

Oklahoma State University

Sociology Department

# Food Insecurity and Volunteerism in a College Town

Social Capital in a Stillwater Food and Resource  
Center

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## **Acronyms**

FRC – Food and Resource Center

FUMC – First United Methodist Church

IRB – Institutional Review Board

ODB – Our Daily Bread

OSU – Oklahoma State University

SMAC – Stillwater Makes a Change

# Executive Summary

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## Background

This report was done to help Our Daily Bread (ODB), a Food and Resource Center (FRC) in Stillwater, OK, understand their volunteer demographics. This Food and Resource Center was started to help serve Payne County and offers the opportunity for people to volunteer their time to meet the needs of the food insecure in their community. ODB opened in September, 2017, and is in the middle of a town primarily catered to the students of Oklahoma State University (OSU). The survey associated with this project was created to gain an understanding of what role college students play in the running of this FRC, and how ODB can better recruit and manage volunteers in the future. This research report critically examines the survey's responses, summarizes the volunteer's demographics, makes recommendations to ODB, and explains how volunteerism within the FRC relates to social capital.

## Methodology

The initial survey was a collaborative effort of the primary researcher, advisors, and the director of ODB. It was then formally approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The survey was sent to a data base of nearly 300 volunteers provided by the volunteer coordinator at ODB, with additional hardcopies left in the break room at ODB for any other volunteers who were unable to use or access the online format. Of all those exposed to the survey, a total of 95 surveys were submitted. Physical surveys were turned into a locked box and then manually input into the Qualtrics system, which was the online program used for the electronic format. The data was then downloaded into Excel where it was cleaned, before it was input into SPSS for further testing. To examine the relationships between separate variables, t-tests and correlations were used as appropriate. Some coding was done by hand to find patterns and form cohesive groups within the responses.

## Key Findings

- Between the 95 respondents, there was an age range of 76 years and an average age of 58 years old.
- The most common initial connection point to ODB was a church or religious group affiliation.

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- Six respondents were students, with no common degree plan, but all reported enjoying and recommending the experience.
- The favorite volunteer positions were Personal Shopper and Back of House/Warehouse.

### **Key Recommendations**

- A structured, formal process for volunteer training and orientation.
- Improve and expand the recruitment of student volunteers.
- Steer new volunteers to an area best suited to their interests or strengths.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

This study builds on what is already known about current volunteer demographics in the non-profit sector by exploring the volunteer base at the Stillwater, OK, Food and Resource Center (FRC), explores the current running of Our Daily Bread (ODB), and critically examines social capital within the context of the FRC. A 2001 study consistently observed a trend in which “volunteering that takes place in short periods of time, usually defined as not more than 3-4 months in duration, or as even shorter bouts which recur, typically annually” was massively more popular than long-term commitments, and even sought after by prospective volunteers (Graff, 2). This kind of volunteering is referred to as episodic volunteering, and is a marked shift from the previous generations of committed volunteers who worked for causes and on behalf of bigger movements through lifelong service. Those long-term volunteers have become nearly impossible to find, as the target volunteer population has shrunk considerably. Women, “who began to volunteer in the 1950's and 1960's were able to dedicate much of their adult lives to volunteering because they were not active in the paid labour force,” no longer have the time as they have taken over a large portion of the labor force and shouldered the responsibility of becoming many household's primary breadwinners (Graff, 3). This phenomenon is summarized by Graff- “volunteering is getting squeezed out of people's lives as more demands and other leisure opportunities expand.” This busy and increasingly self-centred cultural shift has taken a large portion of the elderly labor force, who increasingly see volunteer work as a chore they have earned an extended break from. In regards to new volunteers, Graff observes that 20-40 year olds are characteristically the largest pool to draw from, while older adults and the elderly remain distant and extremely difficult to recruit. Young adults, defined by Graff (2001) as those below the age of 20, are so over-saturated in volunteer opportunities that the dynamic of recruitment and advertising has changed to better market the positions as rewarding for the few volunteers who must now do the work on behalf of many.

Our Daily Bread has been operational since September of 2017, when it consolidated three smaller Stillwater-based food pantries at First United Methodist Church (FUMC), Lost Creek Church, and Stillwater Church of Christ. This merger offered a stable volunteer base and provided low income families a single location that could provide consistent and accessible hours of operation for clients. ODB is open to clients for three hours per day on Monday through Friday, as well as one Saturday per month. When a client walks through the doors of ODB, they are taken into a private office with an Intake volunteer who checks their proof of residence and legal forms of identification for everyone living in their household. The clients are then taken to the shopping

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floor, where a Personal Shopper volunteer assists them in everything from picking out healthy food to swapping recipes. After the client has selected the appropriate number of items for their household, their food is bagged and loaded into their car. This process gives dignity to the food pantry system, as clients have agency over the food they bring home to their household.

