

Syracuse
HUNGER
Project

Executive Report

Presentation to the Community

April 23rd 2004

Text by:

Dale Johnson, Executive Director,

Samaritan Center

and

Don Mitchell, Chair, Department of Geography,

Syracuse University

Maps prepared under the direction of:

Jane Read, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Syracuse
University

CONTENTS

Introduction

The Geography of Hunger

Notes on the Mapping Process

Maps (see accompanying document)

Findings and Recommendations

Acknowledgement of Participants (see accompanying document)

Introduction to the Syracuse Hunger Project

Dale Johnson
Executive Director, Samaritan Center

The Syracuse Hunger Project began in the fall of 2003 as an initiative of the Samaritan Center, a hot meal program serving the hungry at the center of Syracuse's downtown. The Samaritan Center and its Board had tried for some time and without notable success to try to describe the changing needs for emergency food services and the resources available to fight hunger in the City. Many conversations had been undertaken between various staffers of anti-hunger agencies and government agencies, but at best, people working in the hunger field had a clear idea only of what was happening on their own blocks and in their own programs. There was little that had been done on a collaborative, community-wide basis to collect this information.

At the same time, all of the hunger-related agencies reported increasing demand for emergency food assistance. Numbers of free meals continued to grow. Pantry visits increased, and at many pantries, there was a sense that the assistance available was running very close to the exhaustion point. Requests for baby formula and diapers have continued to go unfilled. At different points, the system seemed to be bumping up against hard limits, and yet there no recently completed or commonly available city-wide picture of local hunger. We needed a view from 50,000 feet.

Last fall, the Board of the Samaritan Center, with funding from the Fred J. Harder Foundation, authorized the initiation of the Syracuse Hunger Project. Tim Glisson, having had wide-ranging experience in the local not-for-profit, government and media sectors, was hired as the program director. The Project began with an expectation that all of the various entities involved in the local fight against hunger could learn much more by collecting and sharing information and data in a single local database. It was also expected that the inclusion of SU's Geography Department in the Project would add both technological sophistication and professional expertise to the process of presenting and analyzing the information collected.

Between all of the locally based pantries and feeding programs, the various governmental social service offices, and the wide array of human service agencies and programs, we found that we were dealing with a highly fragmented spectrum of programs and entities that had never been examined (and had never been intended to be considered) as a coherent and integrated system for addressing the local emergency food needs of a highly diverse population. It was also apparent that unless all of these various parts could be assembled and analyzed simultaneously, we would not be able to get a clear picture of all the interrelated issues and problems that are manifested here. Attempting to bring all of this information and expertise together was therefore no small task.

Governance of the Project came from a steering committee, a voluntary group of interested parties from the not-for-profit, government and academic worlds. Meetings

were ordinarily held every two weeks, generally arranged with the generous hospitality of the Salvation Army. In the periods between meetings, Tim Glisson was in charge of communicating with all the various players, locating new collaborative partners and collecting and assembling data. He also was charged with coordinating the delivery of data to the Geography Department at Syracuse University and with working with Professors Mitchell and Read on the production of maps.

Because the understanding was that all participants were equal partners, and all represented agencies were participating voluntarily in the expectation of the potential benefits that this kind of collaboration could provide to them, there was surprisingly little friction. Agencies provided data and information (and leads to other sources of data) as they had the ability, and the Project went forward largely on the momentum of a generous spirit of sharing. Because neither the Syracuse Hunger Project nor the Samaritan Center had any real (or even imaginary) authority, the Project depended both on high levels of trust and on a shared sense of curiosity and possibility about the kinds of findings this kind of initiative might produce.

From the beginning, there were a number of things that we tried to do. Among them were to:

- Collect as much available data as possible and then map it;
- Gather around one table the important players in the hunger field, from the not-for-profit sector, the government agencies, and the local academic institutions;
- Begin a series of thoughtful community-wide discussions about Syracuse hunger;
- Reach a consensus on some basic understandings about improving the provision of services in the hunger field;
- Make recommendations for initiatives in the future using the resources currently available;
- Develop a community of interest among the participants for longer range efforts; and
- Provide maps and map-making expertise as a continuing community resource.

There were also a number of things that the Syracuse Hunger Project deliberately chose NOT to try to do. Among them were NOT to:

- Initiate extensive new research projects without having a commitment for the all of the hours and expertise required;
- Direct or attempt to direct the activities of any of the agencies or offices involved;
- Elicit information from hunger agency clients directly;
- Criticize the efforts of anyone working on hunger issues in Syracuse;
- Use perceived public policy shortcomings as an excuse for not trying to improve the provision of services using currently available resources.

