

## Relationship Depth in Community Food Security: Lessons from a Case Study of the Campus Kitchens Project

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*This article presents an instrumental case study of one branch of the nationally networked food recovery and redistribution program, the Campus Kitchens Project (CKP). Inquiry is focused on developing a better understanding of the relationship between this CKP branch and its community partners, as well as recognizing the potential for CKP branches to engender robust relationships between Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) and host communities. By utilizing a community food security (CFS) perspective, implications are drawn as to the potential for CKP to exemplify CFS values. Recommendations are made for the organization's progressive growth and the potential role for social work education and practice.*

*Keywords:* food security, community/civic engagement, university-community partnerships

### Introduction

Attention to the wasteful practices of the dominant industrial food system has exploded in recent years. Films such as *Dive!* (Seifert, 2008) have captured the interest of the American public. More recently, the USDA and the EPA announced a national “Food Waste Challenge,” which “provides a platform to assess and disseminate information about the best practices to reduce, recover, and recycle food loss and waste” (USDA, n.d.). Basically, food waste *feels* wrong, because, as Jonathon Bloom suggests in *American Wasteland* (2010), “frugality is embedded in our history, and thus, our character” (p. 77). Perhaps most offensive is the glaring disconnect between the growing rates of food insecurity and the vast amounts of edible food discarded daily. With 14.5% of all households in the United States meeting criteria for food insecurity, and even higher rates for households with children, single-parent-headed, and racial and ethnic minorities (Weinfeld et al., 2014), food insecurity qualifies as a major social welfare concern.

A growing number of young adults are targeting both food recovery and food insecurity through involvement in a program known as the Campus Kitchens Project (CKP). Beginning in 2001, participants at the first CKP branch, located at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri, began collecting food, which would otherwise be wasted, from campus and community food service locations. The food is brought to a central kitchen location, and transformed from what would have been landfill-bound into nutritious meals that are distributed to community members in need (Campus Kitchens Project, n.d.). Since that time, the CKP network has expanded this model, expanding to include over 50 locations at IHEs (as well as a few high schools) around the United States (Campus Kitchens Project, n.d.).

CKP branches are dependent on community partners, both food donors and meal recipients, to actualize the organizational mission. With their institutionalized connection to their host IHE and their ability to create long-term community partnerships, CKP branches are ideal for exploring questions about the role of higher education in systems change. Additionally, CKP offers unique opportunities for social work programs to provide students with field experiences that call for systems-thinking, reciprocal community interaction, and public policy knowledge.

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationships between one established branch of the Campus Kitchens Project and its community partners. Specifically, this article responds to the research question: How are relationships constructed and maintained between representatives of the CKP branch and representatives of community partner agencies? The in-depth examination of one well-established branch offers findings of instrumental value for both existing and developing CKP branches, promoting conscious attention to the role of community partners in goal construction and achievement. Given that CKP offers unique opportunities for social work programs to provide students with field experiences that call for systems-thinking, reciprocal community interaction, and public policy knowledge, connections are also made between the values of Campus Kitchens and those of social work practice. Direction for future practice through these connections are explored.

### **Literature Review: IHE-Community Partnerships**

Food rescue and redistribution programs such as CKP have the potential to shift thinking around food security interventions through their attention to addressing the food system, local needs, and local resources. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) are currently involved in these types of efforts (Kobayashi, Tyson, & Abi-Nader, 2010; Pothukuchi, 2007), and through awareness and leveraging of their internal resources, they have the potential to make even greater contributions to food security. In this section, I discuss the historical social contract between societies and IHEs, consider model principles of partnerships, review examples of IHE-community partnerships, and explore the challenges IHEs may encounter when attempting to develop community partnerships.

### **Role of Higher Education in Addressing Social Problems**

Over the past century, IHEs have increasingly taken on the role of addressing social ills such as food insecurity. In the classic text *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey (1916) established the connection between advancing one's education and contributing to one's community. Suggesting that democracy depends on its citizenry to engage in research and formulate ideas for the betterment of society, Dewey (1916) alluded to the notion of a social contract between higher education and the larger society. Similarly, Marullo and Edwards (2000) argued that partnerships between IHEs and communities have the potential to act as a "vehicle for transforming society to make it more just" (p. 897).

