

The Giving Place: A Central Illinois Food Pantry Addresses Food Insecurity

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Abstract

Food insecurity has been a long-standing problem in the United States for decades. Government programs such as SNAP (formally known as food stamps), food pantries, and non-profit organizations help, but still leave millions of people hungry. This has been made worse by the pandemic as workers are being laid off during these hard times. Problems with the food supply chain have also affected access to food even for people who are not technically food insecure. In the early days of the pandemic, grocery stores struggled to keep their shelves full, and established limits on how much each customer could purchase. It has been nearly a full year since the Covid-19 pandemic began. While many have faced uncertainty and hardships during this time, those who live in poverty continue to ask whether they can afford food for their families. This poster explores how The Giving Place, a small pantry in Tolono, IL, has been assisting families and individuals with food insecurity as the pandemic marches on.

Objectives

The objective of this research was to look at the Giving Place and how it helps families living in Tolono, IL with their food insecurities as they have struggled and continue to struggle through the Covid-19 pandemic. Another objective was to look at the number of families that were served during the pandemic and compare those numbers to the numbers served prior to the pandemic.

Research Methods

When thinking about how the Giving Place helps people who live in Tolono deal with food insecurity, the first thing I did was conduct personal surveys. I asked families who came to the Giving Place to receive food, "What it means to have a food pantry in town that was able to supply them with necessary food for their kids as well as their individual selves?". Another method I used when looking at how the Giving Place helps people with their food insecurities is by looking at the families they had served prior to the pandemic and seeing if the number of families had increased by comparing the prior number of people to the number of families served currently during the pandemic.

References

1. Downen, D. (2019). *2019 Food Pantry*. The Giving Place.
<C:\Users\Brandon\OneDrive\Documents\2019 FOOD PANTRY.xlsx>
2. Downen, D. (2020) *2020 Food Total Served*. The Giving Place.
<C:\Users\Brandon\OneDrive\Documents\2020 FOOD TOTAL SERVED.xlsx>

Results

As expected with the surveys conducted, it was unanimously in favor of The Giving Place being a great option for food insecure people living in Tolono, IL. Most of the answers provided had something to do with the local location of the food pantry with one family saying "It is nice to have a place where I know that myself and two children can have a reliable source of food that isn't expired and come from trusted sources. The staff are so sweet and kind to me and other families that come here looking for food that we otherwise can't afford due to being laid off, not having enough money, or don't have cars or families to help during these times of uncertainty" (Anonymous, personal interview, March 17, 2021).

As for looking at the number of individuals and families served prior to the pandemic it was definitely a lot closer than what I was originally predicting. Looking over at the line graph it shows the data for the families served during 2019 and compares it to families served in 2020 with the red line representing families in 2019 and the blue line representing families in 2020. By looking at the graph it becomes apparent that in 2019 the number of families would stagnate every two or three months and for 2020 the number of families would gradually increase as the pandemic started and the families in Tolono were given the "Stay at Home" orders. This hit families especially hard in the fall as the numbers from August onwards would continue to climb until it reached nearly sixty families.

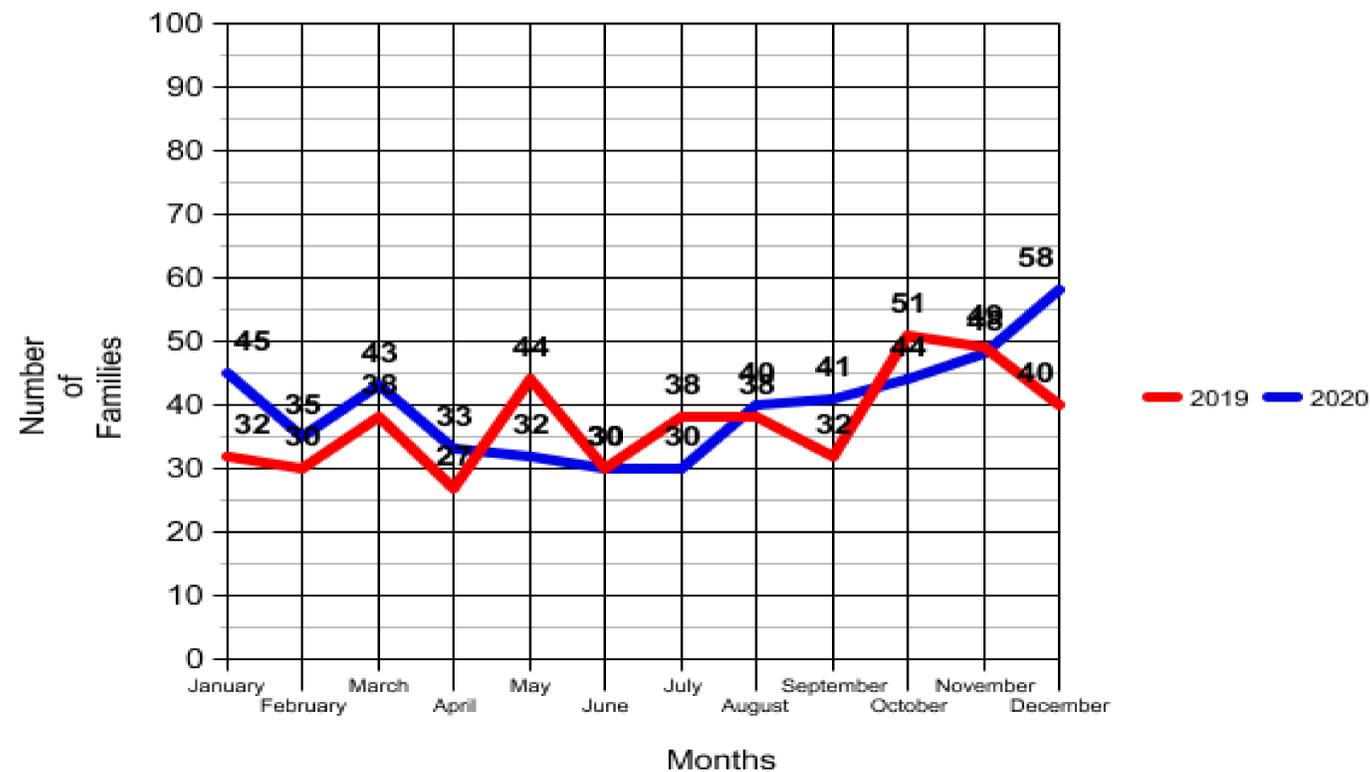
I chose to do these two years as this is the most current data that is available from The Giving Place when I inquired about the number of families they served. This data also serves well as it looks at the pandemic when it was in full swing as well as look at data that was prior to the pandemic as a referencing point.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

To conclude, the pandemic hit the families in Tolono hard. With over two dozen families needing help with their food insecurity every month after the pandemic began. The people in Tolono are grateful for The Giving Place, as it provides a local food pantry that is close to them and doesn't require much more than the family needing to live in Tolono.

I would like to thank The Giving Place for the information provided about the number of families they served as well as the families that took the time to answer my questionnaire when asking them.

Giving Place Families served



The Giving Place