The Project should be viewed as a work in process. We expect that this is only the beginning of a number of new and useful community efforts. When we began, we were not absolutely certain where the Project would go, believing that once things got started,

it would probably take off in directions that could not be planned in advance. That has proved to be the case, and the results we present today are better because of it.

Three things can now be stated with certainty. One is that the participants have enjoyed both the process and the company of the other participants. While the Project was a lot of work, it was also a lot of fun.

Another certainty is that there is a lot more to learn. I hope you will agree that the maps and report that we present today help to form up better questions and to spark more imagination in new ways that we can use this beginning to improve the way we do things here in Syracuse.

The third point is that these geographers that we have worked with are very useful people, and as a community we would be remiss if we fail to use the powerful capabilities that they have placed at our disposal. More on that will be presented later.

Hopefully, this first phase can become a model for cooperative and collaborative decision-making, not only here in Syracuse, but in other communities as well.

I would now like to present one of our collaborators in this project, Professor Don Mitchell, the Chairman of the Geography Department at Syracuse University.

The Geography of Hunger

Don Mitchell

Chair, Department of Geography, Maxwell School

We all know that hunger in America has a history. It is a history of race and class, and of inequality. It is a history of depression and recession, of the New Deal and its repeal. It is a history of neighborhood abandonment and the flight of capital. It is a history of votes cast and decisions made. It is the history of heroic charity – and of charity’s limits. It is a history of stunted growth, illness, and poor achievement in schools. And it is *not* just the history of the “other America,” as Michael Harrington called the world of poverty in our midst, it is the history of *our* America. It is not just the history of the “other Syracuse;” it is the history of *our* Syracuse.

We also know that hunger has a sociology. It is a sociology described by the strange paradox of an epidemic of obesity living *inside* the house of hunger. It is a sociology described by the fact that merely being *elderly* puts millions at risk of chronic hunger. It is a sociology described by the ghettoizing forces of racism, by what Richard Sennett called the “hidden injuries of class,” and by an America – and a Central New York – in which levels of inequality are now greater than they have ever been. It is a sociology described not only by the heroic efforts of religious communities and other charities, but by the *need* for these heroic efforts.

And we know that there is a politics to hunger. It is a politics defined by struggles over the size and role of welfare, by the power of money, by the way that our industrialized food system operates and who it benefits. It is a politics that often pits suburbs against city, farm against town, and the conflicting rights of citizens with different needs, interests, and opportunities.

But what we don’t realize, at least to the same degree, is that hunger has a *geography*. The history of hunger – and the struggle to ameliorate it – has created a vastly uneven landscape where deep food insecurity can exist cheek by jowl with abundant wealth and comfort. The sociology of hunger helps define a map upon which the threat of hunger, malnutrition and perhaps even starvation clumps together in some neighborhoods and not others, stalks *these* children, but not *those*. The politics of hunger creates a complex topography of access to resources, the right to benefits, and the provision of emergency aid by churches, government agencies, and individual citizens.

This geography of hunger has been created by thousands of decisions, small and large, by whole social movements and the committed intervention of faith-filled

individuals, by government policies, the shifting structures of labor markets, capital abandonment, and just plain neglect.

When we start to pay attention to the geography of hunger something new emerges – new ways of seeing the problem and, we think, new ways of addressing them. For the first time, with the development of Geographic Information Systems and other mapping technologies, we can *really* begin to map hunger – and its amelioration – in all its complexity. GIS allows us to *see* hunger in a new way. And engaging in a *community* mapping of hunger, allows us to collectively appreciate not only the scope and complexity of the problem, but also all that we have done right – and wrong – to address it.

The maps that you will see today – and that will eventually be available to everyone on the Web – begin to accurately depict the uneven topography of hunger in Syracuse. They show neighborhoods where the spectre of acute and chronic hunger lurks, neighborhoods that are well served by the existing social service agencies and churches, and neighborhoods that are not. They show us where kids are at risk, where the elderly are in danger. They show us those areas where all the hundreds of dedicated volunteers and the quiet workers of the government agencies are doing an amazing job of meeting the needs of vulnerable people in our city. And they show where they are not.

By bringing together a range of different kinds of data – from the location of food pantries (and their hours of operation) to census data about income, race, and housing quality, to information about who has access to support for utility bills in the winter, to WIC eligibility and use, to the location of stores selling fresh fruit and vegetables – and by creatively combining them to reveal patterns perhaps not easily seen by the unaided eye, the GIS maps of the Syracuse Hunger Project give us a new view of the landscape of hunger in Syracuse. They also, and very importantly, allow us to ask new questions about hunger in the City. The patterns on the maps allow us to ask:

- Where the location of food pantries is adequate and where it is not, and how that might change in the future
- How the *differential* access to food stamps, WIC, and the like in the city (and county) might contribute to pockets of vulnerability – and what might be done to address that difference in access
- Who becomes more vulnerable to hunger when neighborhood schools and school-based summer programs are closed or cut back for budgetary reasons
- What sort of *structural* forces – the continuing suburbanization of the region, the changing nature of the labor market, the restructuring of welfare provision at the city, county, state and federal levels – determine the nature food insecurity for children, families and the elderly ... and *where*.

