

Snack Pak 4 Kids—Hereford, Texas

Evaluation Report

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ABSTRACT: *Snack Pak 4 Kids—Hereford models itself after the Feeding America program that tackles hunger among vulnerable groups: children, working poor, rural residents, and the elderly. Known as Food Every Day (FED) before joining the regional organization, SP4K focuses upon hunger among school-aged children in Hereford, Texas. This report outlines the history of that local program. The report analyzes the food distribution system, the organizational structure, and budget. An analysis of teacher, student, and parent surveys demonstrates the overall impact of the program in the classroom and on the families of the recipient children. The report concludes with recommendations for the organization based upon these combined analyses.*

Introduction

The origin of children's anti-hunger programs known nationally as the Backpack Program is linked to a Little Rock, Arkansas elementary school. In 1995, a principal contacted the Arkansas Rice Depot requesting food assistance for children who had complained of headaches, stomach pain, and various other health problems. Upon examination, the principal had determined the children received little or no food to eat at home over the weekend. The school counselor also noted that these same students were inattentive, disruptive, and lethargic, especially on Monday mornings. These health and behavioral problems were caused by one situation—hunger. This one phone call by the school principal to the Rice Depot led to the beginning of Arkansas's Food for Kids program (Arkansas Rice Depot, 2010). Over the next 17 years, the program was replicated into communities located throughout all 50 states, many of their school systems, and local food banks.

Located in a rural county in the Texas Panhandle, Hereford is one of the few rural Texas municipalities to provide snack packs to all Pre-K to fifth grade students and their siblings living in the home that qualify. This essay outlines the history of the snack pack program in Hereford, its distribution system and organizational structure, budget, and reports an analysis of the end-of-year surveys completed by parents, students, and teachers who participated in the program in its first 30 months. The essay concludes with program recommendations for its continuation that will assist other school-based, anti-hunger programs located in rural communities.

History

Hereford's Snack Pak 4 Kids (SP4K) program began in January 2010 with a radio announcement. National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* announced that one of its corporate sponsors was Feeding America, the national sponsor for Backpack Programs. Krista Lee, one of Hereford Independent School District's (HISD) kindergarten teachers, previously worked in Iowa and Nebraska school districts with similar programs. At the time, Lee thought the Backpack Program was a local initiative. Aware of the effect this program had on her former students, Lee approached Linda Gonzales, her principal at Bluebonnet Elementary School, about starting a program at their school. Their conversation grew to include other teachers at the K-5 school (L. Gonzales, personal interview, March 12, 2010; K. Lee, personal interview, February 08, 2010).

All of the teachers discussed their experiences and personal attempts to feed these hungry children. Several teachers stated they stored non-perishable food items like dry cereal, cheese crackers, and juice boxes in their classroom specifically to feed children who arrived at school hungry. The problem was so widespread that the teachers revealed they included food items for their students on their personal grocery lists each week. The reasons for their students' hunger varied, but knowing that feeding these children might not have been appropriate, the teachers were caught in a conundrum.

Their students arrived at school too late to eat free breakfasts, or it was simply not enough for them to concentrate. These children acted out, complained, and even cried from stomachaches, headaches, or sleepiness caused

by hunger. Many of them lived in single-parent households where the parent, usually a mother, worked two or three minimum-wage jobs, thereby leaving her children with an older child or elderly person to care for them. Many students were either too young to know how to cook or lived with someone who was too old to have the energy to do more than guarantee the child's safety. Several of these parents, many of whom these teachers knew were under 20, might also have been attending vocational training at local community colleges. They had few resources and little, if any, family support. Then there were those who talked about teenage mothers who, in some cases, seemed to view their child more as a fashion accessory than a responsibility. These children were not well socialized to work with their fellow students and caused more classroom disruptions. Some of the children's parents or caregivers were known to be addicted to alcohol, drugs, or participated in illegal activities. The teachers were frustrated by the inaction of the state's Child Protective Services Department (CPS) who did nothing despite their many reports. In most cases, the family situation did not require CPS involvement. These were single parents who were doing the best they could with the limited resources they had. The children and the parents were not bad. They were just poor.

The family's poverty still forced teachers to make difficult choices. They could either feed the child so they could learn and behave or deal with behavioral problems that spilled over onto other students until lunchtime. Feed the child, and all the students might learn; let the child go hungry, and all of the students will learn less because of the disruption that hungry students can bring to a classroom. The teachers' conversation expanded to include the amount each spends on school supplies, finding coats and shoes for their students, and soliciting help from area thrift stores. Furthermore, the teachers were spending a portion of their own salaries to provide for their students at the expense of their own children and financial needs. At times, the teachers said they felt more like social workers who taught than teachers who encourage socially-appropriate behaviors (K. Lee, personal interview, February 08, 2010).

Whatever the situation may be that led to the children's hunger, teachers noticed that they came to school with little or no academic skills or ability to act in an age-appropriate manner. All of them agreed that Monday morning was the worst time for these students. Even worse, Hereford prides itself on being part of America's network of breadbasket communities. Hereford is one of the main agricultural centers of the Texas Panhandle

where much of the nation's beef supply originates (Deaf Smith County Chamber of Commerce, n.d.). The teachers wondered if the community would believe them because the region produced so much food that no one would believe anyone would go hungry there. The teachers realized something had to be done but had no idea how to start such a program. As Lee said in a television interview, "I'm just some kindergarten teacher trying to feed her kids," (Bennett, 2011).

Well aware of the student and teacher needs, Gonzales faced the same situation every time students were sent to her office for behavioral problems caused by hunger. She too paid for school-related items and student needs. Like her teachers, Gonzales had supported outside organizations that met students' basic needs, but more was required. Gonzales asked Lee to investigate further how to establish the program since the latter had worked in school districts where the program existed. Lee agreed and the other teachers gave their support.

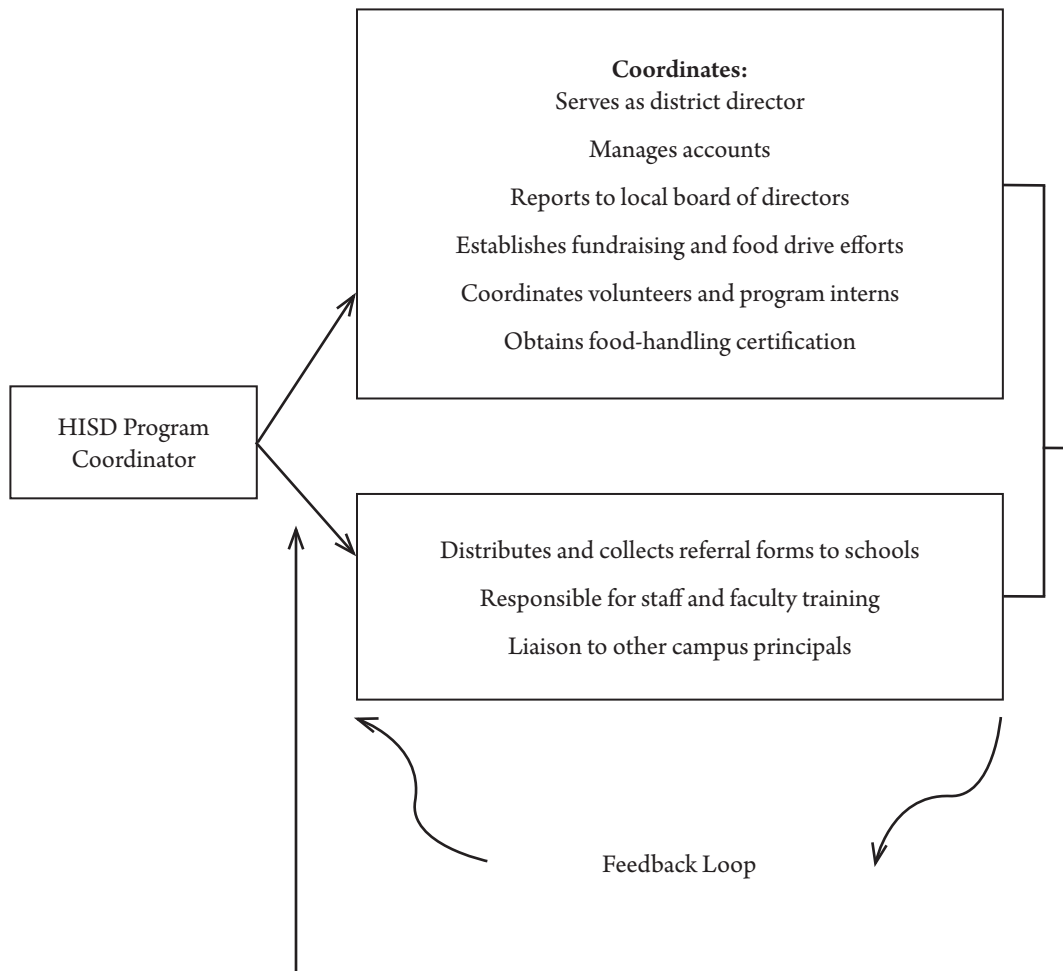
Distribution System and Organizational Structure

Led by both Gonzales and Lee, SP4K developed both an external and internal organizational structure that allowed it to join a loosely-formed conglomeration of other SP4K programs located throughout the Texas Panhandle. The structure allows for food purchase and transportation to their regional distribution in downtown Amarillo, Texas, the largest metropolitan area within the Texas Panhandle. Volunteer coordinators and community members sort bulk and individual orders for each school district. These orders consist of kid-friendly, nonperishable foodstuffs for children living in food-insecure households each Friday afternoon of the academic year. The next section outlines the internal organizational structure that allows SP4K staff members to order and transport the food to their distribution facility. The following section outlines the external structure that provides campus coordinators to assemble bags and anonymously distribute them to their students.

