Feeding the Homeless: A Study in Nutrition and Modern Ideas Collaborating for a Cause

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Abstract

The following paper serves two purposes, the first being a review of literature, newspaper articles, and website publications regarding the state of the homeless population here in Denver, Colorado. The second is an inquiry into their diet, their access to food, and how we might better feed them through the use of a food truck. This concept brings together the use of the student body at Auraria Campus, along with some ideas about what food could be provided and where this food might come from. This design was derived out of simple observation and research conducted about the growing homeless population in and around Denver. This concept can be useful for those who are in need and live in and near central Denver. This truck could also feed those who do not always have easy access to the resources available in Central Denver because they themselves are located in the outskirts of town, with many considered to be part of what is known as the ‘hidden’ homeless population. This idea would come to fruition with the help of students from many disciplines, in order to add a more holistic vision to this service idea. This paper examines the other models that are being used around the country, and how this idea can be molded into something creative and operative.
Introduction

What is the Project and Why is it Important?

Denver has an ever-growing population of homeless individuals, due to its climate, its proximity to two major highways (I-25 and I-70), and its liberal laws (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless [CCH], 2014). Although rich in resources for those in need, there is still an underserved population in Denver and its surrounding areas that needs help. As the population grows, so should the avenues of approach to solving social issues, one of which is feeding the homeless healthy and fresh food. The ways in which society attempts to do this can be both creative and educational, and it can develop new ways to alleviate social issues as this city continues to grow.

Unlike many other big cities in this country, Denver hosts a downtown area that is filled with many shops and tall buildings, making it a place where many people gather. Denver also has many parks in and around its downtown area, providing a gathering place for people of all walks of life. This means those without a home also come to Denver in hopes of finding the resources they need, like food and shelter. The benefit of this is that most of the city’s homeless are right here in central Denver (Denver’s Road Home, 2014) and the resources they need are also located here as well. American author and urbanist William H. Whyte wrote, “The street is the river of life of the city, the place where we come together, the pathway to the center,” (Whyte, n.d.). It makes sense then that most people would gather in this way, and that their resources would be here as well.

One of the disadvantages is that there are still some underserved populations in the more suburban and less populated outskirts of the Denver area that are not getting served. This population is often referred to as the “hidden” homeless. What makes them unique is
that they do not gather in the same centralized way as the urban homeless do, therefore they do not have access to the same resources. They also often times do not have the transportation to get what they need, including healthy food sources. Many of these hidden homeless are families with multiple members and nutritious food, although important, may not be a priority. Although little is known about this population in terms of numbers, what is known is that of the estimated 23,000 homeless children attending schools, a certain percentage are what is considered “hidden,” residing in motels and doubled-up in relatives’ homes (Brown, 2014).

Getting food and other services to these locations can present a challenge. Other organizations in town have taken on the task of helping those in need in both rural and suburban areas. However, there is always room for improvement as the climate of homelessness in and around the city continues to evolve. Being able to get the resources to all of these populations will involve creative minds and fresh thinking. The proposed solution for helping alleviate this issue involves students on the Auraria Campus, and the use of a food truck.

Food trucks are a popular and ever-growing business because they are economical and easy to access for all. They can be used for delivering all sorts of goods and services. The idea of delivering food and other goods to help the homeless has been used in this city and in other cities across the country. One of the first and most successful trucks, called Mobile Loaves and Fishes, serves the homeless out of a food truck, bringing them food and other goods 365 days a year. They have been so successful that they continue to grow and now serve five major cities (Mobile Loaves and Fishes, 2015). Their growth is evidence of their continued success.
This food truck idea will be different, because it will receive direct support from Auraria Campus as well as donations from local businesses, and the truck would be a student-run operation, with a similar concept and model showing great success at other schools for the purpose of bringing mobile healthcare to the homeless. This truck can be run and operated by many departments at the Auraria Campus, with student involvement through an internship program.

This project could potentially be successful if there is some research involved. The social work and human services departments can provide a research team. Student caseworkers can be sent out on the truck to help collect important data that can be used to determine what the needs of these populations are, and help promote a better service for them. Student case workers can also help those who utilize the services of the truck attain other services they need by providing them with information about resources available in their areas. Students can focus on the populations not getting served by other food pantries and trucks in the area, especially those who are difficult to reach because they are not centrally located. They can focus on those who do not have access to a hot meal on a regular basis. They can also monitor the food for nutritional balance, delivering fresh food that is ready to eat. The idea is to help fill the gaps of access while promoting healthy and nutritious food for this population both individuals and families.

**Denver’s Homeless Population and Access Limitations**

Denver boasts a current population of 649,495 within the city limits, according to statistical data from 2013 (United States Census Bureau, 2013) Denver is the 20th largest city, and has the 10th largest downtown area in terms of retail shops and office buildings. Denver also has the nation’s largest city park system, with 205 parks within the city limits.
and 20,000 acres of parks in the nearby mountain areas. There are over 300 days of sunshine in Denver, and the city easily accessible from two major highways (1-25 and 1-70) (Denver Colorado Demographics and Population Statistics, 2015).

