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Volunteerism: The Perpetual Cycle of Unsustainable Growth

Katelyn McAlister

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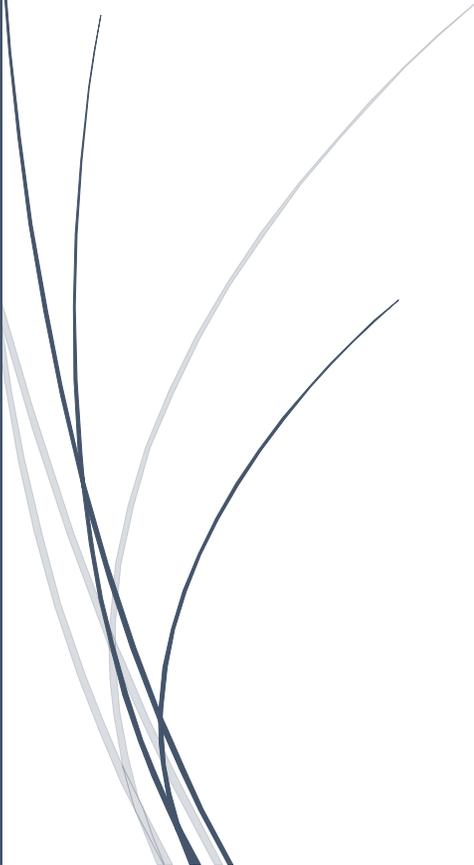
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# **Volunteerism: The Perpetual Circle of Unsustainable “Growth”**



McAlister, Katelyn S. (UMKC-Student)

## **Introduction**

Raytown, Missouri, a town east of Kansas City, houses many different types of families that endure daily struggles surrounding food scarcity. This issue stems from a lack of resources and education on long-term sustainability within the community. This lack in Raytown poses an immediate threat to the residents, demanding a solvency plan in the near future. While the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) is the only food and utility relief pantry within a 25 mile radius, the staff workers are limited on the tools and connections they have, and with the growing demand, there isn't enough supply to continue the pantry. Specifically, when looking inward towards districts seeking help, there appears to be a trend within the income levels and the amount of assistance that is requested. From bill paying to food handling, many families within Raytown fear that their next meal might originate from a nearby shelter or that they could potentially become evicted from their home. Most families in this area are relying on government aid, stipends, grants, and other forms of payment to survive and provide groceries for their family. Though local efforts have already been made to alleviate this issue, Raytown suffers from a lack of education and information surrounding food scarcity. Most of the residents do not have a college degree and have an increased level of residents in their households and community for the current available accommodations.

## **Executive Summary**

Volunteers are the main source of income for the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program. As a person who works alongside families who seek out this aid, I have been able to witness the constant fear and concern that lies within the Raytown constituents. This fear originates from the lack of available resources and the growing demand within district borders that limits supply. While the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program focuses on the families, the distribution of foods should be closely monitored by implementing a specific staff member to delegate this role; this will provide REAP with the most benefits for the community. My paper will analyze the distinct need in Raytown, why this epidemic exists, and how the organization is designed to combat this. Specifically, I will analyze the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program and its overall design, the Raytown district and their availability of sustainable food options, and how the pantry can mitigate these current issues. It is particularly important to understand the issues around food availability and why it exists while also identifying this community as a low-income division of Kansas City. I will do this in three sections.

First, I will discuss the current epidemic surrounding food scarcity in low-income neighborhoods. Low-income areas are becoming expected to focus on food pantries as a part of their relief programs, causing a higher demand in the need for assistance. This section of my paper will be titled, "Food Scarcity: A Unique Issue".

Secondly, I will discuss the founding of the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program and the intended purpose of the organization. The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program is a government-funded aid project to help the Raytown families in a distinct time of need. As it was

formed, the pantry was originally formed to be a utility relief program to help residents with bill paying and maintaining a current status on their rent payments. As the need continued to grow, it fostered into a new need for immediate food supply. While this agency is able to help most of the people that complete the application process, the growing needs creates more limitations on the amounts that they can distribute. This section will be titled, "REAP: A Mitigated Solution"

Third, I will discuss the analysis of the organization. I will research their organizational principles and values while also focusing on the processes they use to approve of new clients and seek out other forms of assistance. REAP is an extremely popular pantry that helps build the Raytown community; the staff is amazing and volunteers truly want to make a difference with the customers they supply. This organization was founded on profound principles and has created a movement for change within the district that has called for national attention. This section will be titled, "The Final Analysis: Food Relief and Personal Development Resources".