Internal Distribution System

SP4K is part of a Texas Panhandle-wide consortium of other Backpack Programs that exist in other area school systems. Most programs exist within school districts and schools located in the Amarillo metropolitan area: Amarillo, Bushland, Canyon, and River Road. Five currently exist in rural communities: Dalhart, Fritch, Hereford,

Figure 1. SP4K—Hereford Internal Structure

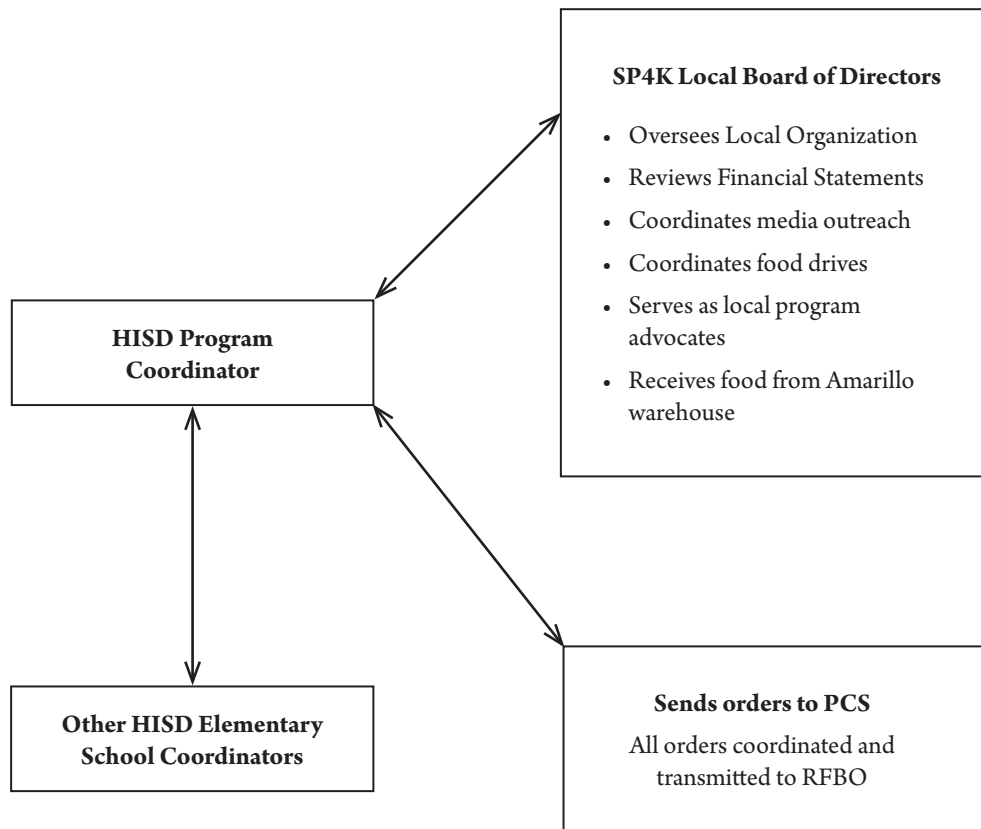


Tulia, and Walcott. Hereford and Walcott exist solely in Deaf Smith County whereas the others are located in multiple counties throughout the 26 counties that comprise the Texas Panhandle (Snack Pak 4 Kids, n.d.a). A regional nonprofit, Panhandle Community Services (PCS), manages accounts. Figure 1 outlines how the coordinators work within the district, place and distribute orders, and work with their local board of directors.

Not only are the district coordinators responsible for food orders and distribution within their district, but they are also responsible for staff training, serving as liaison between the board members and the SP4K staff and volunteers. Each coordinator works with their local board of directors. Their primary responsibility is to review all financial transactions and serve as liaisons to the local community. Board members take responsibility for fun-

draising, media relations, and maintaining community presence through food drives. They submit all donations and receipts to PCS’s accounting office. In turn, PCS provides monthly balance sheets to each of the program coordinators. Furthermore, SP4K directors organize on-site volunteers and train social work and public administration student interns from area colleges.

Under Texas State Code 229.178, the Department of State Health Services requires that all those who serve food to consumers must complete the Food Handler Program. The program reduces the risk of foodborne illness outbreaks caused by improper food preparation and handling techniques (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2012). Krista Lee, HISD’s program coordinator, is the state-trained food handler. The food is stored on shelves or in plastic tubs and placed on wood

Figure 2. External Organizational Structure and Food Distribution System

pallets throughout its warehouse. Lee guarantees all volunteers meet the state's safety standards during the food distribution process. Local community groups volunteer their services bimonthly to pack individual bags for distribution.

Each school and school district located in the SP4K program has a program coordinator. The school coordinators are responsible for the distribution and collection of referral forms that are distributed to teachers, school counselors, nurses, cafeteria workers, and administrators. These forms are collected by the district coordinator and reviewed. Upon approval, the district coordinator informs the campus coordinator to send enrollment and consent forms home with the children for the parents to sign. If the forms are not signed and returned, food will still be given to all the children living in the household every Friday afternoon. The forms are collected and stored in the principal's or counselor's offices in unmarked, locked cabinets on each campus. The campus coordinators pick up the packed items every Thursday afternoon

for distribution on Fridays. The district coordinator has additional responsibilities.

While the district coordinators expand SP4K onto other campuses in their districts, the external organization was created by area philanthropist, Dyron Howell.

External Distribution System

Figure 2 illustrates the linkages between the internal organizational structure of Hereford's SP4K program to its local board of directors, Panhandle Community Services, and food suppliers. Howell was involved with similar programs in East Texas prior to his move to the Panhandle area. However, he focused more upon creating a network of nonprofit organizations, volunteers, corporate sponsors, civic groups, and religious organizations to support the new venture in the Texas Panhandle. His efforts led to obtaining PCS's accounting and website support, thus allowing all program donations to be tax-exempt and online. The organization provided free accounting services to all SP4K members and coordinated

all purchases, thereby decreasing or maintaining food costs (Snack Pak 4 Kids, n.d.b). Monthly accounting and website maintenance is reported to each coordinator and publicly posted on PCS's website. In turn, PCS allocated two full-time employees to work directly with the program, free of charge to SP4K. While Howell was successful in creating a network among the far-flung programs, the organization found it difficult to purchase food at reduced prices (K. Lee, personal communication, February 8, 2011).

The first significant hurdle encountered by SP4K was purchasing foodstuffs from High Plains Food Bank (HPFB) in Amarillo. According to its director, HPFB does not have the additional funding to support SP4K along with its other anti-hunger programs (Z. Wilson, personal communication, June 19, 2012). HPFB staff was supportive of the idea but the program faced an increased demand for foodstuffs caused by the national economic recession. The organization felt that assuming responsibility for SP4K would stretch their budgets and services too much. This could lead to increased hunger among children and adults currently relying upon their services or those who would soon be asking for assistance. Howell's outreach to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma (RFBO) in Oklahoma City helped SP4K programs in the Panhandle become sustainable.

Howell asked SP4K coordinators to send orders from their individual programs to PCS. Food was purchased from RFBO in Oklahoma City. Baldwin Distribution, a trucking company in Amarillo, acquired the shipment and transported the goods free of charge to the coordinated warehouse in downtown Amarillo. Howell's volunteer network meets bimonthly to coordinate the community orders. Each organization is responsible for their own order pickup and delivery to their school districts.

