neighborhood residents.



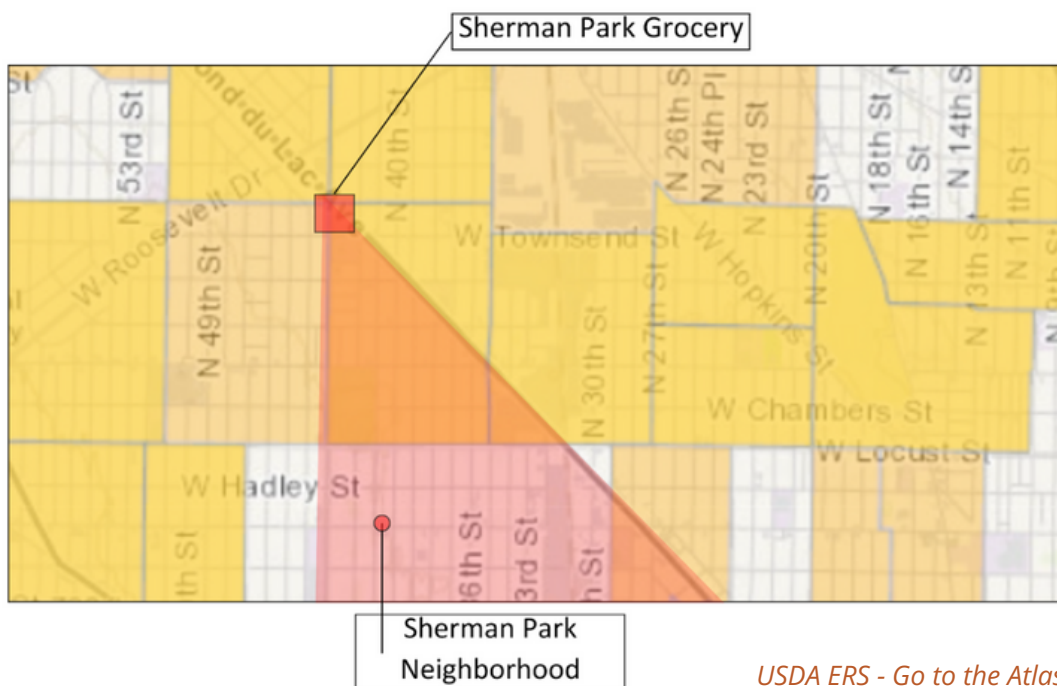
GM Creative

# NEIGHBORHOOD ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEED

The 2016 civil unrest in Milwaukee’s Sherman Park neighborhood prompted Moe and other community leaders to conduct a neighborhood needs assessment and determine a plan of action to help rebuild community. Through door-to-door outreach and focus groups, they identified a strong desire for a neighborhood grocery store.

After the riots and protests in 2020 following the death of George Floyd, the Sherman Park neighborhood and surrounding areas experienced a call for change and community. In a neighborhood that is affected by food insecurity, there was, and continues to be, a need for youth employment, crime prevention, and entrepreneurship to encourage community identity and gathering. Throughout that year thousands of people across Sherman Park gathered for town halls, listening sessions, and planning to see how their city could move forward. In this push for change and healing, Moe and Yashica brainstormed initial ideas before the concept of Sherman Park Grocery emerged and suddenly there was a new goal. The question was, where do they start?

Sherman Park Neighborhood is located in one of Milwaukee’s 13 food deserts, and is also a federally defined area of low vehicle access.



# BLUEPRINT TO HEALTHY FOOD RETAIL: FIVE INITIAL STEPS

## 1. Research USDA-identified food deserts and your chosen neighborhood.

Begin by identifying the specific food deserts that have been identified by the USDA. These areas typically lack access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food options.

Analyze the chosen neighborhood by gathering data on the neighborhood's demographics. This includes the number of single mothers and the prevalence of health issues like lead exposure, cholesterol levels, hypertension, and obesity among children.

Conduct a community needs assessment. Engage with the residents of the neighborhood to understand their specific needs and preferences when it comes to grocery shopping. This can be done through surveys, community meetings, or focus groups.

## 2. Establish a strong business plan rooted in the community.

Create a business plan that outlines the goals, target market, and financial projections for your grocery store. Include details on the store's location, size, layout, and product offerings.

- Resident-informed needs and community involvement threaded throughout the business plan.
- Moe decided early on that his grocery store would be different. He decided to:
  - Partner with a hydroponic farm program to establish growing stations inside of the store.
  - Build a test kitchen upstairs for cooking demos.
  - Create programming for students to learn to cook with local churches.
  - Create a healthy soul-cooking prepared food bar.
  - Employ neighborhood residents.
  - Partner with local businesses and organizations to host regular community events.



### 3. Prioritize strong financial foundations.

Seek funding options to support the establishment of the grocery store. This may include applying for grants, loans, or partnerships with local organizations or government agencies that support community development. Moe emphasized the importance of intentionally seeking partnership and advice from multiple sources for tasks such as grant writing.

Align business plan with priorities of prominent local funders. Moe's process for identifying these priorities wasn't magic. Moe visited the websites of funders and read their mission and funding priorities. He looked up previously funded projects, and then wrote requests for funding that aligned his business plan with the values of the funder he was petitioning. Along the way he would show up at their events and consult with his mentors to ensure his approach with specific funders was sound and well-informed.

Moe leveraged both public and private capital to secure financing. Moe recommended having an additional 33% liquidity as a cushion to account for variations in material or labor cost and unexpected or unplanned expenses. The loans and public awards that Moe received either required significant matches or down payments. The 33% liquidity cushion was critical for these expenses and to qualify for matching funds.