These could all be incentives for anyone, including those without a home, to venture west to Denver. The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) provides a yearly look at what the homeless population looks like from a statistical viewpoint. This is called the Homeless Point-In-Time Study, and is a tool used to take a “snapshot” of how many people are homeless on one day each year. According to the data from the most recent survey 3,245 people were reported to be homeless in the Denver area. This is a seven county survey that includes this same one day snapshot of homeless in all of Denver’s interconnected and surrounding counties. Taking that into account, the number of people who identified as homeless in Adams County numbered 532, and in Arapahoe County, the number is 491. The number of homeless for that day in Boulder County was 850, with Broomfield at 40 people. Douglas County counted 44, and Jefferson County counted 611. The grand total for the survey is 5,773 homeless individuals and their family members accounted for in Denver and its surrounding areas. The survey also shows that there were 2,230 who are considered to be “at-risk” of becoming homeless during the time the survey was taken. This survey tells us that the one consistent finding on all the research on homelessness is an undercount of homeless individuals, especially when using surveys. Another finding is that many people enter and leave homelessness throughout the year, and that this is just a look at one day (MDHI, 2013).
Point-In-Time Survey Results, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arapahoe</td>
<td>491</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boulder</td>
<td>850</td>
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<td>Broomfield</td>
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<td>Denver</td>
<td>3245</td>
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<td>Douglas</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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The Point-In-Time Survey does provide a look at what the homeless population looks like in terms of numbers for one day out the year. This information can be useful when looking towards helping those in need. What it does not do is help identify the homeless population that is “hidden” from plain view. According to a recent newspaper article in the Denver Post (Brown, 2014), many of our areas homeless people consist of families and children, living in motels and with other family members out of necessity. Many have lost their homes because they cannot afford the rising rental costs in and around Denver. These people are considered homeless under federal law, but often get overlooked and unaccounted for.

According to the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless’s Annual Report from 2013, they helped provide various services for over 15,000 people (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, 2014). This number is almost three times higher than the Point-In-Time Study accounts for, and it coincides with the idea that not all homeless individuals can be accounted for in Denver and its surrounding areas. It also supports the idea that there may have been an increase in the number of homeless individuals. This is something to consider
when looking at the state of the homeless situation in Denver and its surrounding areas. If there has been a visible or significant increase, has this caused already existing resources to be drained? Many area day shelters and drop-in centers are seeing a significant rise in the number of people who are accessing their resources. St. Francis, a shelter in the downtown Denver area, was averaging 190 people a night last year and is currently averaging 345 people a night (CBS News, 2014). Father Woody’s Haven of Hope, a drop-in center that provides services that include free lunch and breakfast, showering and laundry, counseling, tutoring, and some medical services, has seen a significant increase in the number of people who are coming to their center, with numbers as high as 300 more individuals a month (McGhee, 2014).

A useful aspect of the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative Point-In-Time survey is that it shows the reader that the surrounding areas have homeless families and individuals who reside outside of the city. In early 2014, The Denver Post wrote an article that proposed the idea that there is an issue with homelessness that is not as visible as what is seen in Central Denver. The story titled, “Trying to Live, Trying to Learn” focuses on the families that live in motels and extended family member’s basements in and around the outskirts of Denver (Brown, 2014). Although this particular article focuses on children and families and highlights the struggles these children have with getting an education while having to worry about being homeless, it also gives some information about homelessness in the outer parts of the city, an area and demographic that needs attention and resources. The author takes an intimate look at the lives of one family, cramped in a motel room, and how accessing resources can be difficult. With six children by her side and no car, the woman in this article often struggles to get her kids to a store to buy food, and relies on occasional food donations
and visits to a food bank. It shows the problems this family and many like them face, including food insecurity. The author of the article describes a local 7-Eleven as a local “grocery store” because it is the only thing the families who live close by in the motels can access for food. She goes on to say that some volunteers do come to deliver goods and food from time to time. This Denver Post article supports the idea that being “invisibly homeless” exists in and near the city of Denver, with families residing in their cars, with relatives in cramped spaces, or in places like Aurora’s motel row. It also introduces us to a program that helps some of the children of these families in this particular area, the Colfax Community Network (Colfax Community Network [CCN], 2015) but stresses that of the 200 children residing there, funding is only available for 25 of them.

The Colfax Community Network’s provides the community with information about the hidden homeless that many would not otherwise have. Their website states that its mission is to “advocate for and work on behalf of children and families that reside in low-income transient housing (primarily residential motels) along Colfax Avenue” and that they help with “food, clothing, hygiene products, and diapers” as well as “long-term stability” (CNN, 2015). CNN goes out into the community once a week to help meet some of the needs of this population. CNN also keeps up with the ever-changing homeless population in these areas and provides that information on its website, one of the few places to do so in Denver. What it does not do is provide consistent help, due to limited resources, a gap that could be filled.

The population of homeless individuals and families who are not visible is not known. There is not a lot of research to support solid numbers when it comes to the hidden homeless. What is known is that research supports the idea that resources are not always
allocated for this population because of the very nature of their existence as ‘hidden’.
Adequate nutrition needs are not being met for the hidden homeless and more access to
fruits and vegetables are needed for this demographic. This population has unique needs
because they are not as visible as their counterparts (Crawley, 2012). There is evidence to
support the idea that while research on absolute homelessness is prevalent, research on
hidden homelessness is still lacking (p. 675).