SP4K Board Member Jerry O'Connor and area volunteers pick up food following the coordinated distribution effort. The program's individual warehouse is located at HISD's community warehouse. Local volunteers place the order in the facility. Along with other volunteers, they return to coordinate the distribution of foodstuffs to the respective schools.

Community Support

Creating the internal and external structure was less difficult than gaining community support for the new, anti-hunger program. Deaf Smith County residents appear to be philanthropic. They created and sustain community-

based programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters, YMCA, community food pantries, etc. that tend not to be located in cities with more than 15,000 people. According to SP4K board member, Brandi Murillo, a commonly held belief by small town residents throughout the Panhandle is that too much is promised to these communities (B. Murillo, personal communication, September 15, 2011). A larger percentage of people living in the Panhandle's smaller towns donate their time and money to organizations that are believed to benefit the entire region. In the end, however, most of the funds and services remain in Amarillo. While people in the area do the work, little measurable benefit returns to their community. Gonzales and Lee struggled initially to gain awareness about childhood hunger in Hereford. Because of a widely-held view that hunger could not exist in the center of beef production of the world, community members appeared to believe that childhood hunger was not a problem. The county's Chamber of Commerce website confirms this belief with the following statement:

Hereford is number one in the world in beef production. Cattle feeding is our main industry and we boast of being the "Beef Capital of the World." There are more than a million cattle fed within a 50 mile radius of Hereford. We lead the entire area in dairy production. We also are nestled in a large grain producing area where farming is abundant.

(Deaf Smith County Chamber of Commerce, n.d.)

In March and April 2010, several community outreach meetings held at HISD were poorly attended by community members thereby providing further evidence of a lack of understanding about the issue and the presence of hunger among Hereford's youth. Two public meetings were held at HISD's administrative office building to discuss the need in March and April 2010. School teachers who participated in the initial, impromptu meeting were the only community members present at both meetings. Lee and Gonzales determined that to increase community awareness, the program needed a local board of directors and to gain local financial support. Otherwise, the program would end before the pilot project folded into the larger SP4K conglomeration.

Lee and Gonzales agreed to continue the pilot program at Bluebonnet Elementary despite the school-wide need for the program (L. Gonzales, personal communication, April 30, 2010). They agreed the working name of the program would be Food Every Day (FED) until it was viable and could join the loosely-formed Panhandle organization. The following day, Gonzales contacted sev-

eral prominent, local people and asked them to serve on a community board. Their primary goal would be to communicate the need for the program in Hereford schools and direct the program to meet community expectations. The following people were contacted: Carolyn Waters, treasurer of the local Lions Club and vice president of the district's school board; Jerry O'Connor, Deaf Smith County Commissioner; Tom Simons, Deaf Smith County Judge; Debbie Gonzales, an executive at First Financial Bank; and Brandi Murillo, Happy State Bank executive. Community activist, Janna Parsons, joined later. Gonzales mailed letters to them the following day.

At first, the board members appeared to be uncertain of their duties. Each member agreed that the community had difficulties understanding how someone could face food insecurity in Hereford. At their initial meeting, Lee and Gonzales outlined the board's overall duties. As seen in Figure 2, the board of directors oversees the entire program. Their responsibilities also include a review of all financial transactions for transparency and reporting their findings to the community.

The initial board members agreed that local residents must serve on the board and advocate for the local program. Like many smaller communities in the Texas Panhandle, Hereford residents believe that Amarillo, with its population of nearly 200,000, dominates the area. This is because while smaller towns may donate to organizations that reportedly allocate funds to all residents, the bulk goes to Amarillo. As a result, SP4K had to have local faces advocating for the local program (L. Gonzales, personal interview, November 15, 2010). With information from Lee's presentation and their budgetary oversights, the board members could advocate for the program among the local population. They could serve as those faces. Each member agreed to have their organizations sponsor food drives periodically throughout the year. Also, the members would serve as program advocates by participating in interviews on local radio and television stations, and in newspapers. Also, the board members would oversee all budgetary decisions and provide a sense of transparency to the community. Murillo became the de facto publicity chair, and O'Connor assumed responsibility for fundraising efforts. All members agreed to assist in coordinating annual food drives and fund raising (K. Lee, personal interview, February 10, 2011).

As Lee's supervising principal, Gonzales agreed to provide Lee with some release time to meet with local businesses as well as civic and religious groups to increase awareness and raise funding for the project (L. Gonzales, personal interview, February 12, 2011). Lee presented to

Hereford's Lions Club, Rotary Club, Interfaith Council, and area banking leaders about the need for a Hereford-based Backpack Program.

United States Agency for International Development defines a food-secure household as one in which "all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life" (USAID, 1992). In her presentations, Lee defined SP4K as the only anti-hunger program that places the solution in the hands of a child. SP4K provides weekend food throughout the school year for children who live in food-insecure households (K. Lee, personal interview, February 12, 2011). Each child takes a bag of snacks home in their backpack each Friday after school (K. Lee, personal communication, February 12, 2011).

Lee stated in her community presentations that, according to Feeding America (2012), 16.8% of all children living in the United States suffer from chronic hunger. Approximately 28.5% of all children living in Texas live in food-insecure households. Texas is ranked fifth with the highest number of hungry children living in the United States. According to Feeding America (2012), 30.8% of all children living in Hereford fall below the national poverty line. For Deaf Smith County and Hereford, U.S. Census data reports that 23.4% of all children under age 18 live under the poverty line in the city. However, 38.2% of families led by a single female live in poverty where one out of every two children in those households lives in poverty. Of all children enrolled in Hereford ISD, 76% receive free or reduced-price lunch. The number of children living in these food-insecure households is 27.5%, an estimated 1,680 children (Feeding America, 2012). "The faces of these children we saw in our classrooms daily validated the numbers that Feeding America and the U.S. Census Bureau provided" (K. Lee, personal communication, February 12, 2011).

While 95% of children at Bluebonnet Elementary School received free breakfast and lunch, an additional 3% participated in the reduced-price lunch program (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In Hereford, 77% of all children live under the national and state poverty line (U.S. Census, 2012b). Statistically, 15% of all children receiving free or reduced meals at school live in poverty-ridden and food-insecure homes. Therefore, 50 children who are enrolled in the Bluebonnet district live in such households (Feeding America, 2012).

SP4K identifies children in need using the school's teachers, school nurse, cafeteria employees, and school psychologist. Their recommendations come from first-hand knowledge of the home situation as well as training

sessions where the following observed behaviors related to hunger are discussed: extreme hunger on Monday morning, eating other students' food, rushing food lines, consistent complaining of hunger, short attention spans in the classroom, asking cafeteria workers and classmates for "seconds" or leftovers, digging in classroom trash cans for discarded food, and begging teachers for additional food at snack time to take home to share with younger siblings (K. Lee, personal communication, February 12, 2011).

The backpack includes food items that do not require cooking or refrigeration such as: 100% juice boxes, shelf-stable milk, beef stew, Vienna sausage, peanut butter crackers, fruit cups, pretzels or cheese crackers, raisins or dried fruit, cereal bars, and breakfast cereal. Each child receives a 12–16oz. jar of peanut butter and crackers monthly. The weekly, average cost of a backpack is \$3 and one person's individual contribution of \$133 feeds one child for an entire academic year, including holidays.

Bluebonnet teachers recommended 28 children for the program in the first week of the pilot project. To include their siblings, 57 bags were packed and sent home with children weekly. As news of the pilot project spread to other area elementary schools, 186 children were enrolled in the program with a waiting list of an additional 250 students not including their siblings (K. Lee, personal communication, April 10, 2011).

Lee secured support from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) to serve as the organization's program evaluator and gained support from the Amarillo Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (AUUF). Its approximate 150 active members agreed to bring cans of food that could be distributed to the children. However, one fourth of the donated food required preparation beyond the abilities of most elementary school children. Lee met with the volunteer staff of Hereford's Food Pantry. Open only on Monday and Friday afternoons, the staff understood her concerns and agreed to swap those items that required adults to prepare for child-friendly food items they stocked.