One of the most influential contemporary voices advocating for increasing engagement and community-mindedness in IHEs was the late Ernest Boyer. During his tenure as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boyer (1996) called for a transformation of academic life toward what he termed "a scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1996, p. 11). Challenging academia to reconnect with its democratic and social justice-oriented mission, Boyer's offerings have become a model of scholarship and encouraged academics to balance research, teaching, and service. The model has been influential in increasing the relevancy of the college or university to the community, including evaluation research and service-learning teaching methodologies. CKP branches serve as examples of one tactic utilized by IHEs to respond to community needs and fulfill this implicit social contract.

How such contracts develop, and what makes these relationships successful, has been one

important focus of organizations such as Campus Compact and Campus Community Partnerships for Health (CCPH). Since its inception in 1985, Campus Compact has provided structure and support to IHEs pursuing civic engagement (Campus Compact, n.d.). In addition to service-oriented activities, Campus Compact affiliates also demonstrate that IHE-community partnerships have the potential to contribute to other critical issues.

In their 2012 report entitled, *Engaged Learning Economies: Aligning Civic Engagement and Economic Development in Community-Campus Partnerships*, Campus Compact authors identified key principles that promote this type of change-oriented partnership: (1) establishing democratic partnerships, (2) aligning campus goals, policies, and practices, and (3) building community capacity (Wittman & Crews, 2012). Through detailed case study accounts, the authors aim to increase understanding around how each principle can be enacted. For example, building community capacity acknowledges that IHEs must “integrate regional interests into development projects; and [ensure that] community partners have the capacity to absorb and utilize knowledge” (Wittman & Crews, 2012, p. 17).

Another organization interested in strengthening IHE-community relationships is Campus Community Partnership for Health (CCPH). They offer a set of guiding principles for forming and growing what they term “authentic partnerships” (CCPH, 2013). Similar to the Campus Compact principles, CCPH also underscores the notion of capacity building, stating, “[p]artnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners” (CCPH, 2013, paragraph 2). One central theme within these two organization’s partnership principles is the message of growth: authentic, change-oriented partnerships allow for—and prioritize—growth. The partnership evolves and adapts, characterized by the ability to see and then address additional needs and issues that arise or evolve beyond the original concept.

### **Food (In)Security and the Potential Role of Social Work Programs**

Through a growing number of service-learning courses as well as the signature pedagogy of field education, social work programs are deeply connected to a multiplicity of community organizations. These existing connections, combined with the service and social justice goals of the profession, position social work programs particularly well to address food security issues. Housed in IHEs, social work education intends to socialize students into the profession, including its history, mission, and goals. While practicing social workers routinely interact with people experiencing food insecurity, the academic discourse from the social work discipline has generally been both limited and narrow, and attention to food recovery is largely absent. Most commonly, social work research addresses food insecurity through investigation of people’s experience, examining food insecurity exclusively or as it connects to another issue or “risk-factor,” such as disability (Parish, Rose, Grinstein-Weiss, Richman, & Andrews, 2008), addiction (Kaufman, Isralowitz, & Reznik, 2005), environmental crisis (Pyles, Kulkarni, & Lein, 2008), or poverty (Bisgaier & Rhodes, 2011). Social work research also approaches food security issues through investigation of both public and private food assistance programs (Bartfeld & Ahn, 2011; Lombe, Mansoo, & Nebbitt, 2009). A common point of attention in these studies are the negative consequences of food insecurity on physical and mental health; therefore, recommendations for social workers include increased attention to vulnerable groups and policy advocacy. The limitations of social work research may impact the capacity for the educational arm of the profession to involve students in creative interventions.

An area less explored by social work research is the potential for food recovery efforts in addressing the consequences of food insecurity. Food waste and recovery has garnered practical attention from the anti-hunger sphere as well as research attention from multiple disciplinary perspectives (Bloom, 2010; Caswell, 2008; Chen, Romano, & Zhang, 2010; Jones, 2005a-f). In addition to the nearly 50 branches of CKP, over 150 food recovery organizations operate in the US and Canada (Weinfeld et al., 2014). Collection may focus on field gleaning or on warehouse-level, grocery-level, or prepared food waste from the restaurant and foodservice industry.