Access is an issue for all underserved populations, whether hidden or not. There is
research and discussion about the limited access that underserved populations often have to
fresh fruit and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole grains. Neighborhoods, both
urban and rural, that are low-income and low-educated disproportionately have less of these
items at their disposal and instead have more access to fast food and junk food. When
healthier food is available in these neighborhoods, it is always more expensive than its
counterpart junk food. The limited access and high expense of healthier food in conjunction
to the easy access of overly processed but inexpensive food encourages those who live in
these areas to not eat healthy (Bodor, Rose, Farley, Swalm, & Scott, 2007).

Another issue faced by this vulnerable population is not being able to properly store
or prepare the food that they do obtain. Programs like the Supplemental Nutrition
Assistance Program (SNAP) limit how people purchase items at a store. For example,
individuals are not allowed to use the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card or Colorado
Quest Card to purchase hot items or ready to eat items from the store. This can cause an
immediate barrier for those attempting to get a hot or fresh meal, especially those without
access to a kitchen, utensils to cook with, or refrigeration (SNAP, 2015).
Although charitable organizations are a great way to get food and other resources to those in need, further investigation is needed in order to understand if what is being served is doing more harm than good. Qualitative research methods were used to take a more in-depth look at what homeless adults in soup kitchens were consuming, including a measurement of nutritional quality, and an exploration of the social, economic, psychological, and situational factors regarding their experiences at this particular place. Participants were chosen based on a (concealed) number underneath the chair upon which they were sitting, then they were screened and deemed ineligible based on intoxication, psychosis, lack of fluency in English, and cognitive impairment. In order to alleviate inconsistencies, the same interviewer was used to interview all 22 participants. Notes and interview observations were then transcribed into 22 case reports, which were analyzed by two authors for over-arching themes. The study concluded that poor health contributed to an increase in food insecurity, and that limited cooking and storage facilities for food directly contributed to their ability to secure any kind of a healthy diet (Wicks, Trivena, & Quine, 2006, p. 922). The study also concluded that education about food posed no issue, and that many in the study went to great lengths in order to attempt to eat a healthy diet, even under poor living conditions (p. 923).

Hendrickson, Smith, and Eikenberry (2006) take a look at four separate communities in Minnesota and how limited food access effects those living there, who is likely to live in these areas, an what kind of food is available. The areas studied – two urban and two rural – were based on four criteria: (1) limited access to grocery stores (2) higher than state average poverty levels (3) having urban influence codes, as defined by the Economic Research Service (which is a way for researchers to break county data into finer residential groups in
order to analyze trends in non-metro areas that are related to population density and metro influence) (4) and civic engagement around food issues. These neighborhoods were all located in Minneapolis, where stores in those neighborhoods were counted and kept track of with a map. A survey was given to all of the stores in those areas, mainly “mom and pop” stores, ethnic markets, and corner markets. The survey asked about food availability and broke it down into the following major categories: fresh vegetables; fresh fruits; dry breads, cereals, and other grain products; canned and frozen meat and meat alternatives; canned and frozen fruits and vegetables; fresh breads; fats and oils; sugars and sweets. These foods were then priced per pound and compared to the same foods priced in other markets. The results showed that fruits and vegetables in all of the neighborhood markets included in this survey were overpriced, had little variety, and were of poor quality. Some of the markets within the neighborhood boundaries for this survey only have a very limited amount of what they did sell, sometimes only one or two pieces of a certain fruit or vegetable. On average, the food in the urban communities was also more expensive than in the more rural ones (p.375). Although this study is specific to Minneapolis and rural Minnesota, it relates to this research because it is a look at both an urban and rural setting and how healthy and nutritious food is not accessible to all of those who live within these constructs. It also shows that low-income neighborhoods, like the ones in this study, have limited access in order to get their needs met.

Many of the sources researched were discovered to have information that supported the idea that the food that is provided for the underserved in these communities may cause or be a contributing factor in rising obesity rates. One way the city of Boston gained this knowledge was by tracking the medical charts from an area clinic called the Boston Health
Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP) between January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2007 and December 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2008. The information specifically collected was Body Mass Index (BMI) data. This data was then compared to a non-homeless population derived from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). The results showed that obesity rates among homeless individuals are prevalent, with over 30\% of the homeless population exceeding obesity, with a mean BMI at the level of overweight (28.4 kg/m\(^2\)) and with individuals with a BMI as high as 68.62 kg/m\(^2\) (Koy, Hoy, O’Connell, & Montgomery, 2012, p. 957). These findings can be compared to findings on the Center for Disease Control website, which show that the overall proportion of adults in the United States who are considered to be obese is more than one-third (34.9\% or 78.6 million). The health disparities related to this include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer, and other causes of preventable death (Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

What the Boston study suggests is that what the homeless are eating is making a large portion of the homeless population obese. The study leads us to believe that lack of economic resources encourages people in this dilemma to purchase food that is highly processed, meaning energy-dense but low in nutritional value, in order to avoid hunger. Another speculation of this study is the “feast or famine” theory, that due to chronic variations in food availability, homeless individuals will often eat too much when food is available. A final thought from this study is that because their diets are not adequate and balanced due to food insecurity, their body might make up for this in physiological changes that help the body store fat when fat is available. Along with a sedentary lifestyle, sleep deprivation, and stress, obesity can be the end result (p.958).
Specific to Denver, there are areas both within the city limits and outside of it that are food insecure. These places are considered to be “food deserts” and can be linked to poor nutrition due to lack of availability. Food deserts, as described by Stilley (2008), are “socially deprived areas within an urban setting and lacking access to food retailers” or “low-income areas that have the lowest access to healthy foods” (p. 36). This means that they can exist within the city or in more rural areas, but the problem presents itself in the same way, with limited access to unprocessed food. Stiller maintains that part of the reason that these areas exist with little access to fresh fruits and vegetables is because retailers that own larger supermarkets where quality and affordable food is available do not believe it is economical to build stores in these areas. The Denver neighborhoods in this study are Clayton, Cole, Elyria Swansea, Five Points, Globeville, North Park Hill, Northeast Park Hill, Skyland, and Whittier. All of these areas are low-income, and where there are likely to find people and families who are homeless doubling up with one another in order to make ends meet. These findings are pertinent to this study, because they support the notion that limited access to quality food sources in these neighborhoods means that they rely heavily upon convenience store food, a potential gap that could be filled through the food truck project’s implementation.