Lee's presentations and Gonzales' outreach to community leaders were successful on several fronts. First, Gonzales solidified program support from her recruitment of local community leaders to serve as SP4K's board members. Her definition of food-insecure households and statistical information from Feeding America and the U.S. Census Bureau, as well as the inclusion of all teachers and staff in FED, later SP4K, spurred community awareness and support. Second, the program began receiving additional financial support because of Lee's community presentations and the increased awareness of hunger

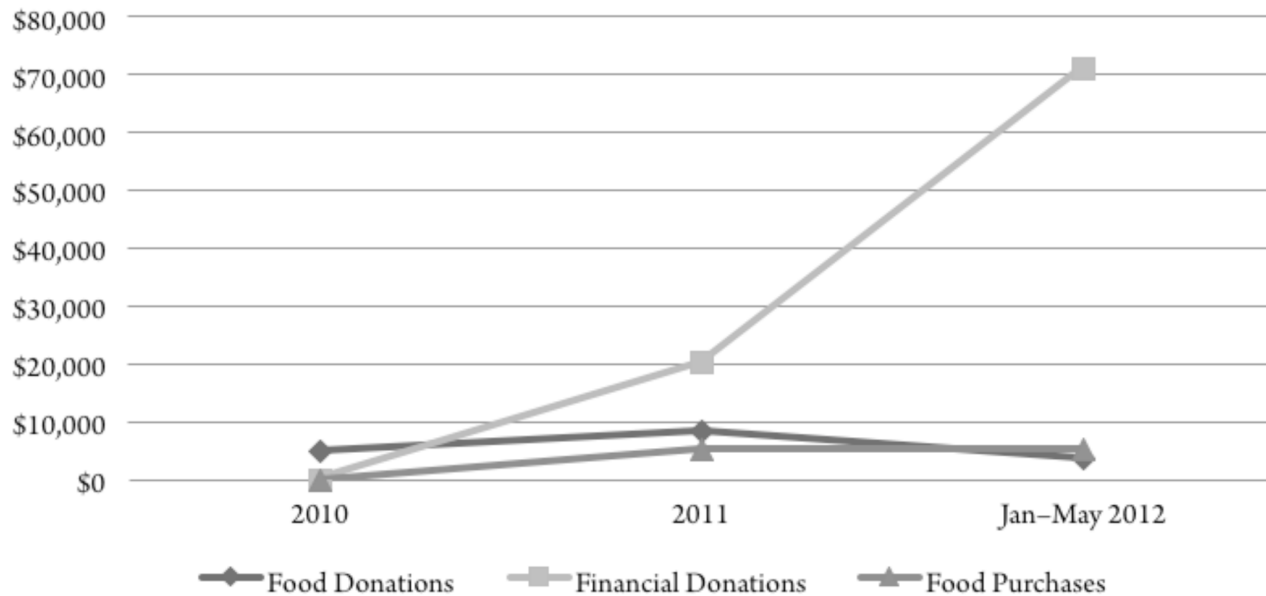
in Hereford. Lastly, the members of these community groups who worked closely with high school and religious organizations encouraged their students and members to select SP4K for their community service project. Working with WTAMU, SP4K provided an undergraduate internship to students interested in working with a grassroots, nonprofit organization.

The board members' tasks include reviewing the organization, and a key component of their responsibilities is program advocacy. At its May meeting, the board requested that Lee, Gonzales, and Aimee Fisher, a WTAMU intern, submit a mission statement as well as program goals and objectives. The mission statement would help all of the organization's members provide a consistent community message. The goals and objectives had to be measurable and obtainable. The board also requested that a fundraising calendar be created so SP4K would remain present in the minds of the community members throughout the year (Lee, 2012, June 25). In September 2011, Lee, Gonzales, and Fisher presented a mission statement to the SP4K board. The board members unanimously accepted it after some minor editing. The approved mission statement for the Hereford SP4K Program is to provide food for the weekend and holidays for children who are at risk for hunger (September 27 board meeting). The board approved three goals:

- Expand the program to Hereford elementary schools, Hereford Junior High School, and Hereford High School by January 2015
- Complete our community networks with all social service agencies, faith-based organizations, civic groups, and businesses in Deaf Smith County by 2015
- Network with community leaders to create a community garden by 2014 (Fisher, 2011, October 15)

As Carolyn Waters, treasurer of the Hereford Lions Club and vice president of the local school board stated in an interview on November 3, 2011 after being involved in the program for six months, "There is no need that any child in Hereford ever goes hungry" (Bennett, 2011). Her statement explains the shift in the Hereford community to realize the presence of hunger in their population and the challenges that teachers faced in the classroom.

SP4K transitioned from its pilot year. It changed its name to SP4K from FED by the end of the 2011–2012 academic year. In addition, it had received enough organizational and financial support to expand into all HISD elementary schools. If the recipients had siblings who were enrolled in junior high, high school or not yet

Figure 3. SP4K Donations and Purchases: 2010–June, 2012

school-aged, SP4K was able to provide them a weekend food supply as well. Board members upheld their responsibilities by connecting the program to area organizations that provided volunteer and financial support. Neither the board members nor SP4K campus coordinators were able to advocate for the establishment of a community garden by June 2012. However, supporters began asking questions about how these children would eat during the summer when they had even fewer food resources available to them. Once the community began to ask themselves this question, the need for community-wide gardens, access to food pantries in the schools, or increased accessibility to the Hereford Food Bank became more apparent (K. Lee, personal interview, April 1, 2012).

Budget

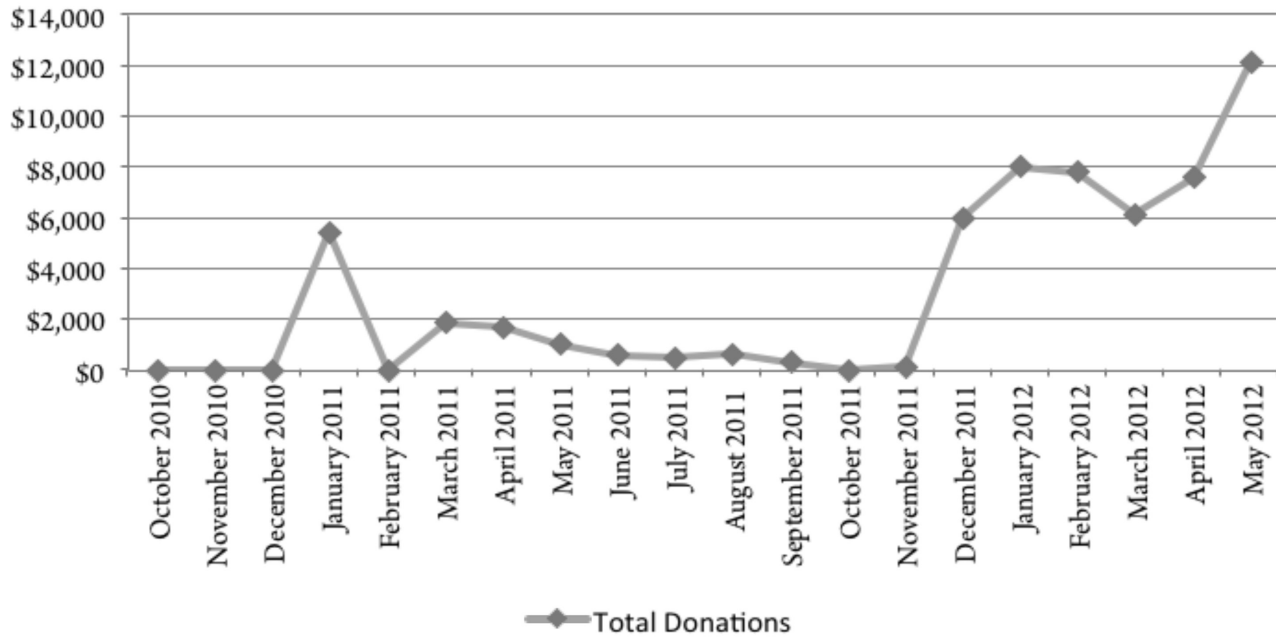
The pilot project began by mid-2010 with no money and no food. The program was funded solely from financial donations provided by Lee and Gonzales and foodstuffs given by the AUUF. Lee unsuccessfully applied for corporate grants to fund the pilot project. These grants required that the organization possess 501(c)3 nonprofit, tax-exempt status issued by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. While AUUF volunteered its IRS-issued, tax-exempt number, it did not meet grant requirements

because its number applied to religious organizations. Furthermore, the program could not wait to apply for its own tax exemption. The IRS administrative process to review and issue the tax-exempt number would take too long at the risk of losing community-wide support. Gonzales and Lee began searching for organizations with similar objectives that would sponsor the organization and allow its 501(c)3 number to include SP4K.