Although academic discourse and research attention to food recovery from the social work discipline may be lagging, opportunities abound for involving students in this work. Social work students benefit from both conceptual and practice-based exposure to food insecurity through the signature pedagogy of field education combined with their required coursework that underscores the profession's commitment to social justice and anti-poverty programming. In the next section, an examination of the Community Food Security (CFS) perspective demonstrates undeniable congruence with social work values, and reveals the potential for food recovery programs such as CKP to contribute to the vision for a justice-oriented food system.

### **Community Food Security (CFS) and Social Work Professional Values**

Scholars across disciplines employ CFS language and values in their research, demonstrating both the relevance and breadth of the CFS perspective (Jacobson, 2007; Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996; Hamm & Bellows, 2003; Sullivan-Catlin, 2002). Anderson and Cook (1999) suggested “three streams of practice and disciplinary orientation” (p. 144) that demonstrate the interdisciplinary base of CFS: community nutritionists and educators; progressive agricultural researchers and grassroots activists; and anti-hunger and community development researchers and activists. These influences are reflected in CFS's values, as outlined by Fisher (1999):

- Focusing on the needs of low-income populations;
- Recognizing that lasting food security is based on a variety of circumstances including sustainable agriculture and a healthy environment;
- Encouraging both local food production and consumption of locally grown foods;
- Emphasizing community self-reliance and decreased dependence on emergency food assistance, including employment security, access to food retailers, etc.;
- Creating a democratic and community-responsive food system dependent on stable local agriculture and reconnecting people and their food;
- Acknowledging that a variety of systems and perspectives informing food security means ensuring representatives from these perspectives have a voice.

These values provide a framework of priorities. In a similar manner, examination of the core professional values and the associated principles of social work practice demonstrates a clear convergence with CFS goals.

Serving as “the foundation for social work’s unique purpose and perspective” (NASW, 2008, paragraph 3), the constellation of core professional values are: (1) service, (2) social justice, (3) dignity and worth of the person, (4) importance of human relationships, (5) integrity, and (6) competence. Each of these values is associated with an explanatory ethical principle, the purpose of which is not to prescribe rigid rules for social work practice, but to balance “the context and complexity of the human experience” (NASW, 2008, paragraph 3). As Finn and Jacobson (2003) articulate in their “Just Practice Framework,” social workers must continually evaluate interventions and practice norms to assess their congruence with core professional values. The major concepts of CFS have the capacity to serve a similar purpose for food assistance and food security interventions. In sharp contrast to the assumption that individuals experiencing food insecurity are deficient in some way, the CFS perspective on the food system as a whole implicate the industrial organization and economic conceptualization of food as the culprits of food insecurity. Although Community Food Security (CFS) values were not intentionally constructed as an extension of social work’s core professional values, the illumination of the parallel connections between the two sets of ideas demonstrates that CFS projects are strongly positioned to receive support from the social work community. Additionally, these values underscore the importance of human relationships and highlight the need for a just food system that values all voices and perspectives while emphasizing environmental sustainability and community self-reliance.

### **Designing an Investigation of a Campus Kitchen Project**

This section outlines the design and methodology of this particular study. With an emphasis on context, embeddedness, and relationships, a case study approach was a good fit for investigating a CKP branch (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Since this study of the selected CKP branch is based in part on the belief that an in-depth knowledge about this organization will “accomplish something other than understanding this particular [case]” (Stake, 1995, p. 3), the present case study falls within the instrumental realm. Through close investigation of the operations, structure, and community contributions, the findings from a CKP case study have the potential to contribute to CFS theory and discourse around the community relationships developed by institutions of higher education (IHE). In congruence with the premise of an instrumental case study, the findings from this research were provided to the CKP National Office.

This case study covered six weeks at the case site while observing, shadowing, conducting interviews, and gathering relevant documents. Use of such ethnographic methods allowed for exploration into these shared patterns of meaning, and deepened the understanding of what makes the case unique. Data collection methods were selected that best responded to the research question. The six-week observation period spent pursuing a better understanding of partnership depth allowed sufficient accumulation of information to provide a detailed picture of the nature of multiple partnerships. Combining these observations with interviews of both CKP members and representatives of community partner agencies helped to validate the impressions of the researcher and triangulate the findings related to the construction and maintenance of community partner relationships.