Stilley (2008) also makes an argument that not having quality food readily available can lead to obesity and diabetes, because less produce is being consumed, which directly impacts the health. The focus neighborhoods mentioned in the article, all located within the confines of Denver city limits, have convenience stores that “dominate the landscape” (pg. 37). The writer of this article considers the idea that having healthy food does not mean
people will buy it, but it is a step in the right direction and if healthy food is not on the mind of those consuming it, then how can they even have a choice in the matter? (p. 38).

**How Nutrition Plays a Role**

Those experiencing homelessness have many issues to face from day to day, some more immediate than others. Nutrition can be overlooked in the diet of someone experiencing homelessness because it is just not at the top of their list. One of the unfortunate side effects of this is that they are provided with food that is satiating, although very high in carbohydrates and saturated fats. This has been directly linked to obesity in those experiencing poverty and homelessness, as well as other health disparities such as diabetes and high blood pressure (Brown, 2013).

Dietary intake of fats, including saturated fat, and lower percentages of fiber and fruits and vegetables seem to plague homeless individuals. At a women’s shelter in New York City a study was conducted to monitor and record their daily food intake for the purpose of showing what the fat, fiber, and saturated fat content were, and also how many fruits and vegetables they were eating. The researchers in this study then compared these findings to a standard USDA diet, including its recommendations for daily intake of the nutrients listed above. Not surprisingly, the results showed that on average, the women at the shelter were consuming 4.3 servings of vegetables and fruits to the 5-7 serving recommended. It showed that daily fiber intake was averaging 16.8 grams while the recommended amount is 20-35 grams. Fat intake in the form of calories was at 36% (daily recommendation is 20-35%) while total fat intake was 99.6 grams on average, with the daily recommendation in the 53-65 gram range. Saturated fat also went over the mark, with 26.3
grams being the average, and 18-20 grams being the maximum (Davis, Holleman, Weller, & Jadhav, 2008, p. 956). The national average for the average woman was 74.8 grams of fat, with 24.7 coming from saturated fat, and 17.5 grams of dietary fiber being consumed (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2015).

What was most profound about this study was the qualitative knowledge received from the participants. The focus groups that got together cited four major themes that helped structure their beliefs about the food choices they made. The first was the resident’s past eating patterns, which were reported as unhealthy eating patterns attributed to cultural background and fast food consumption. The next was attitudes about shelter food, which participants did not believe addressed the unique nutritional needs of certain age groups or those with chronic illnesses. Next, the impact of shelter food and food policies on quality of life had some residents feeling as though food at shelters contributed directly to poor management of chronic illnesses or caused them to gain weight, be fatigued, have headaches, or experience constipation. Lastly, the psychological impact of shelter food policies made participants feel as though they had limited personal choices about food, and they missed the freedom associated with planning and preparing food themselves (p. 956).

The relevance that this study has is that it shows a gap in nutrition for these women, including limited choices (although it should be noted that the “planning and preparing” part is not addressed by the proposal for this particular project).

Drewnowski (2009) suggests to the reader the idea that homeless individuals are more likely to be obese. He gets right to the point by stating that “low-income neighborhoods attract more fast-food outlets and convenience stores as opposed to full service supermarkets and grocery stores” (p. 536). The author also point out that oils, fats,
refined sugar, and potatoes while “filling” and calorie-dense, do not provide a person with essential micronutrients and that foods like fruits and vegetables do, but are more expensive and beyond reach for many people (p. 537).

Soup kitchens are often what come to mind when thinking about feeding the homeless, but even these meals might be contributing to higher obesity rates in the homeless population. When food is provided that lacks essential nutrition and has too many calories, unhealthy diets are then being promoted for those in need. Sisson and Lown (2011) conducted a study in Grand Rapids, Michigan demonstrating that the content of the meals in three separate soup kitchens do not promote healthy dietary behaviors. This study showed that if only one meal a day was consumed by an individual, the amount of saturated fat one person is allotted per day was exceeded and the estimated average requirement (EAR) for nutrients was not met. If any combination of two meals from any of the three soup kitchens was eaten, the nutrient goals were met (except fiber) but saturated fat, calories, and sodium were more than exceeded (p. 318). These findings help back the idea that what is currently being fed to the homeless is low-nutrient-dense meals that promote obesity and other diseases.