These are difficult questions because they are not exclusively or even only “geographical.” They are *political* questions, they are sociological, and they are historical (historical in the sense that the patterns we see on these maps have roots in past policies, past decisions, past neglect, and therefore can be hard to change).

And so the Syracuse Hunger Project has had an additional, and a very important benefit, for the city of Syracuse and for all of Central New York. The maps you will see today are the result of a remarkable – and unprecedented – cooperation between numerous individuals, faith-based institutions, government agencies, and students and faculty at both Le Moyne College and Syracuse University, who all have particular roles to play in Syracuse’s emergency food networks, or specific kinds of knowledge about neighborhoods, charities, and social processes, or specific technical skills. The making of these maps provided a *new* way not only to come together, but to draw on each others ideas, skills, knowledge, and commitment. Making these maps has also convinced us of the need to continue this project, to address the set of recommendations that will be laid out this afternoon, but also to assure we – in the university and the community – continue working together on the social, political, economic and geographic problems that beset us. With the maps as a focus, and with a desire to use the maps as a means to both better understand and better intervene in the problem of hunger in the city, we have all begun to learn again how to pool our talents and energies, to really figure out what needs to be done *now*, what more needs to be known, and how we can begin to *change* the history, the sociology, and the politics of hunger in Syracuse and, finally, to wipe it off the map of the City.

Notes on the Mapping Process

Dale Johnson
Executive Director, Samaritan Center

Before we can wipe hunger off the map, we first have to see where it is on the map. A couple of notes are in order about how the maps were prepared.

Generally, we accepted data from any source that would provide it. Some of the information was collected from local agencies. A good bit was generated from county and state governmental sources, and some came from state-level nonprofit agencies. Much of the basic information came from the latest federal census statistics. One caveat is in order, however, and that is that because the data was collected by different agencies at different times and for different purposes, not all of the information lines up exactly. Some of the maps represent composites of these various data sources and would not necessarily represent a firm accurate picture of a single phenomenon at one specific date or for one specific purpose. The maps do show the data on a consistent basis across the entire city, so that the results will be valid to show comparisons across the various geographic neighborhoods

A second point is that for mapping purposes, there was a great variety of units of measurement. This included census tracts and districts, zip codes and other units of geographic measurement. We have tried to use the smallest areas that we could in order to make the maps as specific as possible, but we had to work at the best levels available to us. Also, there are several parts of the city that are in zip code areas that straddle political boundaries with suburbs. The data for these zip codes thus include areas both inside and outside the city.

What we were able to accomplish represents what we could get done as a first step and with what we had available. There are doubtless other sources of more detailed information available at smaller geographic areas, and as needs are presented for analysis at higher levels of specificity, a more thorough search can be made for other data sources. What we present today is a sampling of what is possible, and as we go into the future with more specific projects, we should be able to achieve higher levels of particularity.

One final note – a significant part of the work of the Syracuse Hunger Project's was performed by students. The maps that you will be seeing today are largely the work product of the students of Professor Jane Read's undergraduate GIS class. The maps are the result of a long semester of work, and a lot of direct collaboration with the managers of the Syracuse Hunger Project and with members of the steering committee.

Similarly, much of the most recent information that we have solicited from local pantries was produced by a survey prepared by Professor Brenda Kirby and conducted by an undergraduate sociology class of Professor Frank Ridzi, both from LeMoyne College. The students there conducted their interviews at several of the various local pantries and

then collated the results. This contribution was also important to what we can report today.

The contributions of these students deserve this community's gratitude. It is fair to say that without their work, much of what we can present today would not have been possible. We are lucky to have had the assistance of all of these students, and they should be thanked by all of us for their important contribution.

(Rev. 4-22)

Syracuse Hunger Project Findings and Recommendations

**Dale Johnson
Executive Director, Samaritan Center**

A. SUBSTANTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

(For Children's Issues)

1. Increase outreach efforts for WIC enrollment.

The WIC program, like food stamps, offers a considerable pool of available assistance for portions of the population that are particularly vulnerable. Women and their infants and children present a particularly critical set of health and nutrition problems that cannot be solved by reliance on the pantry system, the schools, or other community resources. Like food stamps, substantial available WIC benefits routinely go unused at the same time that the crucial health and nutrition needs of pre-school children are insufficiently addressed. Our local United Way's Success By 6 program has identified the particular needs of this population and has described in detail the consequences to our community and to our nation when too many children begin school without the necessary nutrition and preparation. One particular challenge is to increase the continuity of WIC enrollment after infants reach one year of age, the age when WIC reclassifies infants as children. The use of WIC benefits drops off dramatically after infancy, and there should be a number of strategies that can help to maintain the use of benefits by families for all eligible children through age five.