## Food Scarcity: A Unique Issue

Raytown, Missouri is a community that suffers from overpopulation and a lack of resources. In recent years, Raytown has developed into a much larger area than expected, however, there has been no offsetting reconstruction to supplement this. The Mayor of Raytown, Michael McDonough, states, in an interview done by Glen Rice, an author for the Daily Raytown, “The average household within this district houses 8 people with only an average salary of \$37,462” (Rice 1). He goes on to state, “The average income per household doesn’t align with the realistic need to feed a family of 8, leaving a gap between what is truly needed and what is earned” (Rice 1). However, with the average household size larger than Raytown has ever seen, it creates an unrealistic demand for the producers to keep up with three generations under a household. These families are left to rely on others and their donations to the district for help.

In low-income neighborhoods, there is a lack of available resources for community members. In most low income districts, there are a significant amount of families that rely on food pantries and emergency supply banks for their basic commodities. James Mabli, a staff writer for *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, in his thesis, “Characterizing Food Access in America: Considering the Role of Emergency Food Pantries in Areas without Supermarkets”, argues, “There is a major comprehensive depiction of the environment in which low-income households and other vulnerable populations acquire and purchase food by considering access to emergency food pantries in areas lacking supermarkets” (Mabli 13). Low-income areas are becoming expected to focus on food pantries as a part of their relief programs, causing a higher demand in the need for assistance. He goes on to state, “These findings

highlight the important role that pantries play in ensuring access to food for low-income American families and also underscore the importance of taking these programs into account when examining the extent of food access limitations (Mabli 14). The higher demand in the need for relief isn't equivalent to the supply; this causes the consumer surplus and a distinct lack of demand that residents are able to access. Residents are ultimately the ones who end up suffering from the lack of readily available resources, and unfortunately, the low-income families are those who see the biggest impacts.

The lack of resources leads to a concern surrounding food distribution in the Raytown area. Residents in this low-income area do not have enough available resources at their disposal; they are forced to rely on smaller relief programs to house their needs. The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program is Raytown's only food pantry that supplies the residents. According to Holly Greenwood, the previous Executive Director for REAP, in her article, "How We Help", illustrates, "Our emergency food pantry offers a well-balanced and nutritious selection of canned and dry goods, bread, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. We are also able to supply diapers, formula, toilet paper, soap, and various hygiene products" (Greenwood 1). She goes on to state, "Although our selection varies throughout the year, REAP strives to provide each family enough food to last two to three weeks" (Greenwood 1). Though REAP is designed to be a supplementary program for families in need, as the demand grows, not all families will continue to be able to receive from the pantry, which will be forced to away residents who are in need of basic necessities. Since its first year in 1991, a trend has become inherently present with the different types of residents that request assistance. Originally, when they first opened, they were a utility relief program that helped offset overdue and past bills to help residents get to present status, however, once the need grew for food supplements, the

program adapted shortly after its debut. Greenwood, states, “The majority of those who receive benefits are coming from single-parent households and also are actively receiving other forms of financial aid from government subsidies” (Greenwood 1). While this program is an available option for most families to benefit from, the pantry grows smaller as the demand increases, which is what causes an immediate threat towards those who seek assistance from the only nearby pantry. As resources become scarcer, it becomes harder to award those in need with food or supplies because there aren’t enough contributions made.

## **REAP: A Mitigated Solution**

While food scarcity isn't always a daily news headliner, there are many communities that suffer from a lack of resources in their neighborhoods. Families who once were able to receive assistance, now are left with little help. Hunger can be seen on a local, state, and federal level, leaving a plethora of families in need of relief. In specific areas, there are no local food pantries or non-profit organizations to help aid its residents; even some of the wealthiest communities suffer from a lack of resources. The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program provides residents with the basic commodities that are needed in a standard household; things much like deodorant, soap, feminine products, and other non-perishable food items. From bill paying to food handling, many families within Raytown fear that their next meal might originate from a nearby shelter or that they could potentially become evicted from their home. The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program is a government-funded aid project to help residents who live paycheck-to-paycheck maintain bills and food supply. While this agency is able to help most of the people that complete the application process, the growing needs creates more limitations on the amounts that they can distribute. Since its first year in 1991, a trend has become inherently present with the different types of residents that request assistance. The program still currently utilizes all aspects of being a food pantry; however, most of the assistance that they are able to provide is created from grants and scholarships that directly are applied towards customer's acquired costs.

Raytown, a diverse community, is considered a low-income neighborhood, leaving most residents to use REAP but also government assistance to supplement their need. Mayor Michael McDonough states on this concern, "The people that are solely benefitting from this

program can be identified as primarily African-American single-payer households that entail youth from multiple families and 3 generations” (Rice 1). He goes on to report to Rice, “While this household would typically qualify for other forms of financial aid, these families would also qualify for utility payments and food supplements from REAP. It appears that the majority of the people that receive benefits from this program are also already receiving other state and federal government aid, with the hope of reducing the need on local pantries” (Rice 1). This creates a large demand with the growing numbers in the community. This demand becomes difficult to keep up with when the income tapers off during certain times of the year; it is an inconsistent income of goods that still requires a consistent distribution. While REAP has an application system, the residents who seek assistance are typically already receiving other aid from program like WIC or Food Stamps, according to McDonough. Greenwood’s argument flows with her general census of the local food pantry in Raytown. She argues that Raytown’s pantry needs more help than ever because the demand is starting to outweigh the supply; as a result, pantries are low because of a lack of help and resources that are available to them. It is imperative that the consumers not only have access to better opportunities, but that the supply is met at the breakeven points so that there is enough efforts to help those in need.