An advocacy-researcher team formed by a non-profit policy advocacy organization and an academic research center invited 20 stakeholders from the emergency food network (EFN) to help develop policy and procedures for food banks and other food outlets for the underserved in order to improve food nutrition quality and standards. These stakeholders rely on donations and federal programs to help attain the food they receive and distribute. EFN stakeholders include state food bank associations and Feeding America, who in 2009 fed over 37 million individuals, or 12% of the United States population (Shimada, Ross,
Campbell, & Webb, 2013). This means that there is a link between the nutritional value of emergency food and the nutritional status and health of those who acquire this food every year. Feeding America is uniquely positioned to influence the nutritional quality of emergency food, donating to over 80% of America’s food banks (p. 284). What the stakeholder’s discovered during their conference is that defining what is “healthful” and “nutritious” can present a challenge. This meeting with the stakeholders opened a discussion about a wide range of issues surrounding the nutritional value of emergency food, with future plans to implement changes (p. 292). The relevance here is that there is consciousness about this issue by those who help feed the homeless. There was, however, no definitive date about plans and implementation included in this study.

Lee & Greif (2008) considered the idea that food insecurity is not a top priority for the homeless, but that food inadequacies were a problem for many who were surveyed in this particular study. The study was conducted with the use of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers (NSHAP), sponsored by the Interagency Council on Homeless, which is a federal policy consortium. The project was fielded by the Census Bureau, and the study itself utilized 2,898 individuals as the working sample, asking them questions regarding their status as homeless and particularly their experiences with obtaining resources and getting needs met. Even though food insecurity ranked relatively low, those who took the survey expressed problems with food quantity and preference, and infrequent meals. Two-fifths reported that they had fasted for an entire day, and the same amount reported no being able to afford to buy food for an entire month. Twelve percent surveyed has engaged in subsistence eating, taking hand-outs from strangers and eating
from trashcans. One in 20 of these people surveyed had experienced all of these types of food insecurity within a month (p. 11).

**Proposed Solution**

The proposed idea is a food truck that delivers food to the homeless, with a special concentration on populations that are not easily accessible. In order to operate the truck, students from the Auraria Campus would be enlisted as part of an internship program, and be overseen with the help of instructors from various programs from Auraria Campus. The logistics of operating the truck successfully would ultimately be up to those involved. Recruiting students from many programs, including hospitality, business, social work, human services, nutrition and even media to name a few, could help ensure the success of the program. The truck itself can pick up food from various locations, already made or ready to heat. Students from the nutrition program can help provide information about providing healthy meals. Students from the social work department and human services department can help build relationships with people in order to find out what their other needs might be, and collect data about what may and may not be working for this truck. They can also direct participants to other resources in their area. Business and media students can get involved by helping promote the truck and garner support and sponsorship from outside sources. Students from the hospitality department can help operate the truck and provide information about food storage and safety. With help from all of these available avenues here on Auraria Campus, the truck can reach those who need assistance with food and other resources. The truck can also be a tool for learning while expanding campus options.
Delivering goods to through the use of food trucks is not a new idea; neither is using trucks to deliver food to the homeless and underserved. There is some research about delivering food and goods to the homeless, but it is important to take a look at the use of food trucks in general, and how this might be a useful idea for the demographic chosen for this project. According to Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller (2009), a conservative estimate of food trucks operating at the time the article was published was 117,000 (p. 41). The authors state that food truck popularity has increased due to accessibility, easy start-up, and maintenance (pg. 39). Traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants ideas are more expensive to start and maintain and food trucks are an alternative that are seemingly more economical and accessible. This is not to say that certain aspects of running and operating a food truck are not without their issues as well, but the authors seem to be in favor of food trucks as an alternative to a traditional method of food service. The authors of this article promote a seemingly easier business model, with maintenance of the truck being one of the key factors in keeping the business operating (p. 39).

There are a few trucks operating here in the Denver area that help those in need with various services. Food Bank of the Rockies delivers food to the underserved through the use of a mobile food pantry. The truck delivers food based on "self-declared need" and the items included are fresh produce and dairy, as well as meat and dried goods. This pantry caters to those who live in both the suburbs and rural areas; and delivers and sets up their pantry based on a needs assessment, covering 32 locations around Denver (Food Bank of the Rockies, 2015). This pantry does not deliver food that is already cooked but rather, food that can be prepared by the person collecting it at home. Volunteers help set up tables outside of the truck, and display available items for participants to select.
Lunchbox Express is another such idea, catering specifically to school-aged children in the Denver, Englewood, and Aurora area. The idea here is that this school-bus serves "shelf-stable" food to children during the summer months, such as sandwiches and when they are not in school and otherwise would not get a meal during the day. These kids rely on the school lunch and breakfast programs in their areas to feed them during the school year, and this school bus delivery truck helps supplement their diet when they are not in school. Run and operated with the help of volunteers, four school buses brought lunch to 13 sites in and around the Denver area. Jewish Family Services helps support and sponsor this truck, with partnerships that include Denver Public School (DPS), Douglas County School District, Colorado Children’s Campaign, and Well-fed Inc. (Jewish Family Services, 2015).

Another local non-profit who utilizes trucks as a means of helping others is the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Health Outreach Program. As part of their continuing Health Outreach Program, they use this mobile clinic to help the homeless who are not easily accessible, and those who do not come to their clinic on Stout Street because they have no means to get there. This clinic on wheels has been operating successfully since 2002 and currently covers 12 locations around the Denver area. The CCH website states that the mobile clinic travels across the metro area to the day drop-in centers, and also to the motels on the outskirts of town where families are living as a "last resort" for means of getting shelter. In other words, this mobile clinic brings its services to where the people are, recognizing that this is a need for them because they lack proper means to get to the Stout Street Clinic, located in Central Denver (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, 2015).