Like in the case in food stamps, there is an economic loss to the community generally in the failure to have the advantage of considerable available public assistance, and similarly, the burden of that failure comes to rest on an already overstressed system of community supports in the not-for-profit sector. As a simple economic development question, increasing the use of WIC benefits by the eligible population will be an overall plus to the greater community without the need for any new legislative authority or any new appropriation of public funds.

This recommendation should be undertaken in the knowledge that because of the federal government's program design, the administration of the WIC program has historically proven difficult for all concerned. Our local administrators have to work within the food eligibility and stringent formal appointment guidelines set up by Washington. It is not the purpose of this recommendation or of this report to advance an agenda for changes in the statutory, administrative or regulatory framework of the program. Instead, the WIC program will be accepted as we find it, knowing as a community that we have many assets that can be employed for more effective outreach for this program and that many

alternatives methods exist for increasing the use of these resources. Until we can say that we have exhausted all of these local opportunities, we will not know how effective our community can be in gaining access to WIC assistance for all in need. The maps presented today offer a means of targeting outreach efforts on the most highly underserved areas of the city.

We are fortunate in Syracuse that we enjoy a local WIC administration that invites constructive help in reaching an underserved eligible population. Likewise, with leadership in such organizations as United Way's Success By 6 and with many dedicated professionals in the local human service agencies, there is already a strong and available infrastructure to implement this effort. The Nutrition Department and the School of Social Work in Syracuse University's College of Human Services and Health Professions, together with the Maxwell School's expertise in the areas of policy analysis and public administration, offer powerful additional resources that can readily be employed to further this initiative.

Action: A research team from the Department of Public Administration at the Maxwell School will go to work in May and June of this year to push this effort forward.

2. Examine the feasibility of a forming a cooperative of existing agencies to better serve the needs of children.

The steering committee for the Syracuse Hunger Project returned several times to a set of problems that recur across the pantry and public assistance agencies – problems concerning need for infant formula, diapers and related child and infant needs such as clothing and cribs. Most of the agencies active in working with the population of mothers of infants do what they can with what they have, but all have noted that the resources available chronically run short. At the same time, there has been little in the way of interagency collaboration on this issue, largely because there have been few ideas as to how best to work through the problem on a practical community-wide basis.

The issue of insufficient infant formula is particularly widespread. Formula is a food product that is a food eligible for WIC benefits, but it is seldom available in the pantries. Other staple foods for growing children are also eligible products for WIC benefits, but they too are not always available at the pantries. Similarly, diapers are practical necessities that are only available sporadically in the pantries. Making these products available in more localities may well be as important as making use of available WIC benefits, and if the eligible products are more available in the neighborhoods, WIC benefits become subjectively more valuable. At the same time, the economies of scale offered by a community-wide cooperative among agencies should offer higher levels of service at a broader range of locations. The reservoir of expertise in the larger not-for-profit human service agencies, if combined in an effort to design and implement a cooperative venture of this kind, should add greater depth and resilience to efforts to provide assistance to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Action: A research team from the Public Administration Department of the Maxwell School will develop a feasibility study for this effort during May and June of this year.

3. Address the increasing incidence of childhood obesity and the hunger/obesity paradox in all efforts on children's hunger issues.

The media have recently publicized the rapidly increasing incidence of childhood obesity throughout the nation. This epidemic has grown at the same time that the demand for emergency food assistance has also increased on a significant and national basis. This raises the seeming paradox of increasing numbers of poorer children facing hunger issues at the same time that their rates of obesity are climbing. The problem is one that is both complicated and counterintuitive, and it is therefore one that should be part of any community-wide effort to solve childhood hunger problems on a systematic basis. We know that filling lower-priced foods are generally higher in fat and carbohydrates, and thus these diets are not well balanced.

Fortunately for Syracuse, we have resources that are already working and willing to be deployed in this effort. Our County Health Department is now conducting a community assessment study on this topic, called "Healthy Children-Healthy Futures," an Eat Well/Play Hard initiative. We expect that in working on the problem of childhood obesity and hunger, these agencies, in addition to the front line social service agencies, will be joined in making important contributions by:

- The Syracuse City School District;
- The Nutrition Department at SU's College of Human Services and Health Professions;
- The Center for Policy Research at the Maxwell School;
- The nutritionists and dieticians at the Food Bank of Central New York and at Cornell Cooperative Extension; and
- The Department of Geography at Syracuse University

Solving the problem of childhood obesity should be easier with the help of maps, and the Syracuse Hunger Project and the Department of Geography are now in the process of collecting and formatting more detailed data that will permit us to create and analyze a much clearer map showing how this issue manifests itself here in Syracuse.