In order to contextualize the volunteer demographics and better explain the role of college students within ODB, the director Becky Taylor provided their previously collected demographics of their clients. To be eligible for ODB's services, clients must reside in Payne County and must provide a legal form of identification for themselves and every member of their household. These families and households must also meet the income levels shown in Table 1 (Taylor, 2018). The clients are considered food insecure, which is defined as "whether a household has enough money to meet its basic food needs." (Martin, 2646). Food security, the end goal of food pantry resources like ODB, is defined as "access at all times by all people to an adequate amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods for active and healthy life." (Chhabra, 2014). ODB seeks to provide this through their client's-choice, pseudo grocery store system which gives clients dignity and autonomy in what food they will take home to their families. According to the ODB website and supportive information provided through conversations with the director, in their first five months, the average number of volunteers per month was 561 (Taylor, 2018). This volunteer group averaged a cumulative total of 1,495 hours per month, and saved ODB an average of \$10,837.98 in labor expenses each month, as seen in Table 2.

**Table 1 USDA Income Requirements by Household Size**

Size	Weekly Income	Monthly Income
1	\$430	\$1,860
2	\$575	\$2,504
3	\$727	\$3,149
4	\$867	\$3,793
5	\$1,024	\$4,437
6	\$1,173	\$5,082
7	\$1,332	\$5,726
8	\$1,471	\$6,371

In Table 2, volunteer and client population totals are organized side by side. The average number of food insecure households served by ODB between the months September to March was 917. The average number of individuals served was 2,265. The month with the lowest number of volunteers was January with 421, but the number of clients that month was the highest to date with 2,830. The monthly average number of volunteers, from ODB's provided data between the months

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September to January, was 561. According to ODB’s website, the month with the most volunteers was November, with a total of 686. The final column of Table 2 shows the total amount in labor costs that volunteers saved ODB per month.

**Table 2 ODB Client and Volunteer Website Data**

Month	Households	Individuals	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours	Vol. Saved Us:
Sep-17	728	797	521	1717	\$12,448.25
Oct-17	897	2015	588	1610	\$11,672.50
Nov-17	987	2470	686	1934	\$14,021.50
Dec-17	937	2371	590	1518	\$11,003.69
Jan-18	1098	2830	421	696	\$5,044.00

Since ODB opened in September, the total number of clients, including duplicates who returned multiple months, is 5,933 women and 3,890 men. These numbers work out to 40% men clients, and 60% women. The total number of individual clients to date is 5,453, representing 2,210 households. The greatest portion of these clients by age was in the 15-59 year old age range, which has 2,793 clients, or 51% of the total client population. The next largest portion was within the seniors (60+ category), which has 742 individuals, or 14% of the population. The smallest category was pre-school children, aged 0-5, followed closely by adolescents, who are aged 12-17. This information is seen in the provided Table 3.

**Table 3 Client Demographics**

Age Range	Individuals Assisted
Pre-School Children (0 - 5)	543
Children (6 - 11)	630
Adolescents (12 - 17)	573
Adults (18 - 59)	2793
Seniors (60+)	742
Other (unknown)	171
Total	5453

A large portion of this paper is dedicated to understanding how social capital relates to volunteerism within ODB. Martin (2004) defines social capital as “the resources available to individuals through their social behaviors and membership in community networks.” This concept is the lifeblood of a local food and resource center, which relies on the community to best serve and care for the community. The mission statement of ODB is heavy laden with social capital related language: “Feeding our community collaboratively and providing connections that enable lasting change” (Taylor, 2018). With volunteer positions ranging from retail recovery driver to

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running computer systems in intake, many different people with different skillsets are needed to make everything run smoothly.

Using an instrument formulated from Sampson and colleagues (1997) to measure social capital, Martin (2004) found that “household social capital is associated with significantly decreased odds of being hungry.” One of the primary benefits of social capital is the social network that can be a support system in difficult times, and the opportunity for a family or individual to borrow resources like food, should they be unable to provide for themselves. This finding offers researchers who aim to end hunger the potential solution of increasing social capital in a given community or household to alleviate food insecurity. Martin’s 2004 study also observed that households which participated in church were more likely to utilize church-run food pantries and other religiously affiliated resources.