### **Defining the Case**

The process for selecting the case study site was purposive and multi-faceted. Information

included input from CKP's National Office, findings from pilot survey research, feasibility, and learning opportunities. Stake suggested selecting cases that "are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying generalizations" (Stake, 1995, p. 4). In line with these ideas, this research focused on one CKP branch at a private, mid-sized, urban-based university. Key opportunities available in the selected case site included an established CKP organization active for approximately 8 years, the presence of diverse food recovery and collection practices with locations on and off campus as well as food bank membership, and the existing community partnerships with eleven different agencies receiving meals.

## Data Collection

In accordance with ethical research practices, the Human Subjects Committee of an Institutional Review Board approved this study. Data collection took place over a six-week period in the fall of 2011.

**Observations.** Observation location varied, and included dozens of opportunities to witness interactions between CKP branch representatives and community partners. While shadowing the CKP branch coordinator and student volunteers on meal deliveries, I was able to observe exchanges between CKP representatives and all 11 of its community partners, in many cases witnessing multiple encounters with partners. In light of the stated organizing research question, I followed a protocol for each observation session, focusing attention on interactions that provided information about relationships, roles, and values (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

**Interviews.** I conducted 19 individual interviews with seven students, one non-student volunteer, four University officials, six community partners, and the CKP branch's coordinator. Engaging in a week-long period of observation prior to beginning any individual or focus group interviews allowed me to reference field observations during those conversations. I purposefully sampled interviewees to ensure adequate representation across stakeholder groups (Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Roulston, 2010). The interviews were semi-structured, with guiding questions directing the conversation towards an understanding of partnerships and relationships between representatives of CKP and its community partners. The need for data saturation (Charmaz, 2006) was considered as recruitment progressed, and interviews concluded as saturation was achieved. Pseudonyms were assigned to all interviewees.

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted two focus groups. The first was with a group of 12 student volunteers, and the second was with a group of two representatives from two community partner recipient agencies. The student focus group lasted just over one hour, while the community partner group lasted approximately 30 minutes. Utilizing a member-checking strategy where participants inspected flip-chart notes at the end of the session, participants confirmed that all of the main ideas and discussions had been captured, ensuring the accuracy of documentation (Jacobson, Pruitt-Chapin, & Rugeley, 2009).

## Limitations

Every research endeavor has limitations inherent to its design and methods. Foremost, qualitative case studies aim for particularization (Stake, 1995) of the case; therefore, findings are not generalizable in the statistical sense. The study's conceptual framework and specific purpose shaped—and therefore limited—what data were gathered; findings and conclusions stem from a CFS

lens, which values an interconnected, participatory, and justice-oriented food system. Because of the CKP branch's food security mission and its relationships with numerous community agencies, I selected a CFS conceptual framework as a good fit. However, neither the National CKP Office nor the case study branch explicitly state CFS goals as a focus of organizational mission.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Constant comparison was a key tool in the analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Due to the level and types of data, I opted to utilize Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), specifically the Atlas.ti program, to assist with organization and management, as well as cultivate closeness with the data (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Yin, 2009). Thematic analysis began with a holistic approach to coding. While researchers conducting instrumental case studies should be alert to the potential for valuable information that requires direct interpretation to emerge, Stake (1995) viewed categorical aggregation as more important to the analysis of instrumental cases. The correspondence method can assist the researcher with a search for meaning based on "consistency within certain conditions" (Stake, 1995, p. 78). These patterned conditions or behaviors help generate codes, which may stem from preconceived, etic issues, or may be constructed by the researcher directly from the data. Because of the instrumental nature of the case, I used categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995) to merge my sources of data, thereby offering findings about the case based on a convergence of information. Upon multiple iterations of data perusal, codes became properties of categories and sub-categories.