Perhaps the best example of all, the truck operation that comes closest to the food truck design concept desired for this project, is the Mobile Loaves and Fishes food truck
(Mobile Loaves and Fishes, 2015). This concept was started in Austin, Texas and continues to grow to this day. Every day of the year, volunteers deliver food, hygiene products, and clothing using a food truck. This food truck delivers more than just food and services; it also provides the volunteers and participants a chance to engage with each other. This particular truck is successful and the volunteers who help run it are dedicated to what they are doing, as evidenced by the statistics on their website. The website boasts a total of 4,412,235 meals served, with the help of 18,291 volunteers, over the course of 16 years. The organization itself has added many more trucks and more cities to the list of those they serve, including Minneapolis, New Bedford, Providence, and San Antonio. Mobile Loaves and Fishes also continues to use the truck as an avenue of service by helping to assess what other needs this vulnerable population might have by engaging with their community and those they serve.

These are all effective ideas and uses for the truck as a way to tackle the ever-growing problem this city is having keeping up with those experiencing homelessness, as well as their unique needs. Operating this truck so that students can run it successfully is the ultimate goal. The idea of using a truck to deliver services has proven to be achievable in the medical field, as shown by Hastings, Zulman, and Wali (2007). UCLA helps sponsor and support a free mobile clinic, operated by the students and overseen by a few faculty members. The UCLA Mobile Clinic was founded in 2001 and was established in cooperation with the Greater West Hollywood Food Coalition (GWHFC). The mobile clinic and those who help operate it help provide many services, including dental, medical, mental health, STD testing, housing assistance, legal assistance, job assistance, and help with obtaining identification. What makes this particular truck so special is that in addition to partnering with local businesses for sponsorship, the idea was conceived with the help of the
students of the UCLA Schools of Public Health and Medicine. The students wanted to give back to a community where they saw a need, and with the help of the GWHFC, they helped decide how the truck would operate, who they would serve and how they would serve people in need (p 745).

Many of the models presented here have sponsors for their trucks. As mentioned above, the UCLA Mobile Clinic gets much of its support through its partnership with the Greater West Hollywood Food Coalition (GWHFC). GWHFC gets its support through various donations, including foundations and individual donations and volunteers. The school itself provides assistance by helping to recruit the volunteers who run the truck through an application process (The UCLA/GWHFC Mobile Clinic, 2015).

Other means of obtaining sponsorship are similar, with Lunchbox Express using volunteers to operate their truck, and sponsorship and support through both Jewish Family Services and the USDA Summer Food Service Program, which helps provide lunches to school-aged children from low-income families (Family Safety Net, 2015). Mobile Loaves and Fishes receives its sponsorship and help through volunteers and various donations, as well as added support through Catholic Charities (Mobile Loaves and Fishes, 2015). Food Bank of the Rockies again uses volunteers to help run the truck, with donations and financial backing coming from charities, as well as grants from corporations and foundations and individual fundraising (Food Bank of the Rockies, 2015). The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Health Outreach Program gets its support through the same grants and funding that help support the Colorado Coalition and its other programs (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, 2015).
There are also other possible ways the truck, run entirely by the students, could be a good resource and support for the community. Restaurant or food service sponsorship is another variable to this project. Using food that is donated is an option, as is using “food waste” or food that might be thrown away, but is still edible and safe for human consumption. One such way is the truck could deliver food that would otherwise be wasted. This could serve the dual purpose of serving those in need and using food instead of throwing it out. The restaurant that donates the food would act as a kind of “sponsor” for the truck, with the truck advertising who that sponsor is by identifying the restaurant that sponsors the truck that week with a sign, or a sticker in the window of the places that sponsor the truck regularly. The idea of using food waste comes from a study done by a group calling themselves “Hunger Solutions”, a proposed non-profit that operates out of New Jersey and is the creation of Rutgers University students (Fagan, 2009). The group was formulated in order to propose the idea of using food waste to feed the hungry and convince restaurants to donate this food in order to help alleviate food costs and cut food waste disposal costs. They wrote and sent letters to several restaurants in the New Brunswick area asking them how they felt about donating excess food to their cause, in order to help feed the homeless and hungry. The main idea is that a charitable organization would pick up the food at the restaurant’s convenience. A decal would also be provided to show that the restaurant is participating in this project. The letter also expresses that the questionnaire was sent in order to see what the interest level would be to participate and if the restaurants being surveyed would be willing to follow food safety guidelines in order to properly store the food until it was handed over for donation (p. 3). This idea is environmentally friendly because it saves on food costs and waste, and is socially conscious because it is helping
those in need. It is not without its limitations, however. The study does not give much information about how the food would be stored, other than to say it would be picked up at the restaurants location with a refrigerator truck, moved to clean plastic containers on site, then immediately delivered to the homeless at their location (p. 5). The study does not conclude if the food would be reheated for the people who are going to eat it, and it gives a very vague description of what this idea would cost to get started. To their credit, it is a good start on research where there is virtually none, and it does utilize the student body at Rutgers as a source of help for operating the truck.