Lee was refused by several organizations because they believed SP4K was outside the scope of their mission statements. High Plains Food Bank in Amarillo was contacted by Lee for food assistance and program support. Given the national economic downturn at the time and the increased demand for food by all segments of the Panhandle community, HPFB could not provide continuous support to SP4K and meet the increased demand placed upon their anti-hunger programs. One of their program coordinators, Edna Tucker, encouraged Lee to meet with Phyllis Cook, director of Panhandle Community Services (PCS). Howell had worked with them to connect the Amarillo SP4K program with PCS. Since PCS had a branch office in Hereford, the non-profit, social service agency's mission fit within the SP4K's mission and goals.

By November 2010, PCS and FED signed a memorandum of understanding whereby PCS would include the program under its 501(c)3. PCS would provide all accounting services without charge as well as create and

Figure 4. Total Financial Donations



maintain a website exclusively for the Hereford program. While SP4K could join and purchase food from other sources, most orders would be coordinated by Howell, the Panhandle-wide coordinator, and PCS to be sent to RFBO. Their agreement allowed SP4K to enter the Panhandle-wide coalition to purchase their food items, thereby reducing the cost per bag from \$5 to \$3 per person. All donations, unless otherwise specified to be spent on other programs, would go toward the purchase of food. Furthermore, the agreement between PCS and SP4K–Hereford provided legitimacy to Hereford community groups and their members.

Hereford Lions Club saw SP4K as one of their primary community outreach programs. The local United Way asked SP4K to apply for one of its community grants in October 2010. Local banks and HISD high school students held community food drives. WTAMU student groups and classes collected money specifically for the Hereford program. Their financial support, along with AUUF’s food donations, allowed SP4K to become financially solvent during its pilot year, making it possible to join the area-wide consolidated program. Starting December 2011, Caviness Beef Packers began donating \$6,000 to \$8,000 monthly. Terry Caviness, the founder of a long-time, Hereford-based corporation, was contacted by a family friend who worked at the nearby

Walcott School District in Deaf Smith County. A child was found digging in the school cafeteria dumpster for discarded food items that he could eat and take home to his starving siblings. The family friend asked if he could assist the family and wondered if a SP4K program could start at their school. Caviness’s financial support provided immediate legitimacy and funds to expand the program to all elementary schools in the Hereford Independent School District. The Caviness donations also provided SP4K a prudent reserve. As Figure 3 shows, SP4K’s financial reserves increased from \$20,000 at the end of 2011 to \$70,000 in June 2012 because of Caviness as well as other community members’ continued financial support. These donations provided SP4K the financial means to expand into all of Hereford’s elementary schools while SP4K built its reserves. Throughout this period, SP4K’s food donations and purchases remained relatively constant, reaching a high point in 2011.

An analysis of food and monetary donations as well as the combined efforts of Lee and Gonzales to establish the program led to increased community involvement and financial support. As seen in Figure 3, the monetary value of food donations averaged \$577.03 per month over a 30-month period. Financial donations during the same period averaged \$3,339.07 per month. The program’s financial solvency drastically increased from

having a zero balance during the first year of existence to averaging \$1,681.95 during 2011. The 2012 monthly average increased to \$8,335.26. Food purchases remained relatively consistent with donations. SP4K—Hereford depended entirely upon donated food items during the program's first year of existence. The average value of donated food for 2011 and 2012 was \$691.66 and \$577.03. The increased 2011 average is a result of food drives conducted by Deaf Smith County banks that occurred outside of the academic year and anonymous donations given during the summer of 2011.

Figure 4 illustrates financial donations over a 19-month period from October 2010 to May 2012. SP4K's first financial donation occurred in January 2011 and peaked at that time. Between February and December 2011, donations averaged \$603.09. Caviness Beef Company's monthly donations, beginning in December 2011 and continuing through to May 2012, provided SP4K's financial soundness.

From October 2010 to May 2012, SP4K was featured in a local news outlet or community presentations 11 times.¹ On average, for every community presentation and local media coverage that focused on SP4K, the organization either sustained or increased donations in an average of 40 donations after the event. The increased amount of total donations after media coverage varied widely between \$8,120.50 in January 2012 to \$115.69 in February 2012. However, the organization experienced an increase in donations by an average of \$187.40 per community presentation or local media coverage. As seen in Figure 5, a moderate correlation exists between the amount of donations received when compared to the amount of community exposure.

Figure 6 compares the total value of food and financial donations with media exposure to the Hereford community. Food donations started and continued from the program's beginning in January 2010. While there appears to be a moderate correlation between financial donations with media coverage, it also appears that media coverage had, at best, a slight effect on the total dollar amount of food donated to the program when combined with financial donations. The media coverage and community presentations appear to have helped SP4K grow. The steadiest and most consistent growth appears to have occurred starting between December 2010 and January 2011 with the establishment of the local board of directors.

SP4K's Volunteer Involvement

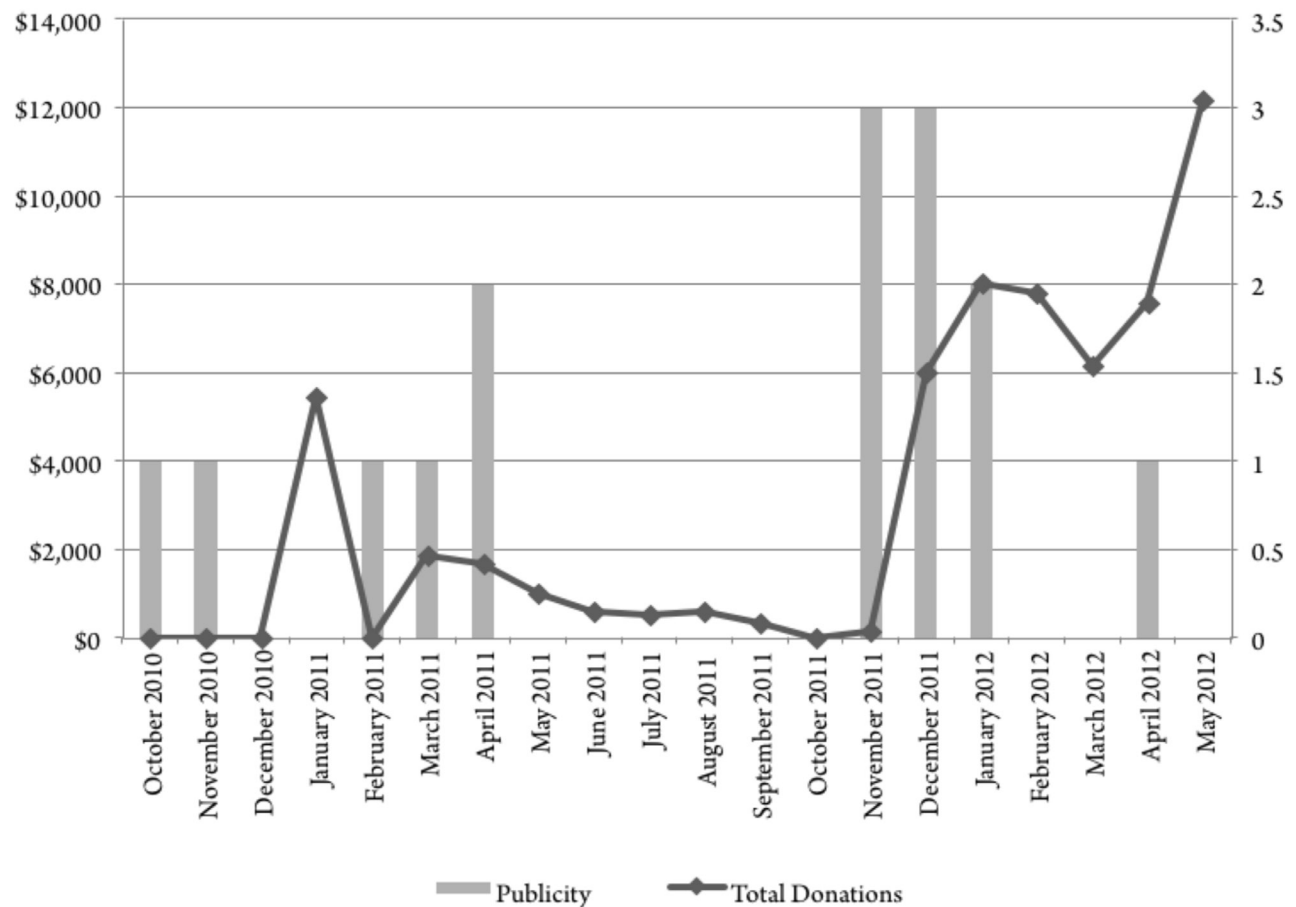
According to Independent Sector (2012), an international coalition for nonprofits, foundations, and cor-

porate giving programs, the dollar value per volunteer hour for the state of Texas is \$21.91. According to 2010 census data provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an estimated 4.45 million Texans volunteered over 695.2 million hours of service to nonprofit and community organizations. Texans are more likely to volunteer with organizations that involve their neighbors and friends, averaging about 37.6 hours annually per organization. Most of these are related to religious groups, educational organizations, and social service agencies that focus on one of the following four areas: food collection and distribution, fundraising, general labor, and teaching (Corporation for National and Community Service [CNCS], 2011b). How much an individual or community supports area nonprofits depends upon five factors: 1) housing foreclosure rates; 2) the number of nonprofits in a community; 3) level of community attachment; 4) the average educational level of its residents; 5) and poverty rates (CNCS, 2011a).