Ultimately, there are not enough contributors to the pantry, leaving the directors to deny candidates for assistance. It appears that the majority of the people that receive benefits from this program are also already receiving other state and federal government aid, with the hope of reducing the need on local pantries. It is crucial that food scarcity becomes an issue that Raytown faces and combats for the bettering of resident’s lives. The graph below illustrates a household within the Kansas City metro area through 2017.

Food scarcity impacts the families in the community and can become a detrimental aspect to a select group of people if not solved. A lack of contribution affects the local pantry and overall impacts the amount of supply REAP has; this makes pantries more vulnerable and susceptible to becoming endangered. Richard Hoefer, a staff writer for *Journal of Policy Practice*, in his article, "Food Security and Social Protection in the United States", argues, "America's vulnerable populations face increasing levels of food insecurity, hunger and poverty as social protection programs are attacked and delegitimized" (Hoefer 4). The increase in the levels of demand often puts a barrier on local pantries, as they struggle to distinguish new methods to help offset the rising numbers.

Additionally, volunteerism holds a great significance on the overall success of REAP; the organization is a vital program that provides nourishment to youth who otherwise would not eat until school lunch time. J Huang, an editor for *Social Science & Medicine (1982)*, in his article, "Low-income Children's Participation in the National School Lunch Program and Household Food Insufficiency", states, "It is important to increase access to school meal programs among children at risk of food insufficiency in order to ensure adequate nutrition and to mitigate the health problems associated with malnourishment among children" (Huang 8). Though the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program attempts to provide healthier meals to families, oftentimes, because it is more expensive, they are left with quick, to-go meals. He goes on to state, "Assessing the impact of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) on household food insufficiency is critical to improve the implementation of public food assistance and to improve the nutrition intake of low-income children and their families" (Huang 8). At face value, the

insufficiency directly relates to the lack of distribution and the effects that it can have on a community.

Education and the availability of personal resources are essential aspects of identifying and combatting an issue in a district. The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program, and the events that it puts on, can be applicable to any community. Though Raytown is a community that faces these specific issues, they act as an example for other areas that find these same concerns and are combatting famines like it. Any community that has a scarcity of resources and a lack of government funding can be faced with the same tough decisions of elimination families who seek help. Acting as a mirror, Raytown holds the potential to lead a community into facing problems like the lack of available resources and food supplies. Nationally, these concepts can be applied universally, as the concerns relate to other locations in other states. The families should not rely on others' generosity as a form of supplements for their household because it creates an unstable precedent for upcoming candidates and has unpredictable outcomes. Since Raytown is a low-income district, this makes them susceptible to this trend. The uniqueness of the pantry, since it serves as both a utility relief program and a supplementary food support, allows residents more flexibility and more comfortability knowing that REAP offers more services. Though the event was deemed an overall success, it emphasized a need for more constant income for supplements.

To ensure the best quality for Raytown residents, the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program understood that there must be a change in their approach, rather than just relying on the consistent volunteers and donors to keep the pantry alive. The workers knew that there was a deeper problem that focused on education and a long-term solution. Daniel Remley, an

editor for *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, in his article, “Promoting Nutrition and Long-Term Food Security through Choice Pantry Development”, states, “Food pantries were originally designed for temporary emergency food relief, but many families and individuals are becoming increasingly reliant on them to meet their monthly food needs. Therefore, food pantries need to holistically address underlying causes of long-term food security” (Remley 1). The increased need of Raytown citizens highlights the lack of resources in this community. This calls for an immediate reform of the current system so that residents can ensure that their supply will continue to be available. Without proper implementation of secure donations, the pantry will be forced to manage their year-long inventory on seasonal donations from food drives, which cannot supply the demand. The need will continue to grow, and without a proper, long-term solution that is implemented, food banks will be in danger, which trickles down to affect those living in that area; this is what poses the biggest threat to those affected by it. Raytown’s pantry adopted new policies that will ensure and secure food resources for those in need. This included the implementation of their development department that focused on career-building aspects to help Raytown residents seem more desirable to employers (this program will be discussed more in depth in section three).