In accordance with notions of "dependability" and "confirmability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301), efforts were made to ensure that study findings reflected the data. I employed the following techniques: data source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Merriam, 2009). Member checking and peer review, as well as thick, rich description, were key strategies in building internal and external validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). Member-checking of interview transcripts acknowledges that even verbatim transcripts are a construction of the researcher (Riessman, 2008) and promotes reliability by ensuring accuracy from the standpoint of the interviewee. Participants who took part in individual interviews were provided a copy of their transcript and given a three-week period to communicate any issues or changes. Findings underwent review by experienced qualitative researchers (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2002). In support of external validity, thick, rich descriptions provided the reader with vivid detail from which they could base comparisons to other cases or situations (Merriam, 2009). Finally, an audit trail was used, allowing for transparency of the decision points (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Findings: Community Partner Relationships**

Relationships with community service agencies comprise an essential dimension of CKP branch operations; it is through these organizations that food distribution occurs. The purpose of this article is to examine the relationships between one established CKP branch and its community partners, guided by the research question: How are relationships constructed and maintained between representatives of the CKP branch and representatives of community partner agencies? During the six weeks I spent with the CKP branch, 11 different organizations received food deliveries. Nine of these agencies experienced regularly scheduled deliveries, while two interacted on

a more intermittent basis. Within this case study, I found that relationships, including face-to-face and other communication efforts, between CKP representatives and their community partnerships lacked depth and were characterized by superficial interactions.

## Types of Partnerships

The majority of community partnerships pre-date both the current CKP branch coordinator and current student volunteers; however, two community agencies have created partnerships with the CKP branch since the current coordinator began her tenure. For these more recent partnerships, relationship construction has primarily occurred between the coordinator and representatives of the community agency or organization. The path to partnership appeared to be influenced by two major forces. Either they must appeal to the sensibilities of the CKP branch coordinator, or they must approach the CKP branch and request meal service.

Because the long-standing partnerships reveal the most about the CKP branch's relationship to the community, detailed attention will be given to explicating these partnerships. I constructed the category "Inertia-Bound" to encapsulate the relationships between the CKP branch and its community partners, with the properties of "Food Quality" and "Delivery Issues" for elucidating the content of these on-going relationships.

### Inertia-Bound

Primarily, these community partnerships are maintained regardless of changes in staff and student leadership. Community partners typically receive meals but do not interact with CKP volunteers or staff beyond this exchange. These sites are known as drop-off sites. Three of the 11 community partners are referred to as stay-and-serve or stick-around sites. Because CKP branch representatives interact with the stay-and-serve sites and interface with agency staff and consumers, I will distinguish between stay-and-serve sites and drop-off sites when referring to a community partner. Although qualitative differences between stay-and-serve and drop-off sites exist, both types of partnerships contribute equally to the construction of this category.

Once partnerships are underway, changes and modifications are infrequent. The two properties of "Food Quality" and "Delivery Issues" explain the maintenance of and communication with ongoing community partners.

**Food quality.** Data included in this property illustrates that both the CKP branch and its community partners concentrated communication on food-related issues, including food needs, allergies, and preferences. While food quality provides a starting point for these relationships, a critical lens may reveal that such a focus unintentionally limits the pursuit of deeper partnerships.

During the student volunteer focus group, multiple participants brought up food quality as a point of pride. One student participant commented, "We don't just serve Oliver Twist slop." The other students agreed that providing quality food was important. Several community partners also indicated the quality of the food as a highlight of their relationship. One community partner indicated during the focus group how the healthier food had been a positive for the members of his group, stating, "Our agency used to get the guys what they asked for on our budget—pizza or whatever. But now they [CKP] bring fresh fruit, spring salad . . . at first they [the group members] resisted but now they are more open."

Community partners overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with food quality, and they

typically indicated they felt comfortable with discussing concerns or needs related to the food. One community partner shared how they were impressed by the CKP branch's interest in providing her group with such high-quality foods. She explained:

[CKP] has asked me, "What are some of the requests?" They had questions about families eating the green salad, I can't even remember, one day [they] sent over a like a dozen things that could go in the salad—it was amazing—and the families love that, they want that, if it's green and fresh.