Deaf Smith County's foreclosure rate is low despite the high rates in nearby Palmer and Potter Counties (RealtyTrac, 2012). According to the 2010 Census, Deaf Smith County has a population of 19,595 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a) with 79% of its residents in Hereford's city limits (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Of all Deaf Smith County residents, 83% have lived in the same house for at least five years. Homeownership is 65%, just 0.2% lower than the state average. Also, the number of available multi-housing units is 12.3%, one half less than the state average for apartment living throughout Texas. The national average of nonprofit organizations per 1,000 people living in a community is 4.55. There are 63 non-governmental, nonprofit organizations located in the county (Manta, 2012). Of these, 49 are religious institutions and the remainder are civil, social service, and business-oriented. Including religious organizations, the people-to-nonprofit ratio is 4.03 per 1,000 residents. This estimate is consistent with the national average for nonprofits in a community and with the type of organization in which Texans volunteer statewide—an educational group that feeds hungry children in their community (CNCS, 2011a).

Despite the potential support for SP4K in the Hereford-Deaf Smith County area, there are contributing social factors that would decrease community backing of any nonprofit organization. Two-thirds of the county's population holds a high school diploma and 13% holds a bachelor's degree or higher (Deaf Smith County, Texas, 2012). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012a) reports that 17.9% of Deaf Smith County residents live

Figure 5. Total Financial Donations Compared to Timing and Frequency of SP4K Publicity in Local News Outlets

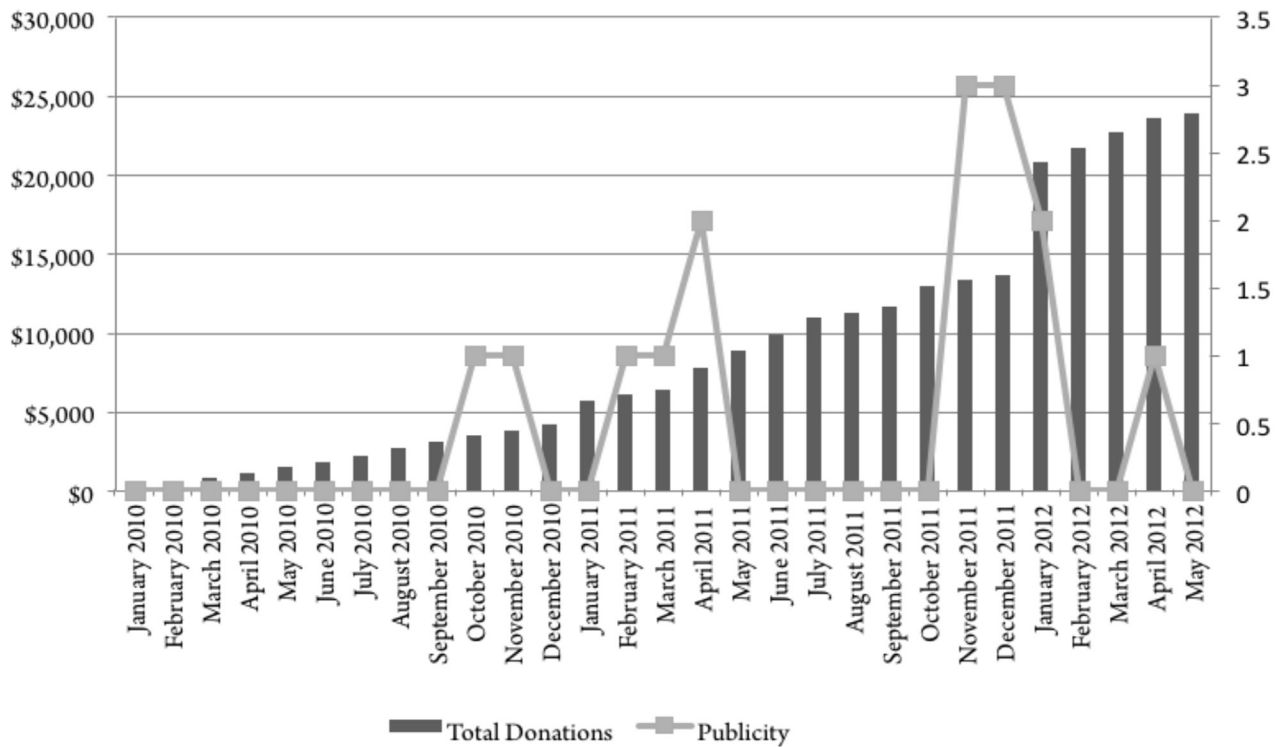


below the national poverty line. Volunteer in America reports that communities where at least 85.3% of residents hold a high school diploma and 27.9% or more earned a college degree are more likely to have higher volunteerism rates (CNCS, 2011b). Approximately 28.5% of all children in Texas live in food-insecure households. While the U.S. Census Bureau (2012a) reports 17.5% of Deaf Smith County residents live under the poverty line, Feeding America estimated the number of children living in poverty and food-insecure households is 30.4%. Both Hereford and Deaf Smith County are above the national and state average for children living in poverty. Over 36% of its workforce is comprised of single women with children (Feeding America, 2012). These women work in one of four areas: agriculture, manufacturing, retail, or social services-education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). As a result of the lower levels of educational attainment

and higher poverty rates, SP4K—Hereford faced an almost double-edged sword.

Residents did not seem to understand the need for an anti-hunger program for children over the weekend and denied that children went hungry in their community. Once this situation was realized, several organizations and individuals who could not donate financially but could donate time did so. Volunteer sign-in sheets were maintained by Lee throughout the history of the organization. At first, most documented hours were those of organizational efforts led by Lee, Gonzales, and Bluebonnet Elementary faculty members and their children. As the organization gained more exposure through local media outlets, community meetings, etc., the number of community and high school volunteers increased. Over the first 30 months of the program’s existence, donated volunteer hours saved the organization \$28,921.20 in program costs.

Figure 6. Total Donations Compared to SP4K’s Community and Media Exposure



The average number of volunteer hours was logged by Lee, Gonzales, and fellow Bluebonnet teachers. Initial publicity in local media or community programs did not affect volunteer hours. An increase in the number of volunteer hours occurred when the local board members and Hereford High School’s Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) began to volunteer consistently each month. However, the greatest number of volunteer hours occurred between August 2011 and April 2012 when Hereford ISD began listing SP4K as one of its students’ community service projects. At this point, between 40 to 60 students volunteered on a bi-weekly basis to unload food shipments, assemble snack packs, and help distribute them to local elementary schools.

There is a moderate link between the amount of media coverage and financial donations provided to the organization. But media coverage did not have an effect on the increased amount of food donated to the program and its monetary value. Furthermore, the number of volunteer hours generated by the community’s commitment to SP4K saved the program almost \$30,000 over a 30-month period, thereby allowing the program to feed

more children without employing a part-time coordinator. Also there appears to be no correlation between the number of hours volunteered and media coverage. The strongest link exists between Hereford High School’s listing SP4K as one of its community service projects for students, JROTC volunteers, and the months in which school is in session.