The primary holders of social capital are elderly households, who also have higher levels of engagement in social and civic clubs and activities (Martin, 2004). This trend suggests that the overarching morals and priorities of the past have shifted in modern times, and society has moved away from the community and relationally-minded traditions and social expectations that grow social capital. Transient households typically have less social capital as they lack social or communal stability, which is especially evident in particular ethnic groups that move as workers, refugees, or immigrants in the United States. To best serve these disconnected individuals and communities, it is necessary to focus on “strengthening the assets and resources that exist within disadvantaged communities” (Martin, 2004). To fully realize the benefits of social capital, it is necessary to build relationships within the context of an individual’s life, and use that relationship to face the various struggles and difficulties they might experience. This is what gives food insecurity and social capital a positive relationship- as people are integrated into the social circle of someone dealing with food insecurity, more resources are accessible, and more people are able to help directly alleviate the issue of hunger.

### **1.2 Objectives**

The purpose of this honors thesis is to help Our Daily Bread improve their volunteer experience. This is accomplished through the following objectives:

- To understand the volunteer population within Our Daily Bread.
- To understand college student participation within a Food and Resource Center.
- To assess which groups are not participating or being reached for volunteer opportunities.
- To assess social capital’s role within volunteerism at Our Daily Bread.

## 2 Methodology

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### 2.1 Research Questions

The primary research questions addressed by this research report are:

1. What are the typical demographics of the Our Daily Bread volunteers?
2. What has the Our Daily Bread volunteer experience been?
3. How does social capital relate to volunteer participation in the Food and Resource Center?
4. What recommendations do the volunteers have for improving Our Daily Bread?

### 2.2 Sample

The sample consists of Our Daily Bread volunteers. A digital survey was emailed to everyone in the volunteer system, Volgistics, which has a total of nearly 300 people. No age restrictions were put on the survey because the data was meant to reflect the current demographics of all volunteers.

### 2.3 Survey Instrument

A 20 question survey was designed to better understand the background and experiences of current and previous Our Daily Bread volunteers. This questionnaire was created with the input of Our Daily Bread staff and the advisement of the thesis directors. Survey questions were built around the four core research questions and included both quantitative and qualitative questions. The final survey, shown in Appendix 7.1, was reviewed and approved by the Oklahoma State University (OSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) with an exempt status. By administering and analysing the findings of this survey, recommendations regarding future pursuits of volunteers and methods for volunteer recruitment can be made. There is also a section specifically for students with questions over their year classification, major, and enjoyment level as a student volunteer. This portion of the survey is meant to explore the university student level of participation within a FRC in a predominately college town. Skip questions were included for students and past volunteers in the online format. A large portion of the survey is designated to rating levels of enjoyment, meaning, and personal rewards gained from volunteering with Our Daily Bread. The online version of the consent form required respondents to click through for consent while the physical copy had an entire front page dedicated to the IRB information and consent form. The survey was administered in English, and the two formats provided access to as many people with impairments and handicaps as possible. The complete survey has 20 questions and was

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administered for a full two weeks at the end of March, 2018, to the volunteer body through email and through physical copies left in the break room at ODB. The following Table 4 summarises how the specific questions used to answer each larger research question:

**Table 4 Specific Items for Research Questions**

Research Question	Survey Question Topic	Description
Demographics	Age Gender Student Status Student Involvement Current city of residence	What is your age? What is your gender? Major? Year? Required to volunteer? Through which organizations? Where do you live?
Experience	Position in ODB Start date Use of ODB's resources Frequency of volunteering Motivation  Enjoyment  Meaningfulness  Reward  Favorite volunteer position Expected end date	Typical volunteer position? When did you start? Have you been a client? How often do you volunteer? Rank your motivation for volunteering from 1-5 (required, desire to give back, interest in food insecurity, influence of friends or family, enjoyment or pleasure) How much have you enjoyed your experience? (Not Enjoyed =1, Enjoyed a lot =7) How meaningful has your experience been? (Not Meaningful =1, Very Meaningful=7) How rewarding has your experience been? (Not Rewarding =1, Very Rewarding =7) What is your favorite position? How much longer will you stay?
Social Capital	Connection to ODB Past experience	How did you first get connected? List past food pantry volunteer experience.
Recommendations	Student opinions Improvements	Is it a good opportunity for students? What recommendations do you have?