Though delivering high-quality food was clearly a priority, stay-and-serve sites exhibited some advantages in terms of their relationships and the resulting capacity to communicate their food preferences directly. Of the three stay-and-serve sites, one was an entirely student-run delivery shift. This twice-weekly delivery, known as "Kids Café," involved student volunteers spending a couple of hours with pre-school and elementary school-aged children while serving them an afternoon meal. Multiple student volunteers shared that, with Kids Café in particular, they considered the nutritional needs of those receiving the meals. One student comment suggests that creating quality meals is a way to demonstrate thoughtfulness towards those receiving the meals:

I think it's the nourishment, because a lot of times the people who we're giving the food to, they don't have the opportunity to have fruits and vegetables all the time, cause healthy food is expensive. So, [I take pride in] the fact that we try and incorporate all the different parts of the food pyramid, [like] dairy and protein and starch.

Other students similarly indicated focusing on increasing the vegetables and general healthiness of the Kids Café meals while still keeping the meals appealing to the kids receiving them. Though direct communication has its privileges, drop-off sites also shared their comfort with providing feedback regarding the food. During our interview, one (drop-off site) community partner commented:

[W]e just see them [CKP branch representatives] once a week when they drop the food off, check in with them, if there's anything they've thought of, like a month ago she [CKP branch Coordinator] asked that we check with the families to see if there are any dietary restrictions or anything like that, to help them out. Otherwise it's a pretty basic [exchange], just telling us what there is. And if we have any requests, we feel comfortable talking to them about that.

While communication around food quality and needs is an essential aspect of communication, I observed that these issues dominated the relationships between CKP representatives and their community partner agencies. An understanding of how this reliance on food quality issues limited communication and relationship-building was evident during an afternoon visit to a drop-off site. When the CKP Coordinator was unexpectedly called away from the program, I had the opportunity to ride along with the Leadership Team (LT) member who stepped in to take over the drop-off deliveries for that day. In this instance, checking in with community partners regarding food quality was the maximum interaction and something done only with those who were familiar contacts. The following excerpt from that afternoon's field notes speaks to the limited nature of communication:

We arrived at the first drop-off site. [The LT member driving] said, “I am not sure which house to go into—I forget which one I went to last week” and I tell her [the Coordinator] always goes into the house on the left . . . I lead the way, as [the LT member] appears unsure of where the kitchen is. We drop the food . . . Back in the car and heading to the next drop-off location, I ask about feedback from community partners—how it works and what she has heard. She tells me that “usually they’ll just tell us if it’s really bad. Places I know better, I’ll ask them how everything was, but [that place], I didn’t—I have not seen the same person there twice.”

In my observer comments, I noted concern that I seemed more familiar with this site than a two-year student LT member did. In this case, a lack of familiarity impacted communication about even the most superficial of topics.

**Delivery issues.** The second construct, delivery issues, demonstrates that outside of specific communication about the food itself, interaction between the CKP branch and its community partners continues to stay close to the established function of this relationship: meal distribution. Closely related to the focus on food quality are the non-food related delivery issues about which community partners and CKP branch representatives also regularly communicated. A representative of one drop-off site explained an example of the type of delivery issues regularly cited by community partners. During our interview, she shared the following information:

Eight meals is usually good, but if we for some reason know that we’re going to have an increase in participants, we’ll just give a call or send an email and it’s never been a problem to adjust the number of meals that we’ve needed.

In my interview with the CKP Coordinator, she cited the number of meals as a prime reason for communication with community partners. She also explained how communication around delivery issues has helped the CKP branch respond to the changing needs and schedules of their community partners, stating:

[W]hen we were checking in with [one of the drop-off sites] that we work with, they were wondering why we bring food when we do. Because they have a fairly new staff person, and so, she [asked] would it be possible to move things around. And so we’re working at in the next couple of weeks, seeing if we can move their delivery around a little bit . . . so it’s more convenient for them, cause we had just been going on inertia.

The recognition that this weekly, high-volume delivery schedule largely resulted from inertia suggests an underlying assumption by the CKP branch that community partners will speak up if their needs change. While many partners indicate they are comfortable doing just that, representatives from at least one stay-and-serve site informed me that, unless the issue was vital, they would rather not make waves. From the point of view of this partner, the CKP branch was giving them something akin to a gift, and she felt uncomfortable levying anything that might be construed as criticism.