Action: This effort, which will involve mapping the city's school age children by body mass index (BMI) will continue over the summer.

(For the Pantry System)

4. Expand the use of the existing pantry system to increase outreach for food stamps, WIC, and the earned income tax credit.

The pantry system in the City offers a ready-made (but currently underutilized) infrastructure for outreach for the various anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs. Clients with emergency food issues know where the pantries are, and when they show up there, this vulnerable population becomes in a sense a self-selected group for highly targeted

outreach efforts. Outside of some of the larger, better staffed, and multiple service agencies offering pantry services, there is currently very little being done either systematically or proactively to use the pantry visit as an opportunity to provide assistance and advice on enrollment in available public sector programs.

One critical issue is that for many if not most of the pantries, staffing is provided entirely by volunteers, and for many, organizational capacity is already strained. It is neither fair nor feasible to expect that these volunteers, who are already the mainstay of the pantry effort, should be expected to perform additional services. At the same time, both the Food Bank of Central New York and the County Department of Social Services have employed facilitated enrollers who have been actively increasing enrollment in food stamps among the eligible population, and both should be congratulated for an effort that has produced enrollment numbers that compare favorably to most of our peer communities throughout the state. There is also no doubt that more facilitated enrollers could be used throughout the community on a highly cost effective basis.

These outreach efforts can certainly be increased and significant organizational capacity is available in existing pantry and pantry-support organizations (and possibly in faith communities) to deploy additional facilitated enrollers on a rotating basis among the pantries throughout the city. Additional trained facilitated enrollers could combine food stamp, WIC and earned income tax credit outreach efforts as a means of obtaining for eligible populations the highest feasible levels of publicly-provided assistance. This should in turn relieve pressure on already strained pantry operations while enhancing the economic benefit to the community.

Action: Preliminary conversations are now under way to determine if VISTA or Americorps volunteers might be used in this effort, and further investigation of this possibility will be undertaken this summer.

(For the Senior Citizen System)

5. Increase Senior Citizen outreach in ways that are responsive to the unique challenges faced by that population.

Hunger issues among senior citizens express themselves far differently than do those of children or of the majority of pantry clients. Health concerns, transportation issues, questions of personal security and physical frailty all complicate the problems of hunger in this population, and all of them can in turn complicate the provision of good nutrition, social interaction, and on-going food availability.

The mapping project has allowed the Syracuse Hunger Project to locate the various senior citizen meal sites and to compare this location information with the information concerning the concentrations of senior citizen populations. This information can be used to inform decision-making for any new programs for senior citizens. The Project has also been mapping the senior citizen population based on scores from the Nutrition Screening Initiative's DETERMINE checklist, which assists in identifying seniors at risk

of poor nutrition. This should produce information that should improve our community's ability to target assistance to reach particularly vulnerable groups.

The data show that the level of food stamp usage among eligible senior citizens is far lower than for the general eligible population. We know from national level studies that many who are eligible don't believe that they are. Similarly, we believe that many currently unserved seniors are not aware that food stamp benefits can be used to pay for Meals on Wheels and can be used in the Senior Dining Program.

The recommendation here is that a systematic outreach program be undertaken to connect eligible senior citizens with the benefits to which they are entitled. The congregate meal sites have already been an effective starting place for this type of effort. Because of a proactive effort by the County Department of Aging and Youth, the guests at these centers receive active outreach and offers of enrollment assistance. For those who have the mobility these sites answer a very important need, and the outreach efforts that are already centered there will logically produce a significant improvement to food stamp usage, particularly if the enrollment process is "customer friendly."

Outreach will be more difficult for the homebound and others unable attend the centers. Those who are not participants in the programs at the centers and currently using Meals on Wheels services have the advantage of enhanced nutrition, visits from a social worker and a dietician, daily social interaction and a reduced sense of isolation.

Outreach to the part of this population not now being served by Meals on Wheels is harder because the participants do not self-select in the same way the senior center guests do. For this population, the assistance and knowledge available to local clergy and the faith communities can be of utmost importance. Efforts by clergy and congregations can connect the homebound senior citizens residing in their neighborhoods with the kinds of resources that are vitally important. Additional enrollments in both food stamps and in Meals on Wheels by the homebound senior population should meaningfully improve both the overall health of the community and the quality of life and sense of well-being among this vulnerable group.