Student, Parent, and Teacher Survey Results

At the end of the 2011–2012 academic year, surveys were submitted by WTAMU evaluators to recipients and teachers involved with SP4K in HISD. All students and their parents were asked to complete questions about the program, foods included in the snack pack, and the effect the program had on their lives. Teachers were also interviewed. They were asked if the program appeared to have improved the health of the child and changed classroom behaviors. In addition, teachers were asked about changes in school attendance, academic improvement, and improvement in concentration. The fi-

Figure 7. Total Volunteer Hours

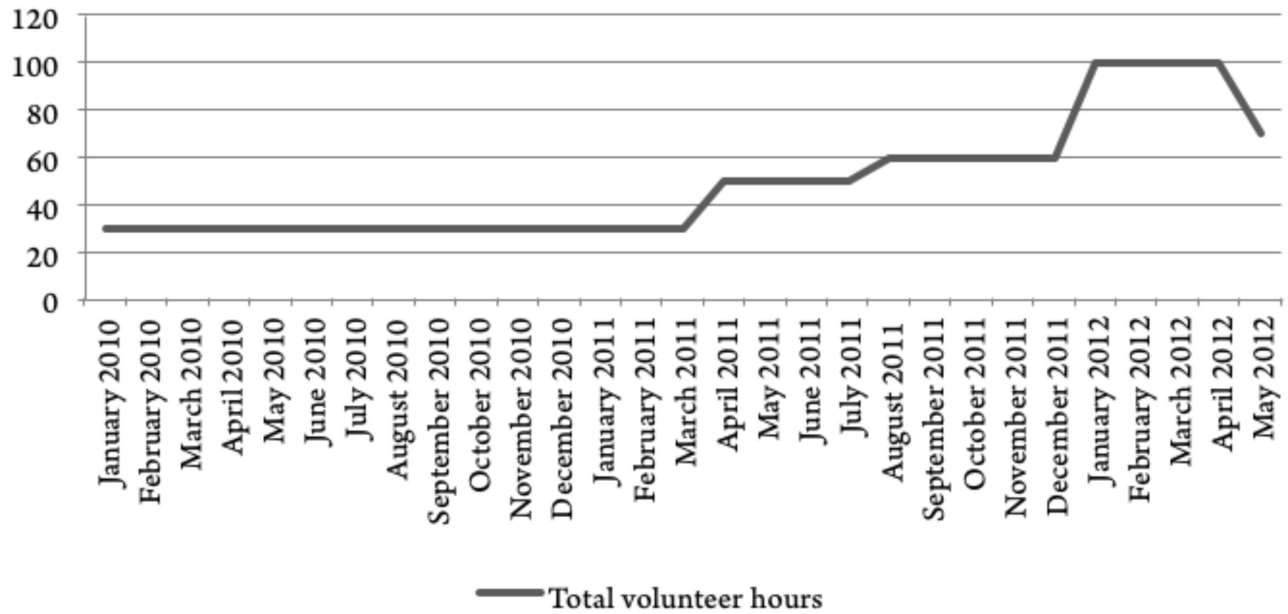
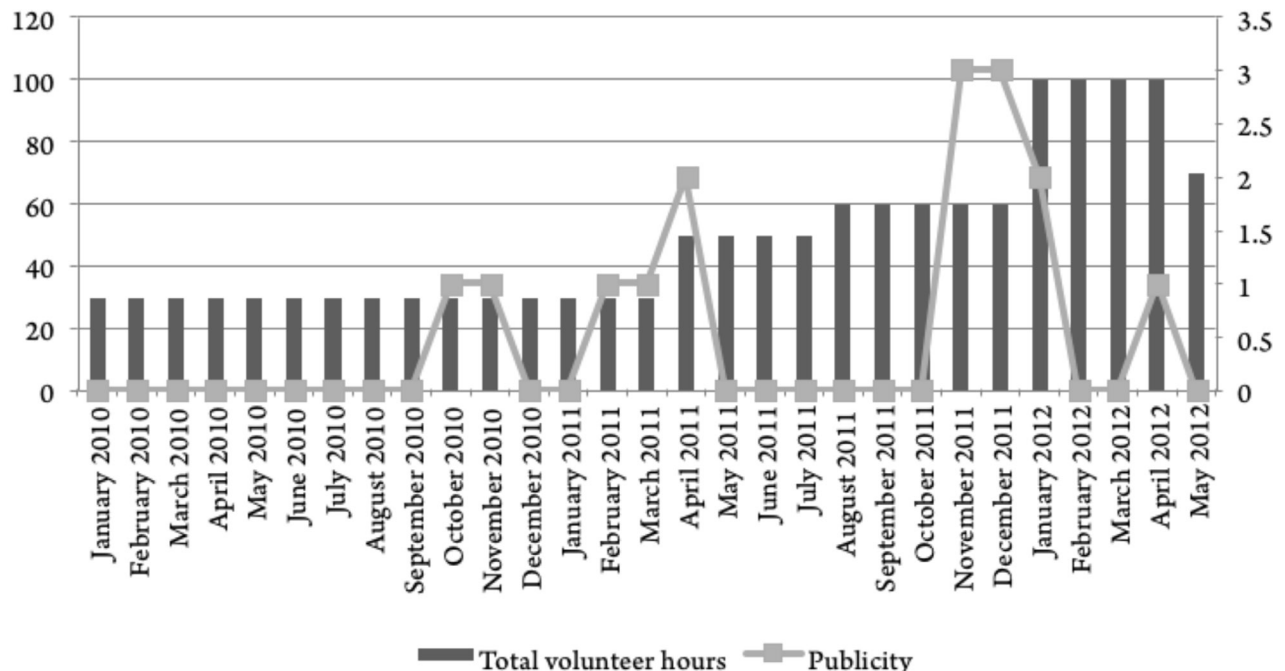


Figure 8. Volunteer Hours and Publicity



nal question asked if the teachers thought the program was beneficial.

Out of approximately 75 parent surveys sent home with students, only three were returned. All of them reported the program decreased their food costs. They reported SP4K lessened their worries about their children. The parents worked two and three minimum wage jobs, and their children were often alone or were not closely supervised by an adult. SP4K provided these children nutritious food that did not require any preparation. For these parents, SP4K's greatest strength was providing food the children could eat without a parent having to worry about them using electricity or gas to cook. As one parent responded, "I don't have to worry about them burning the house down." Even though most parent surveys were not returned, many parents and caregivers came to Bluebonnet Elementary School throughout the year looking for the "Snack Pack Ladies," Lee and Gonzales. Both reported the parents and caregivers thanking them for the food. They repeated how much those items reduced their worries. Most of them offered to work off any debt by cleaning their homes, washing their cars, etc. because they could not pay for the food. Lee and Gonzales reported all of those who visited them were single mothers and sometimes also the recently unemployed. Several cried as they thanked them and offered their services in payment for the food. While the surveys do not provide any statistical significance or reliable descriptive data, the parental visits combined with the written surveys provide limited insight into the parents' thoughts about SP4K and the effect on their lives (L. Gonzales, personal communication, June 25, 2012).

The response rate for the 200 student surveys distributed was 10%. Like their parents, the children's responses throughout the academic year demonstrate their support and need for the program. The children responded that they enjoyed receiving the food and that their participation remained anonymous. The survey asked which one item in the snack pack the student did not like. There was no consistency among the items they most preferred or disliked. Being the "Snack Pack Ladies," Lee, Gonzales, and all of the Bluebonnet teachers were asked the same question by student recipients starting each Wednesday, "Miss, I'm going to get that food on Friday, right Miss?" (K. Lee, personal communication, March 15, 2012). Their teachers always responded affirmatively but this did not stop the children seeking reassurance. They repeatedly asked over the course of the next two days. Upon entering their classrooms, each student unzipped their packs, signed, and relaxed upon seeing the snack

packs inside their backpacks. Many of them would thank and hug their teachers. As Daisha Edwards, a Bluebonnet fifth grade teacher, said during an interview on the local NBC-FOX News affiliate, "I never had a child thank me for food before" (Bennett, 2011).

In 2011, all elementary school teachers with students enrolled in SP4K were asked to complete surveys. In each of the six categories, teachers were given three response choices: much improvement, some improvement, and no improvement. Each response was assigned the numbers 1, 2, and 3 that is consistent with choices. The average response for all categories was 2.06, stating they saw some improvement in the students health, behavior, attendance, and academic abilities. When their responses were separated by school, Bluebonnet teachers' average was 1.73, a difference of .33. The average among all other elementary school teachers was 2.12. All reported the greatest improvement occurred in the student's academic abilities and increased concentration levels, particularly on Monday mornings. As with both parents and children, the teachers' written or verbal responses revealed their support or lack of support for their program.

The results of the teachers' questionnaires indicate that teachers at campuses not involved in the pilot program questioned the necessity and efficacy of SP4K. Like many Hereford residents, they could not believe that children in their community went hungry in the middle of America's beef capital. They questioned if the program encouraged parental helplessness. Some reportedly worried the backpack was filled with non-nutritious food items even though they had not opened any of the bags. Teachers criticized the program because it contained no fresh fruit or vegetables without knowing if the children had adequate refrigeration or someone to prepare the food. Lastly, some of the teachers reported the program encouraged bad parenting and encouraged poor parents to spend more money on "sins" and not on their children.

