

With food insecurity being something detrimental to a community and its inhabitants a local church Abounding Grace Ministries (AGM) which is located in Alphabet City, an area that in the East Village of NYC. Three NYC housing developments: Jacob Riis, Lillian Wald, and Baruch houses along with other tenement buildings make up this neighborhood. Within the last ten to fifteen years the surrounding neighborhood the East Village has become gentrified. Community leaders become outraged and upset about the way gentrification was changing their neighborhood but not their specific area. Alphabet City is still very much comprised of low to middle class families who live in the housing development primarily because this is a neighborhood where they were raised.

Seeing how many of the single parent and lower income families were fighting food insecurities with no real substantive change communities leaders went to their Pastors at AGM to see if a partnership could be made to help combat the food insecurities and help with rising gang initiations and crimes. After several meetings the idea of a food pantry was birthed. The food pantry would be held at Saturdays from 8 AM to 2 PM and during the week it would be open Wednesday and Thursday from 11 AM till 4 PM.

In anticipation of their inaugural opening AGM Pastors and leadership meet with the following individuals to see about partnering together realizing that anything off value must not only be done in community but also with intentionality. First meeting was with a local food distributor to discuss about AGM partnered with a local food distributor who would provide organic

eggs, organic fruits and vegetables, artisanal breads and cheeses, farm-raised meats in the form of beef and chicken would be available – on the 1st and 3rd Saturday's fish would be available.

Next meeting was with the youth Pastor of a neighboring church as a former gang member who years before had given his life to Christ. He himself credited his basketball coach who mentored him through his own challenging teenage years who provide an alternative path to the one gang life provided. As a child of a single parent home, he also knew the importance of having a strong male role model he was excited to partner with AGM. He along with three brothers from his men's ministry agreed to make themselves available on the Saturdays to provide basketball and mentorship opportunities to any male youth who appeared interested.

Knowing that sports was not the route for everyone three local business were approached about volunteer opportunities not only at the pantry on weekends but with high school kids from the neighborhood. A doctor's office would send his physician assistant and a nurse, and a dentist office would send two dental hygienists both offices are located in the neighborhood. Not only that but three of their employees lived within the neighborhood. Although these employees were not members of the church, they saw the value in giving back and offering their neighbors the opportunity to have this service available to them. In addition, the dental office agreed to hire two high school students preferably seniors to help with stocking of supplies and with filing paperwork. The dentist office did not

have a need for volunteers but the owner agreed to come out at least one Saturday to discuss the importance of good oral hygiene and its connection to healthy eating.

Police officers from the local precinct would be there to make connections with those who reside in the community. Having the opportunity to make these connections would enable that the cops who patrolled this neighborhood would be able to make tangible relationships with those they are policing. In an effort to combat the violence that can plague the neighborhood while on hand they would offer safety tips, give instruction on how to anonymously report crime or unsavory activities. This involvement by the precinct would prove to be much needed and beneficial. By ensuring that each side could see the humanity of the other it would begin to make small inroads and would make what is often time a tense relationship would be on hand to offer safety tips and speak of preventative measures to avoid gang and gang violence.

These small connections had the potential to over time become even bigger opportunities not only to be Christ's hand extended but to improve food insecurities, to promote healthy living, oral hygiene, combat gang initiations, provide mentorship, and to strengthen the relationship between the police and the community they served in. Having these Saturdays being successful was vitally important AGM realized that God was using them as a conduit of sorts to ensure that their community was not just getting spiritually strong but that their other needs were being addressed. After

several weeks other partnering opportunities became available. A cop was talking to his firefighter buddy and the local fire department began to show up to discuss fire prevention and had their EMT's offer cpr classes to those willing to learn.

A new bank opened up in the neighborhood and the branch manager saw the flier about the pantry occurring on Saturday new to the neighborhood and not familiar he got permission from his superiors about speaking to the church to see about the bank becoming involved. The manager and two of his employees would come on the 2nd Saturday they would open up bank accounts, give financial guidance to anyone seeking and offered to provide an internship to a high school senior or college student who wanted mentorship but wasn't necessarily into basketball. The public library who had not opened for years on Saturday offered to come to the pantry one Saturday a month to sign folks up for library cards, to offer GED materials to anyone interesting in taking the test and to provide story time for children aged 2-7. The youth pastors wife worked at a workforce development organization after telling her supervisor about her Saturday the supervisor came the following weekend to check it out. She spoke with one of the AGM leaders about providing job readiness trainings that would provide residents the opportunity to develop new capabilities and move towards economic self-sufficiency. By facilitating training opportunities to enhance residents' job readiness, technical and employment skills. Through job search and application completion, resume -building, interview and

employment skills, and computer literacy training, residents would receive assistance that would prepare economically vulnerable workers enter, re-enter or improve their position in the workforce with the tools necessary to acquire and maintain employment. These new connections were vitally important to the growth of Alphabet City it ensured that their youth would see that someone was invested in them. Having the church, the police, food institutions, health entities and financial tools available would make someone who at one time might have felt helpless they would now feel they were able to expand and grow.

Opportunity makes a major difference and having volunteers who are positively committed to seeing positive impact occur in their neighborhood and by dedicating both their time and resources ensures that impact is felt and has a rippling effect. The impact made upon these low-income adults, seniors, children, and youth who live in the housing developments, allow the opportunity to serve the neighborhood. By being community-based means that our proximity and that of our volunteers allows us to better able to provide convenient and effective connections.