Meals on Wheels of Syracuse and the County's Office of Aging and Youth have provided leadership to the steering committee in addressing the concerns of senior citizens, and they have agreed to continue their leadership roles in the future. Whether separately or in conjunction with the pantry-based food stamp outreach effort, a systematic outreach initiative should more effectively connect senior citizens with currently available resources and should improve our community's overall health and well-being.

Action: Like the outreach effort for the pantry system, the possibility of seeking VISTA or Americorps volunteers for this initiative will be pursued this summer.

B. PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Formalize the local emergency hunger network.

One of the most immediate and striking lessons learned from the Syracuse Hunger Project is that there is a profound and demonstrated need for a permanent local organization to serve as a forum and switchboard for continuing a community-wide discussion of hunger and hunger-related issues. The informal steering group that has guided the first phase of the Project has shown that there is a substantial reservoir of good will between and among the various agencies that work in the hunger field. The time is now right to take a fresh, systematic and comprehensive look at hunger in our hometown. The government offices charged with administering the programs most pertinent to the alleviation of hunger have proven receptive to the opportunity to work with the local agencies to improve efficiency and service delivery. The active participation of academic institutions has likewise proven to add a richness of perspective and a depth of technological sophistication to the process of working through community problems. The Syracuse Hunger Project has proved to be a novel way to approach community decision-making by making human service agencies, government agencies and academic institutions equal partners. It is important that we capture the benefits of that approach for the future.

The creation of a permanent voluntary entity would provide our community with a permanent home for creative problem solving for hunger issues. It would provide opportunities to cross the boundaries between sectors and institutions that have often separated the important players in the hunger field and would provide a hearing to multiple points of view that may have been missing or marginalized in the past. The network would offer a convenient means of updating the data that goes into the mapping database at the Geography Department, allowing for longer range identification of trends and the geographic analysis of new issues or problems. Particularly in a funding environment in which individual agencies find it difficult to take on new projects themselves, a new entity (such as, for example, the Syracuse Area Hunger Network) would become a natural center for:

- a. coordinating and sponsoring of ongoing research;
- b. sharing information;
- c. planning and implementing pilot projects;
- d. soliciting grant funding for local initiatives, particularly those involving multiple participants;
- e. fostering new collaborations;
- f. housing a “think tank” to continue the community’s discussions on how best to solve hunger problems.

Action: The Steering Committee will pursue this option over the summer.

7. Convene local faith community leaders on hunger issues.

Another bit of learning that has emerged from the Syracuse Hunger Project is that our city's faith communities are an underutilized resource. Our religious buildings are currently the backbone of the pantry system with a large majority of pantries being housed in or sponsored by congregations. These congregations provide the majority of the volunteers that staff the pantry system. Their buildings are neighborhood assets and offer potential sites for new or enhanced anti-hunger programs.

Leaders of faith communities are uniquely positioned to offer valuable assistance in the fight against hunger. Many live and work in the city's neighborhoods and are therefore the eyes and ears of their local communities. They can assess local needs and can recommend sources of assistance to those in need. They can offer their facilities to provide outreach services directly or provide referrals or encouragement to their parishioners to obtain necessary help from others. They can also help to identify others in their neighborhoods, particularly senior citizens, who may have greater difficulty in getting access to food or other necessities. Local faith leaders are natural connectors of people and resources.

A network of faith communities would represent a powerful community asset that could bring together congregational leaders across the larger community to work on hunger related issues. For poorer urban congregations, meaningful and productive partnerships may be possible with more affluent faith communities outside the city. One consistent theological value that unites denominations and neighborhoods is a sacred mandate to feed the hungry. Despite the evident possibilities of faith-centered relationships between and among congregations, at present there is no formal mechanism for this type of relationship to be discussed or analyzed. As a result, there are likely numerous collaborations between communities of faith that have gone unrealized. The convening of interested faith leaders will allow these opportunities to be pursued and for the various faith communities to more fully live their own spiritual values. The presence in our community of both the InterReligious Council and the Interministerial Alliance offers the potential for tapping into a rich source of existing organizational infrastructure and available community leadership for this purpose.

Action: The Samaritan Center, as an interfaith agency to feed the hungry, has agreed to facilitate these discussions beginning this summer to help bring a network of these relationships into fruition.

8. Invite a community-wide conversation concerning the interplay between theology and efficiency in the provision of hunger assistance.

The pantry system is largely the product of individual faith communities. While many of the pantries are joined together under the umbrella of the Interreligious Food Consortium, and most are clients of the Food Bank of Central New York, the pantries are characterized by very high levels of local autonomy. This is not surprising since most came into existence based on the initiative of a group of dedicated members who were responding to local needs out of a shared sense of religious devotion. Many of the pantries have performed heroically over the years, and the people who have made them

go are the real unsung heroes of the local anti-hunger effort. Their motivation has been based on faith, and their direction has come from within the congregations themselves. Thus for the majority of the pantries, guiding principles have been rooted in the faith of the parishioners and in the values of the denominations involved. The theology of the sponsoring faith communities has been the primary concern.