When community partners do communicate their needs regarding delivery issues, the CKP branch is responsive. During the community partner focus group, one drop-off site representative

shared her experience of negotiating for the delivery of individual meals versus congregate meals. She explained that the staff of her agency had been receiving their food in bulk form instead of individual meals. Because their agency administered a housing program where all consumers resided in their own apartments, they felt that individual meals would be easier to serve the women, since they could easily take the meal home. Talking with the CKP branch resulted in a smooth transition to individually packaged meals that “worked out better for us.”

As the examples in this section demonstrate, communication around delivery issues is a necessity. However, this narrow range of communication contributes to community partners conceptualizing their role as *recipient* rather than *collaborator*. Interestingly, multiple community partner agencies conveyed openness to and interest in furthering the relationship; however, they were uncertain how to approach such a shift in the partnership purpose.

Throughout my field stay, as evidenced by observations, interviews, and focus groups, the relationships between the CKP branch and its community partners presented as minimal, structured around a narrow view of the role of the CKP branch in the community. Although the perspective of this research frames these findings in terms of limitations, it is important to note that, without exception, community partners expressed a high level of satisfaction.

## Discussion

### Community Partner Relationships Suggest a Limited Conceptualization of the Organization’s Mission

Community partner relationships suggest a limited view of the CKP branch; namely, one that prioritizes the service of meal delivery and shies away from the potential for food recovery to contribute to community food security. My time spent observing and speaking with the majority of the community partners of this CKP branch resulted in one clear conclusion: the community partners are highly satisfied with the service. However, when examining the content and depth of the relationships this CKP has with its partners, issues beyond partner satisfaction emerge. The depth and content of these relationships suggests that this CKP branch’s interpretation of its purpose remains too closely tied to meal distribution to be considered a mission of pursuing food system change. Building enduring, collaborative relationships is not emphasized. The brief, food-focused interaction time is a manifestation of a limited self-concept, which is unintentionally communicated to community partners through their behavior. Interactions remain shallow and the CKP branch is cast as a support service to other organizations, hence limiting its capacity to contribute to CFS-oriented interventions.

### Casting Itself in a Support Role

The self-concept view was succinctly stated by the CKP branch coordinator; “We support what they do.” “They” referred to the community partner agencies. With this remark, the coordinator suggested that CKP is primarily a second-tier character in the missions of its non-profit partners. Obviously, providing meals reduces food costs for the recipient agencies, thereby supporting the respective missions of the community partners. However, by relegating itself to a background role, the CKP branch compromises its ability to approach community partners with a collaborative agenda for food system change. Forming a working relationship, as argued by the Campus Com-

munity Partnership for Health (CCPH) guiding principles, is not the sole characteristic of authentic partnerships. Ideally, strong partnerships will also contain an ability to address new goals over time, build the capacity of both parties, and avoid stagnation through an on-going commitment to communication (CCPH, 2013).

An additional consequence of this self-identified supporting-role position may be an ambiguous understanding of its contributions to food security. Investigations into other community-level food security interventions have noted the difficulty in impacting the food security of participants (Lightman, Herd, & Mitchell, 2008). Because the CKP branch does not assess the food security status of its recipients, its effectiveness remains unknown. Again, the CCPH guiding principles suggest that partnership communication include clarity around the goals of both partners (CCPH, 2013). If reducing food insecurity is a goal of this CKP branch, explicitly naming this goal would allow for the partnership to define and measure impact. Without such clear intentions, outcomes rest on assumptions and are difficult to build upon.

### **Brief Interaction Time**

Findings detailed that the interactions between the CKP branch and its community partners are limited, predominantly focusing on food quality and delivery-related issues. In their discussion of healthy partnerships between campus and community, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) asserted that relationships travel through similar stages and experience similar dynamics to those of the interpersonal realm. In order to maintain a healthy relationship, the authors suggest several tactics, including “develop[ment] and use [of] effective means of gaining regular feedback from community partners and students about the nature of the campus-community partnership (e.g., equity, satisfaction, common goals)” (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002, p. 510). Formation of advisory groups and the development of interdependent goals are also presented as ways to promote healthy campus-community relationships.