Low income neighborhoods should be given better access to healthier options. Raytown, a low-income district, does not provide residents with healthy alternative, like Farmer’s Markets. Places like Farmer’s Markets and healthy supercenters have the potential to foster a more nutritious lifestyle for residents in that area, specifically those in low-income neighborhoods. Michelle Fang, a contributor for the *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, in her article, “It’s Not an ‘If You Build It They Will Come’ Type of Scenario”: Stakeholder Perspectives on Farmers' Markets as a Policy Solution to Food Access in Low-Income Neighborhoods”, argues,

“As national and local policies promote farmers' markets (FMs) in underserved communities, it is important to understand stakeholder perspectives” (Fang 3). She goes on to state, “Tensions emerge where these roles conflict: Farmer’s Markets must be profitable while providing affordable foods to low-income customers, and though politicians may seek a “silver bullet” solution, Farmer’s Markets are just one part of a comprehensive strategy to promote food access and economic revitalization in underserved neighborhoods” (Fang 3). Farmer’s Markets have proven to be a profitable industry, however, in low-income neighborhoods, there tends to be little participation and decreased access to healthier food options, causing it not to be a profitable expenditure or risk for a company to take. Fang assumes that because these areas are considered to be low-income that there will be little profitability for healthier companies to operate in these areas. REAP, the only pantry in close radius to residents, relies solely on the generosity and contributions from others. As residents collect from this pantry, and as the need continues to grow, there become smaller justification to implementing healthier foods options when local residents rely on emergency food banks for their everyday essentials. At this point, options like Farmer’s Markets and healthy supercenters become an isolated dream that becomes unobtainable.

## **The Final Analysis: Food Relief and Personal Development Resources**

The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program, commonly referred to as “REAP”, provides many services for those in the Raytown community. After receiving goods and services continuously from this organization, it was clear that this organization’s core competencies were solely focused on assisting its customers. Staff development is a major component for this non-profit. There is a strong focus on both external and internal knowledge, skills, and shared culture of an organization’s team. Staff development is not something that is seen as an obligation, rather staff development is a core competency to invest in to keep their organization thriving. Their ability to communicate the value and impact of their work is what drives their passion to help others. Since they strive for greatness, they have work to improve their communication efforts. With a lack of this, it will directly impact the people they serve and their immediate team.

This agency’s ability to delegate responsibility and to work with others and coach them to develop their capabilities is one of their strongest assets. They provide helpful, behaviorally specific feedback to others, shares information, advice, and suggestions to help their clients become more successful, and provide effective coaching. This is an essential aspect to their program, as they are offering both goods and services. REAP regularly meets with employees to review their development progress, and seeks to follow up with those employees to track progress. They recognize and reinforce both their clients and employees developmental efforts and improvements. It is this competency alone that helped improve my parent’s skillset and helped them land a sustainable career job.

This new development initiative helped draw national attention to Raytown. Local businesses and outside volunteers would donate their skills in resume-building, workshops, and information session to help clients build a budget. The pantry quickly realized that with their previous approach, it only put a Band-Aid on the issues surrounding our low-income neighborhoods. Instead of focusing on the wage gap between jobs or the lack of money, REAP chose to focus on better ways to spend their client's income, ensuring that they are utilizing it to the best of their ability. Though this does not solve the issues from the community's view, it stabilizes the customers temporarily.

Not only does this organization provide assistance with their goods, one of their core competencies is to providing motivational support: Their ability to enhance others' commitment to their work helps improve the lives of their clients, which is included in their mission statement. REAP recognizes and rewards people for their achievements and acknowledges people for their contributions. These core competencies form the organization as a firm that provides both goods and services. With the non-perishable goods that they redistribute and the professional development that they offer, REAP falls into both categories, which sets them apart from other local food pantries.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of assistance strains the families who are currently receiving benefits from this non-profit organization and leaves them with more hardships. This restricts certain residents from receiving some of the benefits that they once were receiving because of the growing need and the lack of opportunity. By implementing an approach that forces the Raytown Emergency Assistance Program to be more strategic and timely with their donations, and simultaneously accessing business' unsellable products, this will create the biggest impact for the residents of Raytown. This community is simply a mirror for other communities, as other districts suffer from these same issues. Nationally, these concepts can be applied universally, as the concerns relate to other locations in other states. With the exposure the pantry has received from their development efforts, it has caused national attention, demanding other companies and non-profits to follow suit. Though food availability is still a major concern for this region, this pantry has created their own innovative approach to maximizing the tools and resources they have available. Families in low-income neighborhoods should not rely on others' generosity as a form of supplements for their household because it creates an unstable precedent for upcoming candidates and has unpredictable outcomes. These ideals must be adopted if Raytown wants to better the lives and futures of its residents.

The Raytown Emergency Assistance Program is a government-funded aid project that has been a tremendous improvement to the community that it serves. The program still currently utilizes all aspects of being a food pantry; however, most of the assistance that they are able to provide is created from grants and scholarships that directly are applied towards customer's acquired costs.

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