Additionally, Moe identified available public funding that aligned with his project goals. The City of Milwaukee issued a request for proposal for a Fresh Food Access grant which provided an opportunity to secure an additional \$50,000 in funding to move his project forward. The resounding commitment from elected officials was crucial throughout this process.



*Moe and Antia at the one-year anniversary celebration of Sherman Park Grocery Store*

## 4. Seek out strategic partnerships.

*"This isn't just a grocery store."*

Relationship capital is the most valuable asset Moe built. He focused on building out community to engage in different aspects of the work.

By identifying potential suppliers, intentional effort was put toward researching and establishing relationships with local farmers, wholesalers, and distributors who can provide fresh and affordable produce, dairy, meat, and other grocery items.

He worked with a professional to design an efficient and customer-friendly store layout that maximizes shelf space and facilitates easy navigation for shoppers.

There was also a focus on partnering with local health organizations to provide education and resources to address health concerns like lead exposure, cholesterol levels, hypertension, and obesity. This included planning for workshops, cooking classes, or offering healthier food options.

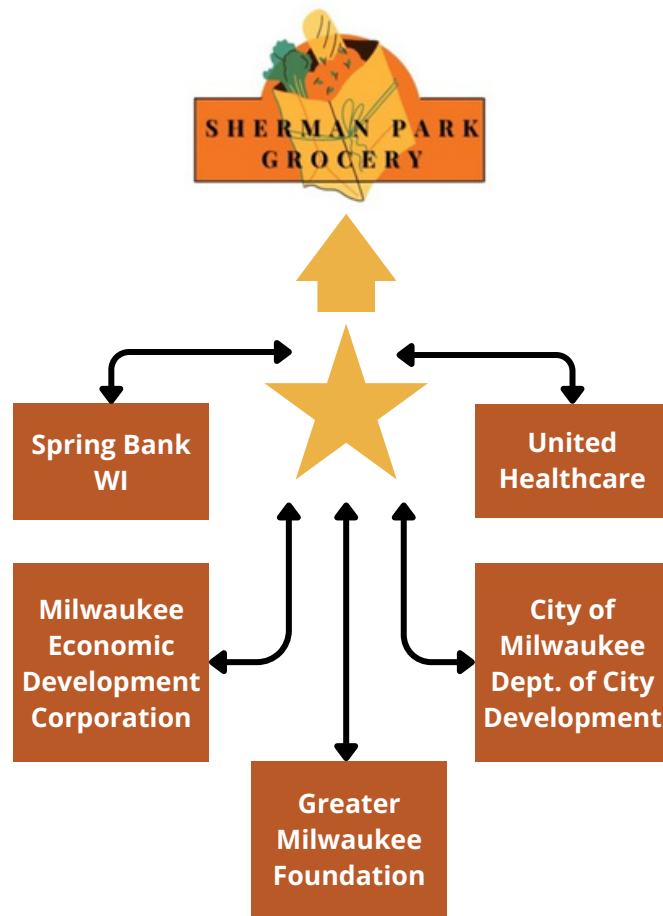
### To do this they:

- Identified areas they would like to find partners, such as:
  - Nutrition: healthy food access, and specifically healthy food access for kids
  - Public Safety
  - Local artists and food artists
  - Experienced grocery store managers
- Created a list of ideal partnerships to help throughout the journey:
  - City Alders, other local elected officials, and state and local government agencies.
  - Business and community leaders: they can help provide market analysis which is helpful for understanding your customer base.
  - Financial institutions and grant writers.
  - Advisory committee or business advisor in that particular field.



*Moe and Yashica showcasing the 2023 Mayor's Design Award presented to Sherman Park Grocery Store*

The partnerships manifested with these community partners that showed their support for the creation of Sherman Park Grocery Store.



## 5. Show up Everywhere and Keep Telling Your Story and Making Your Ask

A pivotal part of establishing a grocery store in a food desert is understanding that being told “no” will happen, and having a plan to respond. Moe created a plan, practiced, and revisited his presentation with bullet points and a strong “ask”. Aligning the presentation with financial institutions’ priorities and hitting the bullet points created a stronger presentation.

Be prepared, and effectively communicate with confidence – which comes from knowing the right things.

*“You need to believe in your goal and your commitment.”*

For people who are getting told “no”, revisit what is being said and how it’s said. Even if the 5 c’s of communication (character, capacity, capital, collateral, and conditions) are present, sometimes it’s in between the lines – it’s in the delivery of the presentation. At the end of the day, proposals never get the first impression back.



# LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES:

When it comes to managing the timeline and budget, there are three main takeaways from the process that Moe and Yashica went through and wanted to pass on:

- There's only one of you. Hire a project manager – someone who has experience doing this.
- Review all contracts and pass them to an attorney.
- Acknowledge that not everything will be on schedule.

Sometimes contractors or subcontractors didn't show up. It prolonged and prevented the next contractor from doing their work.

*"The electrician was in the way of the plumber. The one pipe needed to be moved because it was too close to the electric." - Moe Wince*

Unexpected discoveries can lead to delays and cost overruns. For example, the City signed off on the electrical – but a local planning committee rep came out and found out that there's not enough supply for the demand and had to install a \$40,000 box.

Be mindful of site location details and utility costs. Identifying unknown variables like the acquisition cost, leasehold agreement or the relationship and agreement with a potential landlord can save significant time and money as the project progresses.

Another way to save money and support a project is to identify potential credits. Any energy or solar changes that can be made could be subsidized by the city or state. For instance, Moe identified a LED rebate he could use to help his budget.