The above was just a conceptual idea, and was never implemented. Our food truck concept could utilize this idea once it is established, with knowledge obtained about food safety regulations. With readily available kitchen space at our disposal on the Auraria Campus in the Hotel and Hospitality Department, we may have a venue through which to store donations, reheat them, and refrigerate them as well. Those working in the hospitality department can help with guidelines pertaining to the use of this food, how it is stored, and other necessary regulatory issues.

A truck is needed in order for this project to take place, with a typical base price for a food truck at about $40,000 (Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller, 2009). This is just for what they describe as a basic truck, with cooking facilities and compartments for both the driver as well as space in the back for multiple people to serve the food. This particular model of food truck also has a window on the side, typical of most food truck styles today, where food is served and orders are taken. The article is very clear about the fact that once you start adding more components to the truck, such as flat screen TV displays and stainless steel appliances, the price can jump significantly (p. 37). The authors inform us that although there are many makes and
models of food trucks, most of them are modeled after the UPS or FedEx delivery vehicle (p. 38). A vehicle of this size is able to host many employees at once, something desired for the food truck idea on Auraria Campus. Getting many students involved is one of the goals.

The Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller article was written in Los Angeles, California, and was published in 2009. Food culture itself is always evolving, as are the avenues through which services are delivered. For the purpose of the food truck that would be used, research was done about food trucks specifically here in Denver, including cost. What was discovered is that used food trucks cost about $20,000 - $40,000 and new ones are in the neighborhood of $100,000. The website DenverStreetFood.com (Vendor Resources, 2015) provided this information. This website also provided information and a link to the Denver Food Truck Guide, which provides information regarding regulations for food trucks. Some of these regulations include what kind of permits are needed in order to procure such a truck, where the truck can and cannot park and for what lengths of time, what kind of inspections are needed to get the truck up and rolling, and vendor and licensing fees.

The Denver Street Food website has ad space available for those selling their trucks and one such truck is for sale on their sight now, giving us a general look at what we would be getting for our money. The truck itself is a 1981 Chevrolet Step Van. It is equipped with a 24” two-basket fryer, preparation tables, built-in storage, a single glass door stand-up refrigerator, a 36” sandwich prep refrigerator, new 5’ hood and exhaust system, new Honda generator and water tank, a waste water tank, water pump, large propane tank, and a hot water heater. All of this will cost the buyer $39,000. This pricing coincides with what we have already research regarding food truck pricing for something used and basic (Vendor Resources, 2015).
In order to secure funds for the truck, the school and the student body could start crowdfunding campaign. The school and/or the student body could come up with a proposal for this idea and propose it on one of the various crowdfunding websites. One such website, FoodStart (FoodStart, 2015) supports this method of starting up a business, catering to food trucks. It even has a category for non-profits, which is exactly what this project is all about.

Funding could also be secured through various grants. There are grants that exist for the sole purpose of feeding the homeless. The website Open Your Heart has a list of grants that specifically cater to feeding the homeless. It shows a list of several grants, all of which can be applied for multiple times throughout the year. They list the eligibility criteria being an agency that feeds the homeless and hungry as their primary function. The website lists the maximum amount of money for a single one of these grants is $10,000 (Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless, 2014). Another website that has a list of grants specifically for feeding the homeless is Fundsnet Services (Fundsnet, 2015). This website lists ten total corporations and non-profits that have grant money available for feeding various demographics within the homeless population. Some of them are specific to children, and two are specific to certain states and Colorado is not eligible for those grants, but that still leaves seven to apply for and could significantly provide for the cost of the truck and the supplies to get started.

Another avenue to consider with this food truck is how we get the knowledge about its existence to the right people. Social media is the medium through which the Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller article discusses at length as the best way to advocate their idea (2009, p. 46). This article makes some important points about accessibility to large amounts of people at once, as well as the ability to manipulate and change information quickly. Even though the population being assisted is homeless, social media is within arm’s length for most people in this day and
There are a few websites here in Denver that accommodates the needs of food trucks and gets them in touch with their customers. One is called Roaming Hunger. What makes this website unique is that it provides a list of trucks in the Denver area, what times they operate, where they are going on that particular shift, as well as options for hiring a truck for catering. This site also looks for trucks by category, including most liked, recently tweeted, sweet, savory, and vegetarian. This site sponsors food trucks across the nation, including on their website recent tweets promoting trucks in the area where you are looking for a truck. The one noticeable thing this website does not have is a category for non-profit trucks or food trucks that even occasionally feed the homeless or underserved (Roaming Hunger, 2015).

Another website that tracks food trucks here in the Denver area is called “Where is that Food Truck?” (Denver - Where is that Food Truck?, 2015). The trucks listed on this site are categorized by cuisine, featuring trucks that serve BBQ, eclectic, Latin, Dessert, Asian, Indian, coffee and breakfast, burgers and brats, pizza, and Mediterranean cuisine. Again, this website makes no mention of non-profit trucks or food trucks that deliver food to the homeless, something that could be implemented for the food truck idea in order to spread the word about its existence.

Another website that mentions food trucks here in Denver is the aforementioned food truck site DenverStreetFood.com (Denver Street Food, 2015). This website seems to provide the most information, both for vendors, potential vendors, and customers. It also provides trucks and
carts by both location and cuisine. It hosts some ad space for people to sell their products, and has various news updates about food truck related items. This site also features a Q&A section, where people can ask questions about obtaining food trucks, including costs, the various styles, and where to get them. Various social media sites are also linked to this website, so you can see who says what about each cart or truck. Again, this is a great way to get the truck idea to the people who need help accessing food assistance.