Understandably, the pantries' decisions made with this high level of local autonomy have not explicitly included much in the way of community-wide planning or in a systematic examination of the overall efficiency of the city's response to hunger. The tension at the intersection of theology and efficiency has at various times concerned both those who seek greater efficiency in the system and those who have historically been protective of the theological underpinnings of the pantry system. Requests to enhance efficiency have been interpreted by the pantries as ingratitude or as a challenge to local autonomy. Resistance to suggestions for more broadly based planning or greater efficiency by the pantries may be interpreted as parochialism or close-mindedness. Past discussions on this topic have understandably been difficult at times.

The fact of the matter is that both sides are right according to their own values, and the theological perspective and the interest in higher efficiency are both values that should be honored by the community. Unfortunately, what can be called in shorthand the "efficiency versus theology" arguments are couched in different vocabularies, and it should not be surprising that the participants in the discussion may talk past each other. For the pantries the language describing their programs is religious language; for those interested in efficiency, the language is more rooted in systems, statistics and government regulations.

One recommendation is to invite ongoing and respectful discussions (at both the neighborhood and community-wide levels) with the understanding that there is, and likely always will be, a real and inevitable tension between those two interests. The community might be better served by conversations that frankly and forthrightly acknowledge this fact while seeking agreement on those more systemically efficient priorities that can be accomplished in a manner that fully honors the theological basis on which the pantry system so firmly rest. There appear to be many opportunities available to make real progress while supporting both interests.

In this context, the maps can become extraordinarily helpful in informing these discussions to help to target needs that may be underserved. The maps offer a neutral means of describing community issues and offering options for more nearly optimal solutions. For instance, by working collaboratively over a set of neighborhood maps, pantries in the same neighborhoods can coordinate days and hours of service to maximize the availability of assistance. Siting decisions can be made based on an analysis of demonstrated objective needs. Voluntary collaborations of this kind can strengthen pantries and programs by allowing decision-making to take place within a community-wide examination of shared local interests. There is no reason why a more efficient system of providing assistance to the hungry clients should not simultaneously honor all of the spiritual grounds on which the pantry system rests.

Action: This will be a high priority agenda item for the formal community-wide hunger agency when it is formed.

9. Make explicit the relationship between public sector and not-for-profit hunger assistance programs.

Currently public sector hunger assistance programs (like food stamps and WIC) operate side-by-side with the programs run by the not-for-profit agencies (like the pantries and hot meal programs). Uniformly applied formal interaction between the two remains spotty, meaning that most frequently it is the client who, without necessarily knowing of other options, decides which programs will be accessed and in what order. The operation of two independent parallel paths means that there is little community-wide systemization in the deployment of food assistance resources, a result that has now placed a great burden on the food pantry system at a time when substantial available food stamp and WIC assistance goes unused.

One recommendation that seems self-evident is that there should be greater explicit coordination between the two systems. The most logical result would be a community consensus that food stamps and WIC be considered the primary and most immediate resources to be employed and that the pantry and hot meal systems will be used as the safety net for needs remaining unmet after the public sector benefits have been exhausted.

This recommendation gets at the heart of a very basic question: How do you determine the difference between the need for emergency food assistance and the demand for emergency food? As long as there are two independent parallel tracks available, and as long as clients are the ones making the choice on an ad hoc basis without necessarily knowing of other options, it will be difficult if not impossible to tease apart the “need versus demand” question.

The County Department of Aging and Youth has already had success in helping to bridge this gap with the senior citizen population that it serves. The Department is actively engaged with Meals on Wheels and with the Nutrition Outreach programs of the Food Bank of Central New York to bring the governmental and not-for-profit programs into a higher level of congruity with one another. The Department is now working to enhance the ways that the food stamp program can be included in a more holistic approach to the outreach process for seniors.

If this approach could be placed into effect across all of the various programs, it would have three major positive effects. The first is that the community as a whole would have the economic benefit of considerably higher federal-level assistance that has already been allocated. Even collecting just half of the unused food stamp eligibility in the county would generate annually nearly ten million dollars in additional economic activity without requiring any new legislation or governmental funding authorizations.

Second, this change would relieve pressure on the not-for-profit agencies by allowing available food stamp and WIC funding to alleviate household emergency hunger needs now being met by the pantry and hot meal programs. For a pantry system operating at near capacity, this is the most immediate available source of relief.

Finally, client households with access to supermarkets and grocery stores would enjoy an enhanced level of choices (including meats, dairy and fresh vegetables) rather than the narrower range of options available at the pantries.