*Wisconsin Governor Evers (center, right) with Moe and Yashica (right) and special guests (left) at Sherman Park Grocery Store*



When Sherman Park Grocery Store was getting set up with SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), there were many bumps along the way. However, SNAP is the strongest safety net program in the county and is a key aspect of making sure Sherman Park Grocery is serving a community in need. Moe provided the following about his experiences in setting up Sherman Park Grocery to accept SNAP payments:

- **Do your research and expect delays.**
  - “It was difficult – we didn’t apply in enough time to get it and – it came sometime between 1 and 45 days afterwards. We didn’t apply soon enough – there was a backlog.”
- **Expect the unexpected.**
  - Representatives certifying the SNAP application for Sherman Park Grocery Store went to the wrong business, and were turned away as the other business didn't want SNAP. This caused further delay in getting approval of the SNAP application.
- **Ask for help. Reach out to local elected officials (See partnerships above).**
  - The USDA returned to certify the SNAP application, but it took another two to three weeks. Moe reached out to local elected officials Senator Lena Taylor and Alderman Khalif Rainey. The elected officials were helpful in walking Moe through the entire process.

When it came to managing other paperwork and procedures, Moe recommends working with local municipalities to understand requirements and local rules. This includes obtaining a Seller's permit, ServSafe Certification, Tax ID, and setting up an EIN (employer identification number) for payroll.

Moe faced additional administrative hurdles to reclassify the building through the city planning committee to convert the space from residential to commercial use. All of the inspections needed to be signed off for occupancy. They needed to submit reports and approvals to the planning committee, pay for occupancy licenses, and account for workers compensation and business insurance.

On top of all of this, Moe worked to organize the parking, lighting, means of egress, signage, and fire code adherence. All of these added to the administrative and regulatory necessities which can prove arduous for a first-time entrepreneur.

Have a solid plan which includes a business plan, support from the community, and support and input from local politicians. Be able to identify funding sources: prime and subprime, and be completely transparent with yourself.

*“You should be able to say it’s do-able or be able to accept that it’s not.” - Moe Wince*

### Reflecting on the First Year of Business:

Community engagement is vital. Moe emphasizes the need to intentionally draft strategies to engage and involve the community in the grocery store's development and ongoing operations. This may include hosting events, partnering with local organizations, or providing job opportunities for residents. Promotions, branding, and marketing go hand-in-hand. For Moe, this involved making an effort in creating a presence with social media, billboards, by word-of-mouth, etc.

There is also the consideration for maintaining community relationships and seeing those efforts returned with earned media. By keeping a list of reporters who asked for interviews, Moe reached out to those same media outlets before for the celebration of the 1-year anniversary of the store. Moe always made a point of saving media contacts and reaching back out when there was another story to tell about the grocery store.

**"Then once they're part of your rolodex, I can text, call, and email them - continue effective communication." - Moe Wince**

Develop a marketing plan to raise awareness about the new grocery store. Utilize various channels such as social media, local newspapers, and community bulletin boards to reach the target audience. Work with government officials. Moe worked with local and federal elected officials to connect to resources and assist in finding ways to navigate the administrative hurdles his store faced.

Plan for a Grand Opening and ongoing operations to generate excitement and attract customers. Ensure that the store is well-stocked, staffed with friendly and knowledgeable employees, and continuously monitored for quality and customer satisfaction.

Finally, the impact of SNAP spending cannot be overlooked for its importance in food insecure neighborhoods. The rollback of the Emergency Allotments to SNAP benefits that were in place during the COVID-19 pandemic caused an immediate impact to small business. People spend SNAP in their community and when the extra SNAP benefits ended, a significant source of the Sherman Park Grocery Store income vanished. March 31st, 2023 was the cutoff for emergency allotments to SNAP, *"April 1st was the day we felt it. It was immediate. It hit the register, the bottom line . . . When you talk about policy and sharing the story - how do we get to our policy makers that the need has not gone away."*

# FINAL THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS:

After a full year in business, Moe shared that the biggest lesson he has learned so far is to not undervalue the recruitment and retention of customers. *“Without them, our doors won’t be open. If we don’t have the right product that we’re looking for – they won’t be back.”*

Especially for retail based operations, don’t be afraid to pivot. *“Disruption is not destruction, it just means you’ve thrust your business to a different level. This product doesn’t work? Give it up.”*

Moe is in the midst of progressing toward goals for the second year of business. At the top of the list is to increase the store’s sustainability - to maintain and increase momentum and to increase core customer numbers. Moe’s other main goal is expansion. This includes a focus on diversifying how to increase community food security and stable housing. As of October 2023, Moe has already successfully opened a laundromat across the street from Sherman Park Grocery as well - filling another community need and contributing to the revitalization of the Sherman Park Neighborhood.

The Sherman Park Grocery Store is a unique but replicable success story. It is an example of partnership, preparation, perseverance, and innovation. Moe and Yashica continue to demonstrate an intense dedication to community and their mission to bring affordable, healthy food to Milwaukee’s Sherman Park neighborhood. This blueprint provides key steps to open a brick and mortar grocery store in a food desert in a city similar to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Moe’s participation in Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin’s Food Leaders Lab program serves as a model of identifying and advancing local solutions to hunger, while making a positive impact on the community.



# STEPHANIE MERCADO

Increasing Fresh Food Access in Corner Stores



## Project Goal:

Stephanie has spent most of her professional career working on environmental health issues affecting the Latinx population in Milwaukee. She has witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects of food deserts, predatory marketing, and lack of healthy food options. Specifically, Stephanie is focused on how corner stores can effectively incorporate and promote healthier food options to address the nutritional needs of their communities. This goal is being approached through

interviews conducted with corner store owners in the 53204 zip code on the southside of Milwaukee. The intention was to identify barriers and opportunities to provide fresh food within corner stores.