Outcomes and Recommendations for Hereford SP4K

An audit of PCS by Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs revealed the agency's utility assistance program had misallocated 1 million dollars through the use of poor accounting practices (Ross, 2012, May 18). PCS agency director, Phyllis Cook, resigned after allegations of backdating invoices were made (Ranaivo, 2012, May 14). SP4K was not implicated in the investigation. However, its members feared the scandal would re-

duce donations and hungry children would pay because of decreased donations. Thus SP4K underwent organizational changes in 2012.

Howell contacted other nonprofit agencies to seek their support. By January, 2013, SP4K's regional system transitioned all accounting and website maintenance to Baptist Community Service (K. Lee, personal interview, September 1, 2012). Furthermore, Howell's work allowed the regional network to join a wider Texas system. This increased the organization's buying power but changed the menu items. One of those items is shelf-stable milk provided by Southwest Dairy Farmers and Elanco Corporation (Wehmhoener, 2012, August 21). The organization's external and internal systems would remain intact. The only thing that would change was the supplier.

At that time, SP4K—Canyon, a sister organization, separated from the regional network. SP4K—Hereford board members also considered becoming an independent agency with its own tax-exempt status because of the PCS scandal and upcoming organizational changes. Lee's investigation determined that leaving the regional SP4K network would force the Hereford program to purchase its food at retail prices or decrease the number of items contained in each bag. The local board decided to remain in the regional coalition.

Both Lee and SP4K board members grew concerned about the Hereford program's organizational structure. Lee was the central figure both in the Hereford program and its link to the regional one. "If I got hit by a bus today, who would feed the kids tomorrow?" Lee asked. In their June 2012 meeting, the board determined they would survive if Lee became ill or left the organization (Lee, 2012, June 25). Cross-training needed to occur so someone would be familiar with daily accounting requirements, obtaining food handling licenses, distribution, and volunteer management. Lee needed to choose between being the Bluebonnet campus coordinator or the district coordinator. She chose to be the district coordinator but also to work closely with campus coordinators so they could assume any responsibility should Lee be unable to do so.

Within 30 months, SP4K—Hereford established itself in the community and obtained seed money that allowed the program to expand and continue. It networked with local businesses, area high school students and organizations, as well as religious groups that provide funds, volunteers, and held community food drives. By joining the regional SP4K group, the Hereford program purchased food at reduced prices. The program's internal

and external organizational structure stabilized itself to a point where it could withstand external program shifts.

SP4K—Hereford established itself in the elementary schools; however, it was not able at the time to expand into the local junior high or high schools. At the school district's 2012 Welcome Back breakfast, the high school football coach, Don Delozier, told the crowd of 800 employees about one of his promising players whose academic and physical abilities started a rapid decline. After several weeks, the player came to him to explain what happened. The working-class family was faced with the choice of housing and feeding everyone or paying for the health care needs of a critically ill family member. They also chose to pay for housing and food for the sick family member. Everyone agreed not to eat at home so every penny could go to saving this family member's life. So, if the player did not eat at school, the student did not eat at all. In the meantime, the player was taking every odd job possible to help pay for unexpected medical needs. School work and football suffered. Junior high and high school teachers were becoming more aware of hunger in their schools because SP4K had increased community awareness and need (K. Lee, personal interview, August 13, 2012).

Until a snack pack program or food pantry is available throughout the Hereford ISD school system, childhood hunger over the weekends will continue unabated. SP4K may not be the appropriate response for upper-level classes because these students are more likely to be embarrassed by receiving SP4K aid. According to Nancy Ramsey (personal interview, February 18, 2012), an Amarillo middle school guidance counselor, once it was perceived that a middle school student was participating in the program, they would often refuse any assistance despite being chronically hungry. The high school football player is one example of how these students may feel about receiving snack packs at school if there was any risk of being seen by their peers. As a result, HISD may open a food pantry in its school that opens after school whereby students can seek assistance during non-school hours. Since these children are older, they would be more mature and capable of cooking simple meals with less risk of hurting themselves or others during preparation. Their anonymity would be protected by having the program open after-hours, and the students would be fed.

SP4K—Hereford should remain in the Panhandle-wide coalition. Their participation with the other groups increases the opportunities to purchase bulk food items from food banks. Moreover, breaking away would result in increased menu changes. To maintain menu and nu-

tritional consistency, SP4K may be required to purchase these items at retail costs. The transition from RFBO to the Texas coalition should not bring substantial change to the local program or the services it provides that it cannot meet its organizational or client needs.

The creation of the locally-controlled board of directors created several long-term benefits. Local board members stated that smaller towns and cities in the Texas Panhandle believe that Amarillo gets all of the attention. Amarillians encourage everyone in their communities to participate so every town benefits. The smaller communities will send their residents to assist. In the end, most of the funds and services remain in Amarillo. The residents believe their efforts to help themselves at home end up helping Amarillo more. The peanut butter drive held at WTAMU along with President Bill Clinton's 2012 visit to campus provide insight. Only four of the 30 volunteers were from Amarillo, yet an estimated 647 jars out of the 870 collected went to Amarillo schools.

Having a Hereford-based board of directors overcomes several obstacles. PCS and Baptist Community Services are based in Amarillo. PCS has a local office in Hereford and there are several Baptist churches in Hereford; therefore, opposition to having the financial accounts operated out of an Amarillo organization decreased because of their presence in Hereford. But the creation of and direct involvement of community members in this community project provided local legitimacy. The director serves at the pleasure of the board. The program director reports and implements all board recommendations and they are largely responsible for directing its school coordinators to train across job duties. In this way, no child goes hungry because of a coordinator's temporary inability to pick up and distribute food.

SP4K-Hereford needs to continue its community outreach and media presence. Volunteers saved the program almost \$30,000 during its first 30 months. Food drives saved an average of \$577.03 in monthly costs to SP4K. A comparison of program donations and publicity shows that every month the organization was featured positively in local or regional news, food and financial donations as well as volunteer hours increased. On average, these donations peaked within 30 days following the coverage. However, donations decreased within 60 to 90 days following the coverage.

Conclusion

SP4K-Hereford, like the national program, started in an elementary school with teachers, parents, and nonprofit organizations working together to solve childhood hunger in their communities. These teachers listening to an NPR broadcast and talking about the problem in their classrooms led to the creation of a pilot program in their school. The project has now expanded into a regional organization that is combatting hunger throughout the Texas Panhandle. The Hereford ISD program serves as a model for rural schools interested in establishing anti-hunger programs in their districts.

The internal and external organizations illustrate how food can be ordered, shipped, and distributed to schools and students every Friday afternoon during the academic year. As the organization gained community awareness, nonprofit organizations and religious groups donated food and money. It was this community support that led to large corporate funding and program stability. While year-end evaluations did not provide parental and student opinions, their expressions of gratitude and worry throughout the program provides supportive data to show how the program positively impacted their lives. Teacher evaluations among schools where the pilot project did not exist suggest that the weakest link between the recipients and supporters were the teachers. Much like the community as a whole prior to the establishment of the program and its media exposure, the teachers thought hunger did not exist in the community or was the result of negligent parents. They also thought the program's food was less-than-nutritious. Additional training programs and the presence of an on-campus coordinator help to eliminate false, preconceived notions about hunger in rural communities. The essay concludes with recommendations for the continuation of the program that will assist other school-based, anti-hunger programs located in rural communities. SP4K-Hereford may not have changed the planet, but it has changed the world for hungry kids attending the Hereford elementary schools.

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Note

1. The occurrences considered a media coverage or a community presentation are: 1) October 2010 presentation to Hereford Lions Club; 2) Gonzales's outreach to create a Hereford-based board of directors; 3) Lee's live interview on KPAN, a Hereford radio station on Tuesday, February 8, 2011; 4) April 2011 food drive hosted by First Federal Bank in Hereford; 5) publication of "Snack Pak 4 Kids program seeks community support" in Hereford Brand on April 8, 2011; 6) Amarillo's KAMR-TV report on Hereford's SP4K program on November 3, 2011; 7) November 2011 food

drive hosted by Happy State Bank; 8) Hereford Brand mentions SP4K as a community group; 9) community outreach to Terry Caviness and Caviness Beef for financial support after school children were found eating out of garbage at nearby Wolcott Elementary School; 10) Hereford Brand article by C. E. Hanna published on December 20, 2011; and 11) WTAMU encourages residents to donate jars of peanut butter to support SP4K region-wide as part of former President Bill Clinton's visit through the university's Distinguished Lecture Series (L. Gonzales, personal communication, October 3, 2012; Hanna, 2011, December 20; K. Lee, personal communication, October 3, 2012; Starling, 2011, April 8).

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