## **2.4 Data Collection**

The survey was administered, advertised, and explained through physical copies left in the Our Daily Bread volunteer break room and through the digital avenue of the volunteer email system. The Qualtrics system was used for the online format of the survey. Physical copies were advertised through posters hung in the ODB office and through word of mouth by ODB staff. These physical copies were especially important for one-time volunteers and those without access to a computer or personal email. The practice intercept dialogue, posters, and all other promotional materials were approved by the Oklahoma State IRB. Completed surveys were left in a locked tub, located in the volunteer break room, and were collected daily from ODB. Survey responses were then manually input into the Qualtrics system, after which they were destroyed for confidentiality. The entire data collection process lasted two weeks, from March 19-30, 2018. The initial email was sent on March 19<sup>th</sup>, and the final reminder email was sent March 28<sup>th</sup>. All volunteers were invited to participate and encouraged to do so, and with the two email reminders, poster advertisements, and word of mouth, a total of 95 individuals participated in the survey.

## **2.5 Data Analysis**

The primary data systems utilized in this study were Qualtrics and SPSS. The electronic surveys were automatically input into Qualtrics, while physical surveys were manually input. Data was then downloaded from the Qualtrics system and cleaned in both Excel and SPSS. In Excel, age, current city of residence, and other questions were made more uniform for the sake of coding and testing. This cleaned data was then analysed through SPSS with crosstabs and correlations for t-tests. Some coding was done by hand for the recommendations section and the open ended questions regarding enjoyment, meaningfulness, and how rewarding volunteers felt their ODB experience was. Common themes were pulled and further discussed, and changes were made as necessary to ensure valid and specific coding.

## **2.6 Limitations**

The survey received a total of 95 responses, which is less than a third of the total population in the ODB volunteer system. Since only a handful of people used the physical copy, some volunteers who were less tech savvy may have struggled with the formatting of particular questions, such as those that asked for ratings and specific ranking of motivations. Additionally, those without access to email were excluded unless they went into ODB during the two week window that the survey was open and in the office. The survey took place over OSU's spring break, so many students were likely out of town for the first week of administration. The director

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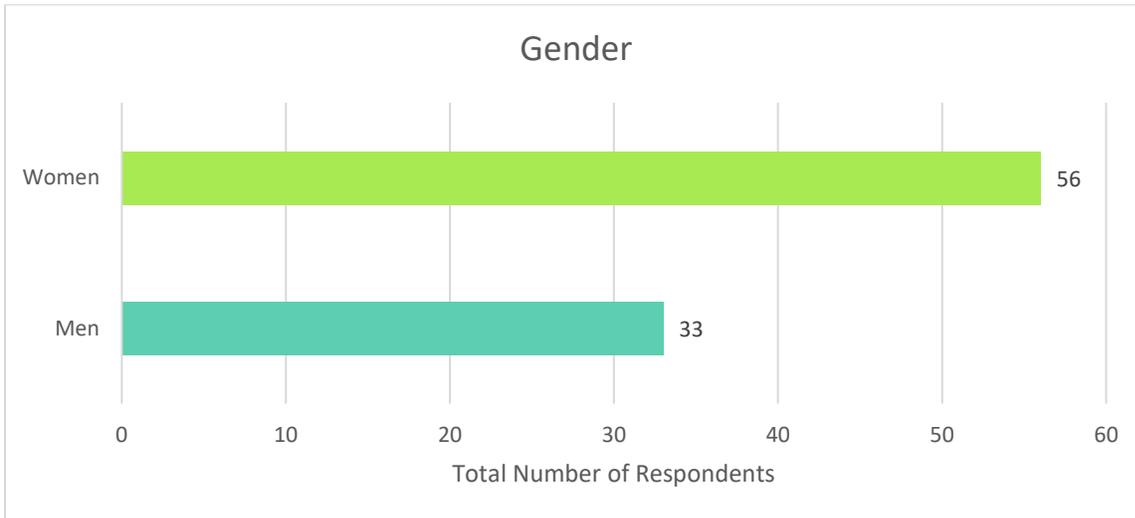
of Our Daily Bread, Becky Taylor, mentioned that there is a noticeable trend in less volunteers over OSU's academic holidays. Because the survey was only open for two weeks, many one-time volunteers were not reached, nor were many past volunteers who no longer help or are a part of their relatively new volunteer system that has been in place since December of 2017. Still, 93 of the respondents are continuing volunteers, and, as the analyses below indicate, are invested in ODB. These findings represent those most committed to the organization and are in the best position for sharing informed opinions and making valid recommendations.