## Why this project was chosen:

Through her participation in the 2022 Food Leaders Lab cohort, Stephanie identified an area of need she sees every day in her own neighborhood of Milwaukee - a prevalence of corner stores and a lack of healthy food options. Having grown to know her neighbors and people who run the stores near her home, Stephanie chose to ask these shop owners directly how to improve the healthy food options in their stores.

**“CORNER STORE: Typically defined as a small-scale store that sells a limited selection of food and other products. These businesses are also referred to as convenience stores or bodegas.”**

*Definition from Siedenburg, Kai, Brianna A. Sandoval, Heather Wooten, et al., “Healthy Corner Stores Q&A,” Healthy Corner Stores Network, February 2010. Available at [thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/healthy-corner-stores-q-a.original.pdf](https://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/healthy-corner-stores-q-a.original.pdf).*



*Representative Sylvia Ortiz-Velez, Assembly District 8 & Milwaukee 2022 Food Leaders Lab Graduate, Stephanie Mercado*



# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

Starting by identifying the three store owners that she would be interviewing, Stephanie's interviews tracked common themes across the stores, trends for decisions made, and she provided suggestions based on her findings.

All the shop owners preferred to stay anonymous, and interviews were conducted during business hours so conversations were frequently interrupted by customers. The stores were located in the neighborhood of 53204, immigrant-owned, and were found to be a place people went for groceries - especially children. To this point, Stephanie did make a note that the shop owners have seen a growing younger demographic as customers.

The interviews were structured as a conversation with 6 main, open-ended questions surrounding product selection choice (both from the store owner and the customer perspective), the importance of offering healthy foods in their stores, and what would have an impact on the types of foods that are sold (customers, equipment, sales, etc.).

**1. How important is it to you to provide healthy food to your customers?**

a. **Follow-up question:** What are your highest selling items?

**2. How do you determine the items you want/wanted to sell?**

**3. How have your customers evolved over the years?**

**4. Do your customers request new items?**

**5. What are the challenges you see in bringing the items you requested to your store?**

**6. What brand partnerships do you have? What does that partnership require?**

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

Stephanie tracked common themes from the store owners and found that the main motivator for product availability was the customer base and their expectations for what a corner store has available. There is a culture of customers asking corner store owners to stock certain items and the owners responding. Customers have expectations for products they are used to finding at corner stores, which makes it difficult to incentivize owners to introduce more foods, especially foods that require additional licenses and materials to prepare. More commonly, store owners equated “healthy” with “cooking essentials/basics,” which they considered eggs, bread, and milk as well as canned goods. The owners also indicated this type of product was among their highest selling, next to beer sales.

*“What do you mean healthy? Like fruits? I’ll put out a few bananas and they’ll sell but any more, they won’t. It’s just as good as me throwing them directly in the trash.”*



Throughout the conversations, corner store culture trends continued to arise. With those trends came similar sales mentalities and promotions. One owner stated the corner store owners on the southside all know each other. They all know when a new one is opening and when one is closing. As well, all owners had chips and candy displayed closest to their entrance door and checkout counters. However, there was an additional consensus stating that they would be receptive to programs that would incentivize people to buy fresh food from their stores before it goes bad.

*“We accept SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) so, we try to carry fruits and vegetables, rice, and snacks for kids but things that don’t come in cans, usually go bad.”*

# RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

While these interviews provided a start to building knowledge on how corner stores operate, there is still room to build upon the information gathered, and continue to identify recommendations for how to encourage an increase in access to fresh foods. Stephanie compiled recommendations for how to move forward based on her interviews and information gathered:

## **Continuing Research:**

- Conduct additional interviews with non-traditional food establishments within 53204 to obtain a more representative sample of perspectives on corner stores offering healthier food options
- Develop a structured questionnaire or survey to gather quantitative data alongside qualitative insights from the interviews

## **Provide Educational Resources to Owners:**

Prioritize equipping corner store owners with resources and information on available tools to overcome educational barriers, as participants have identified government bureaucracy and resource limitations as obstacles to offering fresh foods like fruits and vegetables and hot, prepared foods.

- Collaborate with local educational institutions and government agencies to create “pilot” workshops or mini-training sessions specifically tailored to corner store owners' needs.
- Create an online resource hub or toolkit that store owners can access, offering guidance on navigating government regulations and providing tips for sourcing and handling fresh foods.

## **Leverage Customer Preferences:**

Recognizing that the owners emphasized how customer preferences wield significant influence, empower store owners to align their product offerings with customer demand to potentially promote healthier food options.

- Conduct market research to gain a deeper understanding of the specific preferences and buying behaviors of customers within the target community.
- Implement a pilot program in collaboration with corner store owners to test the impact of aligning product offerings with customer demand, closely monitoring sales and customer feedback.

## **Utilize Storefront Windows for Promotion:**

Encourage corner store owners, who indicated having decision-making authority over storefront displays, to promote healthier food choices and marketing through signage and advertisements.

- Work with healthy brands and/or local artists on designing and displaying signage promoting healthier food options that are culturally relevant and accessible to the communities they would be in.
- Establish partnerships with local health organizations, government programs and agencies, and community groups to provide funding or resources for creating eye-catching and informative storefront displays promoting healthier choices.