Action: This will be a high priority agenda item for the formal community-wide hunger agency when it is formed.

10. Use an on-going mapping project to inform and direct community siting, program and operations decisions in hunger-related efforts.

During the course of the Syracuse Hunger Project, the steering committee has been continually impressed with the usefulness of maps and mapping techniques to identify, describe and analyze hunger-related questions. The agreement by the Geography Department at Syracuse University to host a website and to continue into the future the enhancement and updating of the mapping database represents a gift to the community of a powerful new asset to use in fighting hunger in Syracuse. As a community, we should seize on the opportunities presented by this new technology.

Some obvious and immediate uses of mapping are for:

- pantry siting decisions,
- determining optimal locations for WIC, food stamp and EITC outreach efforts,
- determining days and hours of operations,
- selecting summer and after school meal sites for school age children,
- locating at-risk seniors for enhanced nutrition services, and
- preparing maps for Meals on Wheels routes.

More in-depth use of these mapping resources should be made in the neighborhoods. This capability should be of particular value to the various TNT neighborhood groups to analyze their own local community needs and assets. Continuing collection of data on a systematic basis over time will permit the preparation of more detailed “time lapse” maps to help identify trends in demography and needs.

Over the long term, this part of the Syracuse Hunger Project will permit a deeper understanding of our hometown while offering insights into the spatial distribution of all kinds of social indicators, including those of hunger and poverty. The mapping database and its availability over the internet will permit analysis of related social concerns (such as public health issues) that will add depth and richness to the public discussion of social problems. We have had some very preliminary discussions about the possibility of developing a new full-time, paid position of “Community Geographer,” to be situated at the People’s Geography Project at the Maxwell School and would be charged with the

task of using geographic tools to help with community projects, like the Syracuse Hunger Project, that can benefit from geographic analysis.

Action: Continue planning with SU and potential funders over the summer.

C. Conclusions

Having said all of that, where does that leave us? While the data and the maps demonstrate that there is a lot more to do, the results of the first phase of the Syracuse Hunger Project also show that this community has a lot of assets to work with. There is far more reason for optimism than pessimism.

Among the important community assets that have become more obvious are these:

1. The number, talent and commitment of the people working in the various nonprofit agencies in the hunger field continued to amaze us. Many of the agencies that we work with are blessed with people of tremendous gifts of knowledge, compassion and energy. They are often invisible and far too underappreciated, but they are the single most important resource in this fight.
2. The commitment of the people working in the governmental agencies has also been very impressive. We have had nothing but cooperation from our allies in the public sector at all levels - city, county and state. Our Social Services Commissioner, David Sutkowy, deserves particular recognition for his successful efforts as a statewide leader to lower the paperwork barriers to greater food stamp usage among the eligible population. Their spirit of cooperation and their interest in exploring new ways of meeting the needs of their clients serves this community well.
3. We have a substantial reservoir of talent, knowledge and commitment in our local academic institutions. Both LeMoyne College and Syracuse University have made substantial contributions to this project, and their commitment will continue to be important well into the future. The fact that we are presenting this report at the Maxwell School is itself important in symbolizing the way that the academy and the local community can join forces to approach community concerns on a more well-informed and systematic basis. This mapping project and the interest and enthusiasm of the Geography Department for future and ongoing projects represent a community-wide opportunity that most other communities can only wish for.
4. The Food Bank of Central New York has been recognized by its peers nationwide for its efforts to go far beyond the core mission of food delivery to frontline anti-hunger agencies. The Food Bank has been proactive in food stamp outreach throughout the broad region it serves, and it has made available in a number of

innovative ways the services of its staff of nutritionists. We are fortunate to have these resources available to this community.

5. Syracuse has a well-developed infrastructure of other important agencies and organizations, including our local foundations, our associations of faith leaders, our public health agencies, and many others that collect together many of our most important community assets. The presence of these organizations significantly simplifies the process of community organization around issues like hunger. Other cities would envy these well-developed and highly engaged community assets.

The bottom line conclusion is this – the means are at hand. It should be possible for this community, working together as a community, to materially improve the lives of those who need food assistance. Those of us who worked on the Syracuse Hunger Project – I think uniformly – believe that by working just with the resources currently on hand, and with greater coordination of efforts and better communication between the various agencies, we can make a very significant difference.

When the Board of the Samaritan Center launched the Syracuse Hunger Project last year, the vision was that by 2006, no one in the City of Syracuse would need to go hungry. While that is still a very ambitious goal, it now seems a bit more within reach. As a community, we still have a lot of work to do. But as we approach the future, we are armed with greater knowledge, more powerful tools, better organization, and perhaps a renewed spirit of common enterprise.

I hope that all of you will make your own contribution to this effort as we go forward.

Thank you for coming.

(Rev. 4-22)