# 3 Results

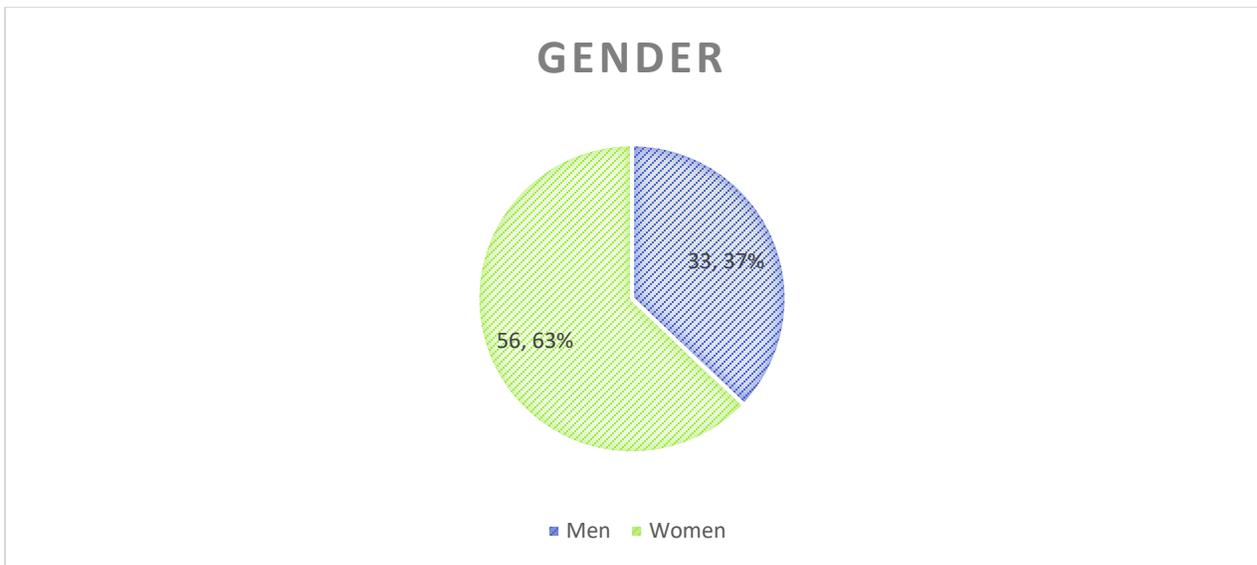
## 3.1 What are the typical demographics of Our Daily Bread volunteers?

The gender of volunteers was disclosed by 89 of the 95 total survey respondents, with a recorded 33 men and 56 women. This equates to 37.08% men and 62.92% women. This is shown in both Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.

**Figure 1 – Gender of Volunteers by Numerical Totals**



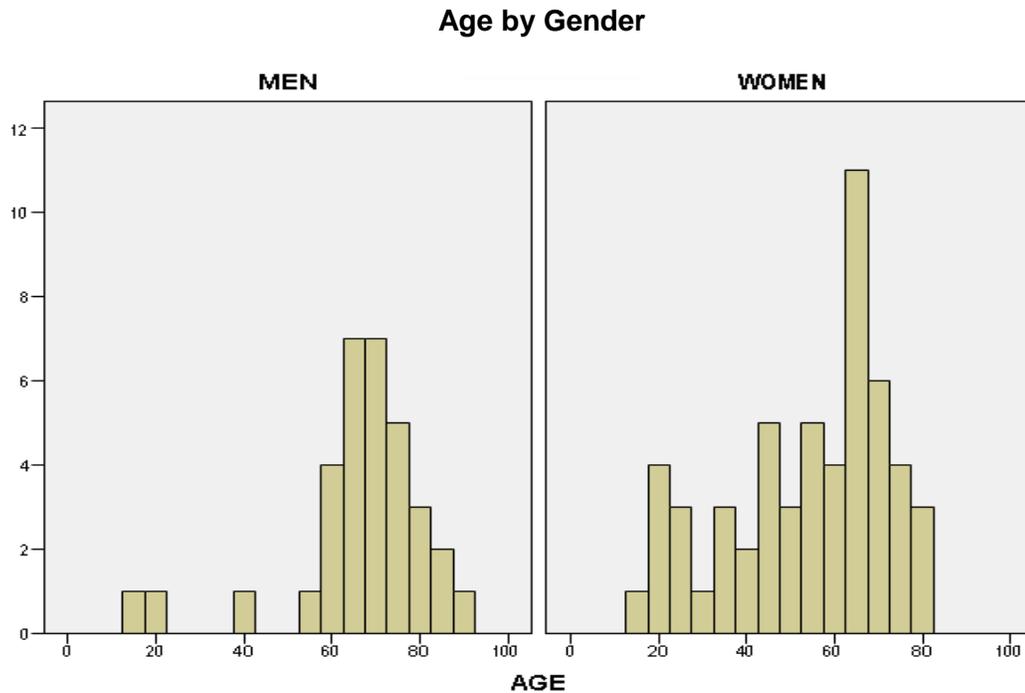
**Figure 2 – Gender of Volunteers by Percentages**