# DEE-DEE DAVIS

Supporting Small Food Pantry Nonprofit Sustainability



## Project Goal:

Across the city of Milwaukee there are dozens of food pantry programs focusing on serving their communities, but Dee-Dee found that many of the organizations that run pantry programs have limited access to key resources that are pivotal in maintaining a sustainable program. Specifically, Dee-Dee identified a need for building financial capacity (grant applications, fundraising, advertising, etc.) and knowledge sharing between programs to share resources and information. The first

step in the process is to find out what knowledge and processes already exist, followed by reaching out to community organizations to find where their priorities are, and then creating a knowledge sharing system that can provide key information to smaller food pantry nonprofits seeking to improve their institutional sustainability. The first step in the process is to find out what knowledge and processes already exist, followed by reaching out to community organizations to find where their priorities are, and then creating a knowledge sharing system that can provide key information to smaller food pantry nonprofits seeking to improve their institutional capacity sustainability.

## Why this project was chosen:

Through her work with Greater New Birth Church's outreach team including the food pantry and warming center, and her work with the pop-up food pantry and meal site Dream Team, Dee-Dee identified a need for institutional and financial support of smaller nonprofits that are making an impact in their neighborhoods. Through the first cohort of Food Leaders Lab in 2022, Dee-Dee narrowed down her work to focus on researching how to help small nonprofit food pantries (<\$100K annually) become more sustainable. Her hope is to be able to contribute insight and ideas toward coming up with a collective solution for these organizations.

In many avenues of her research, Dee-Dee found it was difficult to connect organizational recommendations to what is available to a small Milwaukee food pantry operation. Many programs in the city are run by churches, elders, African American and communities of color with their own cultural expectations of which foods they will eat (or are even familiar with) and their own ideas on how a pantry is supposed to operate in the first place. Her work intends to bridge the gap between resources that already exist and organizations that face a variety of barriers in accessing them.



# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

## Research toolkits, manuals, news articles, and other resources that seek to support small nonprofits:

- Found a lack of news articles/ publications on smaller organizations. The primary focus of these articles surrounded (3) main categories:
  - Highlighting an outstanding individual,
  - Focusing on an outstanding (but large) food pantry program,
  - Found many best practice publications were not relatable or accessible to smaller Milwaukee programs.
    - Page count, font size, digital access requirements, financial components to changes, etc.
- Explore research for promoting a “Client Choice” food pantry model.
  - Offers greater autonomy and dignity to the pantry clients.
  - Decreases food waste from pre-bagged groceries.

*“We had boxes and boxes of quinoa and we couldn’t get people to touch it. Same with things like leeks. People don’t know what that is! It just adds to food waste.”*

- Implementing these processes may require additional resources from a food pantry program: storage space, volunteers, funding, time, etc.

## Research methods for communicating resources across organizations - taking into account age, digital literacy, communication preferences, time availability, etc.:

- Starting to research feasibility of a program similar to Food Leaders Lab, but for small food pantries seeking networking space and consistent meeting space to cover topics of interest.
- Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin hosts “Partner Primer” virtual trainings that open to their network pantries to join to learn about a variety of topics.
- Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition Meeting has monthly/ bi-monthly meetings of market managers to discuss topics of interest.

# RESULTS/FINDINGS

Dee-Dee's ultimate focus for building a network of resources and institutional resource knowledge prioritizes acknowledging two main points:

1. The nonprofit sector is always changing and knowledge sharing cannot be dependent on any one person or organization if it intends to be a sustainable resource.
2. Many resources that currently exist do not take into account a multicultural or diverse perspective when considering how organizations run.

If resources and information are to be shared and used in Milwaukee, they need to take into account considerations such as, who is using this information? Who are the people visiting this program? Is this information accessible? This includes thinking about literacy levels, age (from type font size to digital literacy), financial flexibility, personnel availability, and more.



Feature on Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin in Milwaukee Magazine, 2023 Faces of Milwaukee

# RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Dee-Dee is collaborating with Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin staff to highlight pantries in the network that are either small in size or that are larger but have clearly established organizational structure and resources that may be of use to other programs. She plans to continue scheduling site visits to different food pantries in Milwaukee and collaborating with program coordinators to narrow down what areas of support food pantries are actively seeking. Finally, Dee-Dee intends to focus on how to create a resource for food pantry excellence that acknowledges the barriers small operations may face, but also provides a landscape layout of resources available to them in different mediums that are accessible to all.



GM Creative

*Food Leaders Lab meeting with Stacy Dean, Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, Sept. 2022*



# JULIA MEANS

*Trauma Informed Care, Engaging with Clients at Food Pantries*



## **Project Goal:**

Julia sought to work on how to inform food pantry staff and volunteers on what Trauma Informed Care is and how to use the awareness of what trauma is to more conscientiously engage with people who are visiting a food pantry.

*"We know that the world in which we live is more violent, deeply disturbing, and very harsh, especially for people of color who experience food insecurity, and those who live in poverty. We know that this affects every aspect of their lives."*

## **Why this project was chosen:**

A traumatized person can feel a range of emotions both immediately after the event and in the long term. They may feel overwhelmed, helpless, shocked, or have difficulty processing their experiences. Trauma can also cause physical symptoms. Trauma can have long-term effects on the person's well-being.

When Julia completed the Food Leaders Lab program in 2022, she wanted to use her experience and her professional position to raise awareness and offer information on *Trauma Informed Care* to communities working in food security - specifically food pantries. Julia has over 40 years of nursing experience, loves teaching healthy food lessons, and works with people who need help understanding how to live with their chronic disease successfully. Through her work in healthcare in the community, there is an aspect of health and wellbeing that cannot be untethered from healthy and consistent food access.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach to serving community members is not accomplished through any single technique or checklist. It requires constant attention, caring awareness, sensitivity, and possibly a cultural change at an organizational level.



# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

## Create a tangible tool for food pantry staff and volunteers to use for trauma informed care:

- Julia created a short walk-through presentation to introduce the concept of trauma informed care to make the information more accessible.
- A 1-pager explaining trauma informed care, types of trauma, and emergency contact information.

## Identify at least (3) neighborhood food pantries that will welcome Julia to provide her presentation to their staff and volunteers:

- Solomon Community Temple United Methodist Church, 3295 N Doctor M.L.K. Jr Dr, Milwaukee, WI 53212, Food Pantry on Thursdays 1-3 PM
- Saint Martin de Porres Catholic Church, 128 W Burleigh St, Milwaukee, WI 53212 - Food Pantry on Thursdays from 11-2 PM
- Trinity Presbyterian (Sherman Park Ministries Food Pantry), 3302 N Sherman Blvd, Milwaukee, WI 53216, Food Pantry on Tuesday from 8:30 - 10 AM (not the first of the month)
- Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center, 3132 N Doctor M.L.K. Jr Dr, Milwaukee, WI 53212 - Food Pantry on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 2-5 PM

## Identify needs and opportunities to receive feedback, share out resources, and improve knowledge sharing:

- Continue communications with pantries with whom the presentation is shared for any follow up questions and provide additional training for new volunteers upon request.
- Coordinate the distribution of the 1-pager with the food pantries through Julia's network and the pantry network through Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin.

# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Many people we serve and some of us are dealing with trauma, which can wear on a person mentally and can make daily life more difficult. **Some behaviors that we may see as a result of trauma are:**

- alcohol or drug misuse
- feeling on edge
- anger and irritability
- chronic pain
- eating problems
- difficulty concentrating
- reckless behavior
- relationship problems

At times we may ask: "Why do they behave that way?". Instead, we should ask: "What are they going through?" or "What have they been through that makes them behave this way?"

**Adopting a trauma-informed approach requires constant attention, caring awareness, and sensitivity.**

- We know our regular clients. The ones who have no problem verbalizing their grief from loss of a child, husband, or parent.

**What can we do to support people who may be experiencing trauma?**

- Practice active listening
- Be patient and kind
- Reach out to other staff members to help communicate or deescalate a situation if you are not comfortable
- Ask to have them contact their Primary Physician, they can start there for a referral
- Education - [traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma](http://traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma)

**Emergency support contacts:**

- For medical or emergency situations - call 911
- For mental health crisis support - call 988

**There are three main types of traumas:**

**Acute trauma:** is usually a singular traumatic event that is brief in duration and narrowly focused. Such as a death, a car accident or assault.

**Chronic trauma:** this trauma is repeated and prolonged, such as domestic violence, senior abuse, or living in a violent neighborhood.

**Complex trauma:** is trauma exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events at the same time, such as being told you have cancer, you are getting evicted, your child is missing, and you were robbed, and your ID was taken.

# RESULTS/FINDINGS

Julia intends to encourage information sharing of what Trauma Informed Care is and how to use this knowledge within a food pantry setting. People who work and volunteer at food pantries are not there to be psychiatrists, but hopefully this information will provide understanding of the trauma that many people are enduring. The goal is to cause people and organizations to plan, research even more, be an active listener, and be more compassionate while keeping the pantry going.

*“The same day of our training a single dad raising his children broke down in tears at our intake table. The staff came and got me but they were handling the situation well. The person that I would have called for resources, came walking in the door. It was very helpful for all involved.”*



In a setting where people are experiencing different levels of trauma, people may see behaviors such as alcohol or drug misuse, feeling on edge, anger and irritability, chronic pain, eating problems, difficulty concentrating, reckless behavior and relationship problems. Seeing these behaviors, this project seeks to encourage people to move past asking, why do they behave that way? Instead, the resources and presentation encourage people to explore questions like, what are they going through? Or, what have they been through that makes them behave this way?

*“We know our regular clients. The ones who have no problem verbalizing their grief from loss of a child, husband, or parent. They just need to have you listen. Remember to be patient and kind.”*

Milwaukee 2022 Food Leaders Lab  
Graduate, Julia Means

# LEATANYA DUNN

*Equitable Food Access for People with Disabilities*



## **Project Goal:**

Leatanya seeks to improve nutrition and food access equity for people with disabilities by establishing an emergency food delivery option for people with limited access to food. This solution is meant to be coordinated within a 90-day time frame between the person in need of support and food pantries. This may be by establishing a routine or procedure between the person seeking food and a family member, friend, case manager, etc. The important step in this process is to ensure that the

person seeking food will have support to establish a routine to encourage on-going food access without assistance in the future.

Individuals under the age of 60 who are food insecure and homebound have inadequate access to emergency food in the City of Milwaukee. While FoodShare/SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) participants can establish an authorized user to shop on their behalf, as well as make online-SNAP purchases through approved retailers, their ability to solve short-term food insecurity and bridge the gap between SNAP issuances is unresolved. The impact of this is that while people are dealing with food insecurity they are not getting food, and in the meantime they may be coming up against barriers that prevent setting up these supportive systems.



*Milwaukee 2022 Food Leaders Lab Session*



## WHY THIS PROJECT WAS CHOSEN

In 2022 Leatanya already had an extensive record of sharing out community resources, many of which included a focus on helping Milwaukee residents locate more food options and make healthier choices. To help others maintain healthy lifestyles by providing them with resources and food education, Leatanya intended to continue on her prior work and knowledge to expand access to resources to the community.