The majority of the CKP branch’s community partners receive drop-off donations, and contact time is typically less than 10 minutes. Opportunity for feedback was limited when deliveries constituted the primary source of communication. Again, it is the CFS conceptual framework that shines a critical light on these limited methods of relating. Explicating CFS values, Fisher (1999) stressed that programming and interventions should focus on creating a democratic and community-responsive food system that ensures representation of a variety of systems and individual perspectives. Burns (2007) described an example of one such programming effort in his piece detailing the positive interactions amongst Somali refugees and people of diverse religious traditions in a Denver, Colorado area community garden. Offering an additional contrasting example to the more superficial relationships that characterized the CKP branch’s community partnerships, Jacobson (2007) reported on the process and outcome goals of a Community Food Assessment (CFA) and underscored the role of strong relationships in creating an accessible and just food system. These examples emphasize that, with intentionality and conscious effort, food security interventions can create pathways of communication and contribute to community building.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

In this section I will discuss the practical implications of this research. IHE-community partnerships are complicated; academic research presents one opportunity to critically explore

these relationships and support their progressive growth and staying power.

## Practical Implications

Beyond its implications for CFS as a conceptual framework, the findings of this study have relevance for the CKP National Office and its network as well for social work education and practice. If the CKP National Office is interested in pursuing a CFS-oriented conceptualization of food security, this study suggests several practical applications. First, CKP National may elect to create a protocol for acquainting its branches with CFS concepts and ideals. This could be an aspect of the trainings conducted at the annual new coordinator “boot camp.” The CKP annual conference presents another opportunity to promote CFS ideals to CKP branches. Fisher (1999) articulated a set of values that provide a starting place for discussion among CKP branches. Incentives could also be used for branches to become involved in CFS efforts, with potential activities including sending representatives to food policy councils and linking with community gardens. Such incentives would not have to be monetary; branches could be featured on the organization’s main website, acknowledged at the annual conference, or recognized through other non-monetary means.

Additionally, because of the unique position of CKP branches operating within host IHEs, organizations such as Campus Community Partnerships for Health (CCPH) may be useful if CKP is interested in moving toward a greater reflection of CFS values. CCPH offers 12 guiding principles for IHE-community partnerships that underscore the need for ongoing reflection, communication of evolving priorities, and the potential for IHE-community partnerships to contribute to capacity building (CCPH, 2013). Applying these guidelines to CKP could provide a structure that reminds branches to reflect on the goals of partnership and how collaborations can grow beyond initial plans.

This study also has potential to inform the social work profession and social work education. Because operations are based primarily at IHEs, social work programs are a natural fit to support and connect with CKPs. Social work students, via class projects, service-learning partnerships, or BSW and MSW field placements, have the potential to contribute a perspective that stems from systems thinking. Students pursuing social work receive training in a wide variety of approaches to social change—from policy to interviewing skills—that could push the CKP organization to more fully reflect CFS values.

Similarly, connections between CKP and social work researchers would highlight the congruence between CFS and the core values of the profession. Moreover, involving social work with CKP would broaden the base of professional research related to hunger and food insecurity, which have predominantly focused on individual and group experiences (Kaufman, Isralowitz, & Reznik, 2005; Parish, et al., 2008; Pyles, Kulkarni, & Lein, 2008) or well-established interventions such as National School Breakfast Program or SNAP (Bartfeld & Ahn, 2011; Lombe, Mansoo, & Nebbitt, 2009). Because CKP provides an example of a non-traditional food security intervention, it contributes to the emerging body of social work literature stemming from a critical perspective (Freedman & Bess, 2011; Hazra, 2009; Kaiser, 2011; Jacobson, 2007; Jacobson & Rugeley, 2007; Jacobson, Pruitt-Chapin, & Rugeley, 2009). The various aspects of large-scale food assistance programs that are the primary focus of social work research have not yielded a significant reduction in food insecurity rates (Gibson-Davis & Foster, 2006; Huffman & Jensen, 2008; Wilde, 2007). This study contributes to areas where more information is needed: the impact, challenges, and potential of community-level programming.

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