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The average age of an ODB volunteer is 58 years old. There was a 76 year range between the youngest respondent, a 15 year old, and the oldest, a 91 year old. The most common age was 71. In total, 45 of the respondents were over the age of 65, or retirement age. As shown in Figure 3, men, on average, were significantly older than women, with an average age of 66.5 as compared to 53.6 years old ( $t = -3.551, p \leq .001$ ). The table shows the total number of respondents by their age in years.

**Figure 3- Volunteer Age by Gender**



Five of the 88 respondents who reported city of residence were from outside the city of Stillwater, OK. Two of the five out-of-town volunteers live roughly 10.4 miles away from ODB's front door. One of these volunteers serves once a month, and one comes in multiple times a month. Another volunteer drives a 15.2 mile commute. There was a one-time volunteer with a total travel distance of 24.5 miles. Only two of the out-of-town volunteers come on a weekly basis. The remaining 83 surveyed volunteers live in Stillwater, OK.

Only 6 of the surveyed volunteers were students, five of which are completing their undergraduate degrees with one currently enrolled in graduate school. The undergraduates are pursuing degrees primarily through the College of Arts and Sciences at Oklahoma State, with several focusing on pre-med tracks. Two are pursuing degrees in the journalism and media related field, and three have social services or liberal arts degrees.

**“I have found this volunteer opportunity to be one of the most rewarding volunteer experiences in Stillwater because you can really see changes occurring in the community firsthand.”**

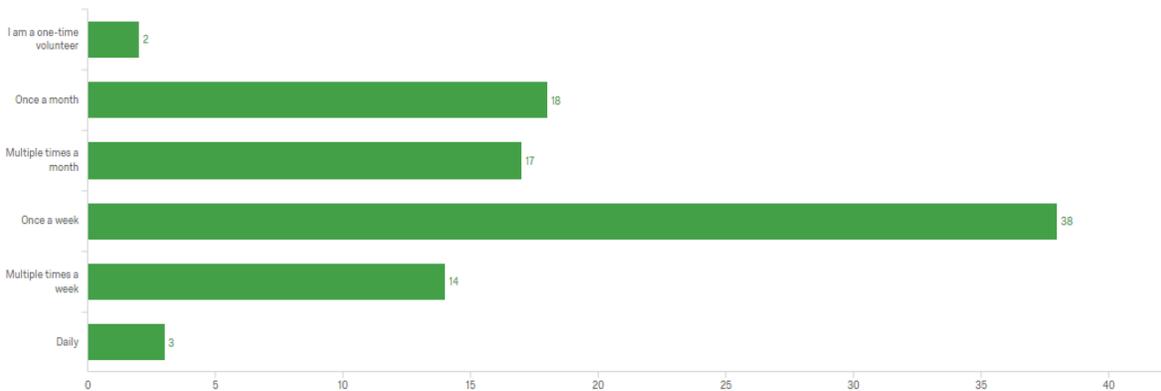
**-Current ODB Student Volunteer**

Only three of the students are required to complete volunteer hours because of an organization or club, and all of them said they would recommend volunteering with ODB to other students. Most reported that it was well suited to and relaxed enough to accommodate student schedules, and one said they valued the interactions with directors and staff. Sixty-six percent of student respondents were seniors, with one junior and one sophomore.

### **3.2 What has the Our Daily Bread volunteer experience been?**

The current ODB volunteers are most likely to volunteer once a week, with a total of 38 out of 92 choosing this option, which translates to 41% of respondents. The least frequent responses were from two one-time volunteers and three who responded that they volunteer on a daily basis. Twenty one of the 92 respondents reported that they were involved with Our Daily Bread from before the opening date.