In her work with family resource centers, she provided basic needs and food pantry information to the community. While doing that work, she noticed that she was receiving a lot of requests from folks that have disabilities. There are transportation barriers, physical or mental barriers, and people needed someone who could help get the food. This problem was recurring for not only people with disabilities, but also elderly people, young people, those experiencing homelessness, and those dealing with severe mental health restrictions. People need food, they have no way to get it, and many are out of options.

By working to address this problem, Leatanya seeks to create connections between residents and emergency food delivery options, working to build nutrition equity for food insecure people with disabilities.



# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

## Identify current restrictions for homebound people who are food insecure:

- There are a limited number of food pantries that deliver.
- Delivery or program restrictions may vary depending on site but may include restrictions on participation due to: age, disability status, income, zip code of the home vs the delivery service area.

## Identify possible barriers to establishing emergency food delivery options for residents in Milwaukee:

- The actual transportation of the food - it is not scalable to have one individual do this.
- Finding and selecting the people to pilot this project and receive the resource.
- Focus on working with people with more acute physical or mental disabilities.

## Prepare for coordinating a pilot group of participants:

- Leatayna would be a point-person to coordinate between the individuals and food pantries to set up delivery.
- Seek to work with a population that isn't already receiving adequate services.
  - People home-bound with physical or mental disabilities - that are not seniors.
- Start drafting a process plan to work with individuals to get a proxy.
  - Identify a family member, friend, or case-management services to help them obtain food from a pantry.

## Identify next action steps:

- Identify pilot food pantry partners and subsidized housing complexes.
  - Research a possible partnership with Julia Means to provide food pantry partners with resources on providing trauma informed care, and Dee-Dee Davis to provide ongoing technical and logistics support.
- Within an identified housing complex, partner with the building manager to identify a dynamic list of individuals that need food delivery.
- Work with a partner food pantry to establish a food delivery plan for individuals when needed.
- Within an identified housing complex, increase awareness of grocery stores that offer delivery and online payment with FoodShare (acknowledging that FoodShare does not cover delivery costs).

# CURRENT RESULTS & NEXT STEPS

Leatanya currently has maintained her connection with Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, after her graduation from Food Leaders Lab, to be able to identify food pantries across their network to connect individuals to. This partnership will provide additional information such as food pantry locations, hours, zip codes and identification restrictions, portion restrictions, etc.

The next step will be identifying individuals to engage with and provide connective services to, in order to help people establish reliable systems for obtaining food from food pantries. Leatanya intends to conduct 1:1's with individuals and complete a more comprehensive needs assessment. This will provide more context on not only what services beside food a person may be in need of, but will also provide additional context for if there are additional services a food pantry may provide that can be layered in, in addition to food resources.



## Feeding America National Organization's Elevating Voices Power Summit Conference in Washington D.C., 2023

- Leatanya Dunn, *Food Leaders Lab Graduate, Milwaukee 2022*
- Dee-Dee Davis, *Food Leaders Lab Graduate Milwaukee 2022*
- Barbie Izquierdo, *Director of Advocacy, Feeding America National Organization*
- Jennifer Estrada, *Executive Director of Crusaders of Justicia, Food Leaders Lab Graduate, Appleton 2023*
- Tia Kendl, *Food Leaders Lab Graduate, Appleton 2023*
- Anita Garrett, *Food Leaders Lab Graduate, Milwaukee 2022*

# ANITA GARRETT

Healthy School Meals for All



## Project Goal:

Anita seeks to increase school lunch and breakfast participation at Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) through improved menu satisfaction. Current efforts to improve school meals within MPS include input from students, educators, the Board of Directors, and food service employees, but lack the input and advocacy from parents, grandparents, and guardians of MPS students. Anita worked to identify, measure, and elevate voices from this population to influence school meal satisfaction at MPS.

## Why this project was chosen:

Anita was a member of the 2022 class of Food Leaders Lab in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Anita has a personal connection to the value of school meals. She experienced poverty and hunger throughout her childhood and the prospect of a warm, appetizing school meal provided motivation to attend school and the energy to focus.

Anita lost her son to violence and now raises her five grandchildren who attend MPS. Anita continues to work to try and make ends meet, and school meals are a critical source of food for her grandchildren. However, Anita consistently saw her grandchildren come home hungry because they were unhappy with the food options they were presented with at school. *"The school called me and told me my grandson is acting out. I asked him why and he said he's hungry. I talk to other parents and their kids are doing the same."*

After graduating from Food Leaders Lab in 2022, Anita went on to be one of the representatives from the state of Wisconsin at the first White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health hosted in over 50 years. She has continued to be a strong local and national advocate for healthy food access, and with the availability of SNAP-Ed support through Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin (FAEW), she directed her focus toward healthy school meal access in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

The main problem Anita seeks to address is raising awareness of not only the quality of the school meals in MPS, but the end result of poor food quality - that at the end of the day, kids aren't eating. Anita says, *"No matter what, no child should go hungry."*



# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

## Identify possible legislative or budgetary pathway and barriers to more appetizing school meals:

- Anita met with her School Board Director, and other Board Directors to discuss current options for menu improvement, barriers to improvement, and a timeline for progress.

## Identify current landscape of individuals and organizations working toward a solution:

- Anita identified organizing opportunities through the current Food Justice Task Force members, and Parent Coordinators within MPS.

## Identify gap in current coalition:

- Anita identified a key audience - parents, grandparents, and guardians - who are invested in their children's nutrition and school district decisions.

## Identify needs and opportunity:

- Anita developed a survey and attended tabling events, food pantry distributions, and community events to collect paper surveys. She identified select parents who will participate in a roundtable and be provided with an opportunity to provide valuable, direct feedback to the MPS Board of Directors.