There are other ways to spread the word about this truck, ways that are more basic but would still work. By making connections with various agencies within the community, students and faculty operating the truck would be able to ensure this idea gets to the right people. Other food banks and shelters would likely be able to spread the word as well. Students could reach out to them as part of their curriculum. This could be part of the planning stages of this project.

Moving forward with this idea would require cooperation from many of the departments on Auraria Campus. As mentioned before, the Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center would need to assist in food storage and safety measures. Their knowledge regarding these matters could be used to get a better understanding of how to keep the food cold enough, hot enough, and to know how to properly reheat the food received as a donation. The students would want to be able to provide the participants with good quality food; otherwise, they are defeating part of the project’s purpose. The culinary knowledge could be a useful tool as well because the students also want to make sure that what they are feeding people is balanced in flavor and tastes good.

The Department of Nutrition at Metropolitan State University could be helpful with the running and operating of this truck. Students would want to be able to make sure this truck is serving its chosen population healthy and delicious food that is micro-nutrient dense. The
Nutrition Department could add their knowledge to this idea, helping to ensure they are serving food that is healthy. The students involved would want the people participating to enjoy what they are eating, and to feel as though they are not just trying to fill their bellies, but also assist in helping them be healthier.

This project can take on the role of being a research-based project, reaching out to the community and assessing what other needs they might have. The Department of Social Work at Metropolitan State University can assist in meeting that goal by engaging with the community and people that the truck helps provide food and resources for. Students in the Social Work Department are taught that an important part of their job is to be an advocate for those who do not always have someone on their side, or a voice of their own. They are also taught how to engage with the community, including those who are struggling, in order to make them feel as though they are part of their team. Social work students could help out with this truck by doing what they are trained to do, and align themselves with the demographic in question, find out what their needs might be, and continue to help the truck grow so that the communities and people it supports will get the best use out of its services.

The Department of Human Services could lend a hand in the arena of assessment and making connections with the people they are helping. Human service students could help provide more information for those they are helping, including information about counseling resources. Working together with the social work students, they could collaborate and gather information and formulate plans in order to help with other needs.

Other departments that could get involved might be the Marketing Department, the Department of Art, and maybe even the College of Business. Each of these Departments could
possibly play a role, with the Art Department being in charge of painting and repainting the truck each year, and the Business and Marketing Departments giving advice on how to make the truck thrive and generate sponsorship.

The primary goal here is to serve food, but there are other things to take into consideration as well. The idea for this truck is that students could volunteer to work on the truck. It would be part of a year-long internship idea, an alternative to regular agency work. Teachers could also volunteer for these positions as well, with the criteria being the same as if they were teaching a class. Students would meet weekly in a regular classroom setting and, depending on the schedule of the truck, would also have their “class” be delivering food from the truck. For example, there might be as many as twenty students chosen from several departments, but only room for four students on the truck at a time. If the truck runs twice a week, there would have to be a rotation and a schedule.

The students who are chosen would want to come together in order to make decisions about how the truck operates, including where it goes and what is being served. The project idea is aimed at helping the homeless, including those who are less visible. Although this study has done some of the research in order to find out what the needs are and whether or not they are being met, students would still be encouraged to reach out to the communities where poverty and homelessness are issues and make a plan of action. Contacting other agencies and food banks in these areas is a good start. Since continuing research is part of this project, keeping the doors of communication open and even collaborating with other agencies and food banks can assist in assessing the ever-changing needs of Denver’s homeless individuals and families.
Training would be required for all of the individuals wishing to participate in the program. Training would consist of knowledge about food and food safety measures. It would also require that the student had the proper licenses and insurance coverage in order to operate the truck. A teacher would most likely have to be the primary driver of this truck, and would have to get special training to drive it. Because restaurant codes would most likely be applied to this truck due to the fact that it serves food, students working on the truck would have to learn this information as part of their curriculum. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also recommends a food handler card as part of an added safety measure for those who serve and handle food. It is not a requirement, but could be added as part of the curriculum for the students wanting to volunteer on the truck (StateFoodSafety.com!, 2015).

The area of concentration this project is working towards helping is motel row in Aurora on East Colfax, based on the density of hidden homeless, including children. In order to target this specific area, flyers could be distributed. There would be about 20 students who were running and operating the truck, with two instructors driving and teaching the class. The truck would go out twice a week, with half of the students going out on a delivery one day, the other on the other day. The students would also meet for instruction and planning once a week as a group. Four social work students, four human services students, four hospitality students, two marketing students, and a business and an art student would be selected for this internship program, based on an application process determined by those who structure the final idea.

Auraria Campus positions itself to take on this project because it is an urban campus and is faced with homelessness every day. Auraria has a food bank for the homeless that congregate on our campus as well as for the students who cannot always get what they need in order to just get by. Students here understand that food insecurity is an issue, and Auraria has the tools and
young minds in order to help those who need it. Auraria is also located downtown in a modern city, and could be the first campus to implement a food truck that not only helps the underserved, but does it in a way that employs the student body here on campus, making use of their skills and knowledge and helping them to move forward within their fields.

This paper is written from a social work perspective, employing the values of *service* and *social justice*. In this particular study, healthy food is seen as a right, something that all people regardless of socioeconomic status, should have access to. A quote from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States (2015) sums up this feeling best: “The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”. 
References