**Figure 4 – Current Volunteer Frequency**

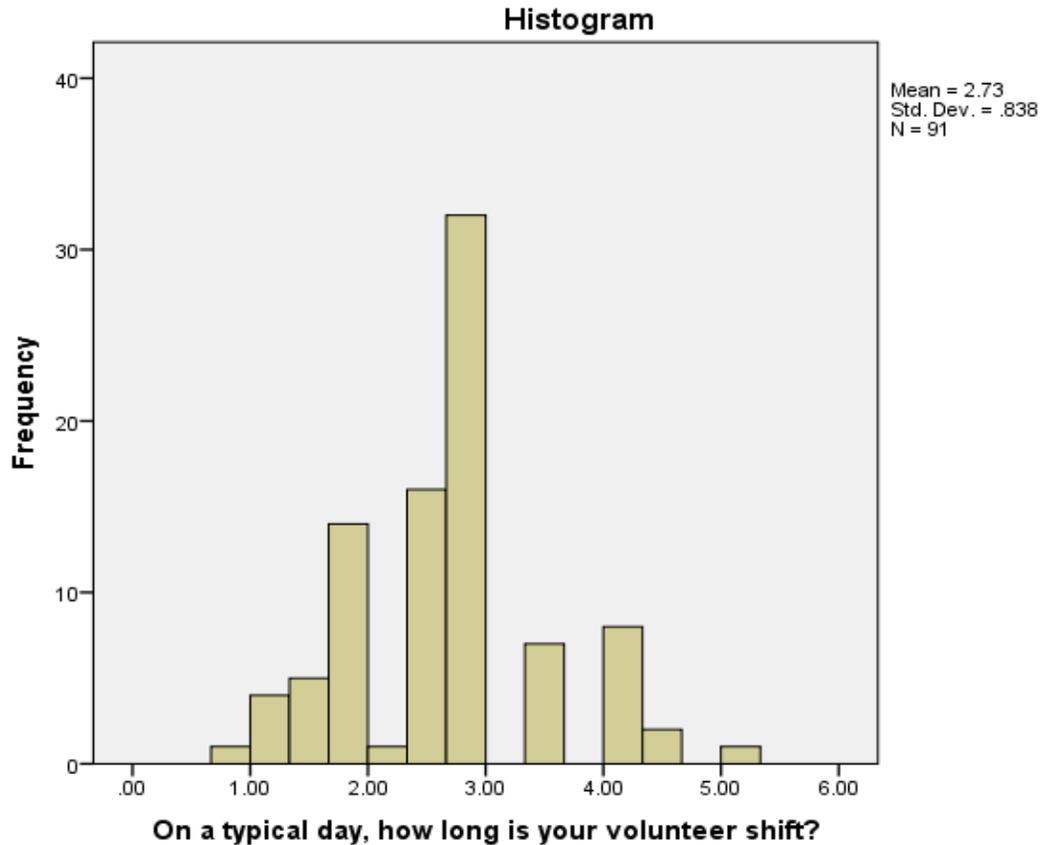


The most common volunteer shift length is three hours, receiving 32% of the responses. In order of popularity, the next three most common shift lengths were two and a half, two, and four hours. There was not a significant relationship between age and shift length. ODB opens for two

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and a half hour long intervals on a weekly basis to meet a variety of schedule needs for their clients, which corresponds with the length of time the majority of volunteers serve in a shift.