## Illustrate Parent, Grandparent, or Guardian support for improved school menu offerings and increased meal participation:

- Anita created a 10-question survey that asked questions about meal satisfaction, meal access, and what students do when they choose to not eat school meals, or don't have access to meals like school breakfast or afterschool meals.
- Anita attended community events and food pantry distributions across Milwaukee, and used a table and a clipboard to speak to residents and collect survey responses.

# RESULTS/FINDINGS

Anita collected 130 survey responses in September of 2023. In Milwaukee Public Schools, 100% of school breakfasts, lunches, and afterschool meals are served free to all students. In the 2022-2023 school year, 40,562 students participated in school lunch, on average, each day.

## Anita's survey findings:

- 31% of families said their children rarely or never ate school lunch.
- 47% of families said their children often or always ate school lunch.
- When children choose not to eat each school lunch, 70% of families said it was because students didn't like what was on the menu or how that food tasted.
- 37% of the students rarely or never eat school breakfast.
- 82% responded that their children are hungry when they get home from school.
- 86% responded that having healthy and tasty school meals was very important.
- Only 13% were unhappy with the way the food was presented.
- **92% responded that if the schools provided "home cooked" meals, their children would eat school meals more often.**
- Of the kids that skip school lunch, 35% go hungry until they get home.
- Of the kids that skip school lunch, 64% either eat fast food, food from a corner store, or go hungry until they get home.

*"When you're hungry you don't think about your education. You think about where you're getting that next meal. That's why I have a passion. **No child should worry about hunger.**"*



## ANITA'S REACTION TO THE RESULTS

"We need to change the school menu. Need to go back to home-cooked school meals. You didn't have the complaints that we do now. I looked forward to eating the school lunches. They were tasteful. I was satisfied. **That may have been my only meal, but I had a meal.** These kids today don't have that to look forward to. As a parent or grandparent that's a major concern for us."

With the current state of increasing food costs, and the ending of emergency allotment payments to the Wisconsin FoodShare program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP), families have less and less to offer their children at home. "Public benefits like foodshare got big cuts. But now these kids are eating even more at home even though we have less FoodShare. Because they aren't eating as much at school, it means they come home and eat so much more. But we don't have as much FoodShare to get food. **My 10 year old eats an adult sized portion. We had some strawberries and ate the whole thing. He's 10 years old!**"

## CURRENT ADVOCACY AND NEXT STEPS

Anita worked with FAEW and MPS District #4 Director Aisha Carr to survey families at community events, digitally share the survey to parents across the school district, and visit food pantries to offer people a chance to share their experiences through the survey. These results will be shared internally, publicly, and directly with the Milwaukee Public School Board and the district-sponsored MPS Food Justice Task Force.

Anita also acknowledges that parents may not have awareness of school board meetings, how to find them, how to attend, how to speak and make their voice heard. Anita will work with interested parents in breaking down barriers to connecting with their elected School Board Directors.

# Y.E.S. (YOUTH EMPOWERED IN THE STRUGGLE)

*Healthy School Meals for All, Encourage Student Voices*



## **Project Goal:**

Youth Empowered in the Struggle (Y.E.S.) is the youth arm of Voces de la Frontera, encompassing the high school and college levels. The mission of Y.E.S. is to build power in schools through organizing students around important issues. With this project they seek to increase student participation in campaigns to improve student satisfaction with school meals, and consequently, participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). YES produced an informational video, by students and for students, to be shown online - website, social media; and in-person before group meetings.

## **Why this project was chosen:**

Healthy, appetizing, and culturally appropriate school meals are important because they take into consideration every student's needs. It is also an opportunity to introduce students to food they wouldn't otherwise know or ever see. Y.E.S. seeks to use their video as part of their school meals campaign to encourage Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) to meet the student demands outlined below:

1. Provide fresh school lunch that is cooked at the school.
2. Provide more lunch options simultaneously.
3. Put a system in place that identifies and accommodates students' personal, religious, and medical dietary needs.
4. Provide larger, more filling meals.
5. Hire more lunch staff and increase their wages.
6. Establish regular meetings with MPS board members and Y.E.S. members to ensure these demands are met and implemented with student voices at the table.
  - a. This has been accomplished by Y.E.S. creating a task force to focus on the issue and continue providing space for students to voice their opinions, concerns, and demands.





# TACTICS/METHODOLOGY

In starting this campaign with the 2023-24 school year, Y.E.S. expected to have to work hard to collaborate with unionized food service workers to understand their needs because a lot of the other issues are as a result of MPS being down nearly 200 food service workers with many kitchens operating understaffed. The hope is to bring them to the table because their voice is very important in this issue.

In preparation, Y.E.S. was able to present their demands and hold meetings with MPS nutrition administrators but they were very dismissive to students and wanted to explain why they couldn't achieve these things rather than working to a solution of the issues. So, Y.E.S. lobbied the school board to adopt a resolution to establish a Food Justice task force composed of Y.E.S. leaders, MPS board directors Henry Leonard and Ericka Siemsen, as well as the head of Human Resources, nutrition services, and Chief Financial Officer that meets monthly to implement short and long term goals to improve school lunch.

Ultimately, this video is one piece in reinforcing the notion that it is important for students to feel empowered and invigorated to make change in their community. It is only through their voices where students are able to call attention to local issues and organize against them. A strong student voice is important because it represents and advocates for the interests and needs of the student body.



*Video stills featuring student Jeffrey Pain*



*Video stills featuring student Mandeeq Abdulahi*



*Video stills featuring student Zaiire*





*Video stills featuring student William Pickard*



*Video stills featuring student Dorisella*



Thank you for  
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**SNAP-Ed**

Food Leaders Lab  
Graduate Project  
Report



**2023**