**Figure 5 – Volunteer Shift Length by Hours**

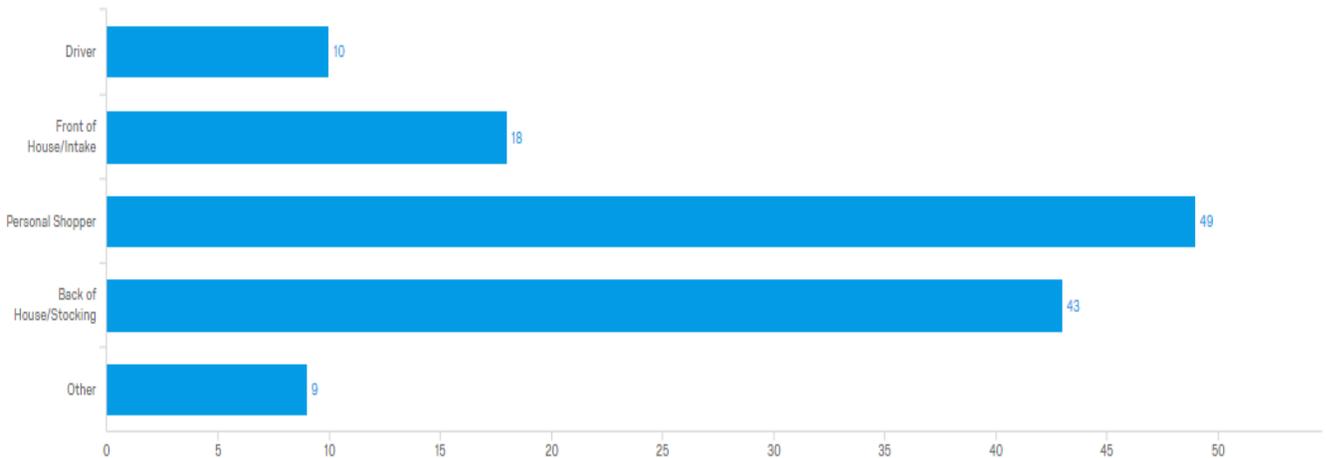


There are a diverse span of daily needs within ODB, and there are many different positions that a volunteer can serve in to meet these needs. The most common positions are Drivers, who pick up the food donations from various stores around town and bring them to ODB, Front of House/Intake volunteers, who greet clients and make sure they are properly identified and registered in the system, Personal Shoppers who assist the clients with picking their food from the grocery store style pantry, and Back of House/Stoking volunteers, who typically spend their time unloading and reloading boxes in the warehouse or freezers. The two most common areas for volunteer work are the Personal Shoppers and Back of House positions, which is not surprising since these positions require the most technical work and manpower to complete. When gender and volunteer position are compared, only men served as Drivers, and 17 out of 42 of the Back of House and Warehouse volunteers were men. The “other” category for typical volunteer position, which was a catchall for the various other tasks and projects ODB asks their volunteers to fulfil,

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was also dominated by men with 66.67% of this category. This “other” category had a few write in responses on the favorite position question, and was mostly filled in as Retail Recovery. This position entails sorting through goods donated by local stores due to forthcoming expiration dates or excess of a particular product, especially seasonal produce or food items. There was not a significant relationship between volunteer position and age.

**Figure 6 – Volunteer Positions at ODB**



**Figure 7 – Volunteer Position by Gender**

		Which volunteer position do you typically perform at ODB? (Select all that apply)					Total
		Driver	Front of House/Intake	Personal Shopper	Back of House/Stocking	Other	
What is your gender?	Male	10	6	11	17	6	32
	Female	0	11	38	25	3	56
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	10	17	49	42	9	88

The favorite ODB volunteer position amongst those surveyed was Personal Shopper followed by Back of House. The Back of House workers appreciated the flexibility in hours and how easily the position worked into their normal schedule. One volunteer said they appreciated that they “can bring [their] family (husband and 3 kids) to work with them, together.” Another consistent rationalization for preferring this position was the labor intensiveness and lack of interaction with people. The 27 volunteers who most enjoyed this position also mentioned the instant gratification of being able to see what they accomplished after a shift, and knowing that they were helping others by keeping shelves stocked and organized. Personal shopper, the most

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popular position, was primarily mentioned for the interaction with clients that volunteers were able to enjoy. A student volunteer who chose this option said “As a human development and family science major, I see this position beneficial as I get to interact with the guests and learn different things from each person.” There were clear values placed on connecting with, speaking to, praying over, and all around helping people amongst the 38 volunteers who preferred this position. Front of House volunteers mostly reported enjoying meeting new people, doing meaningful work that was not labor intensive, and getting to interact with clients as soon as they walked through the door. The majority of respondents who chose Driver as their favorite position reported feeling qualified for the position because of experience at other food pantry resources. They also appreciated the chance to commit several hours to volunteering without getting physically exhausted.

**“I love shopping with the clients and getting to know them, and letting them know they are important to us. They make me laugh, and it feels so good to think about/help others.”**

### **-ODB Personal Shopper Volunteer**

Five of the surveyed volunteers are or have been clients of ODB. All of these client volunteers are women, and they range in age from 27 to 79, with two under the age of 40. None of these volunteers had recommendations for ODB, and one responded to the question by saying “I was scared and insecure at first, but volunteers and leaders were very supportive and helpful.” The most common answer to how much longer they intended to volunteer was “indefinitely”, and one woman serves on a daily basis as a volunteer. Only one of these five responded with something lower than the highest level of meaningfulness, enjoyment, and personal reward from their volunteer experience.

There was not a significant relationship between the willingness of volunteers to be ODB clients and gender. All four of the respondents who answered “no” to this question were between the ages of 45-66, with an average age of 58. They all listed their primary motivation for volunteering as enjoyment or pleasure, and all found the experience highly meaningful, enjoyable, and personally rewarding. They enjoyed getting to help the less fortunate, and reported the exposure to a vulnerable population as revelatory. None of these volunteers had recommendations for the FRC, and only used the provided space for positive feedback. None of these individuals had previously been a client of ODB, and only one had previous volunteer experience in a food pantry setting.

**Figure 8 – Volunteer’s Consideration of ODB Use by Gender**

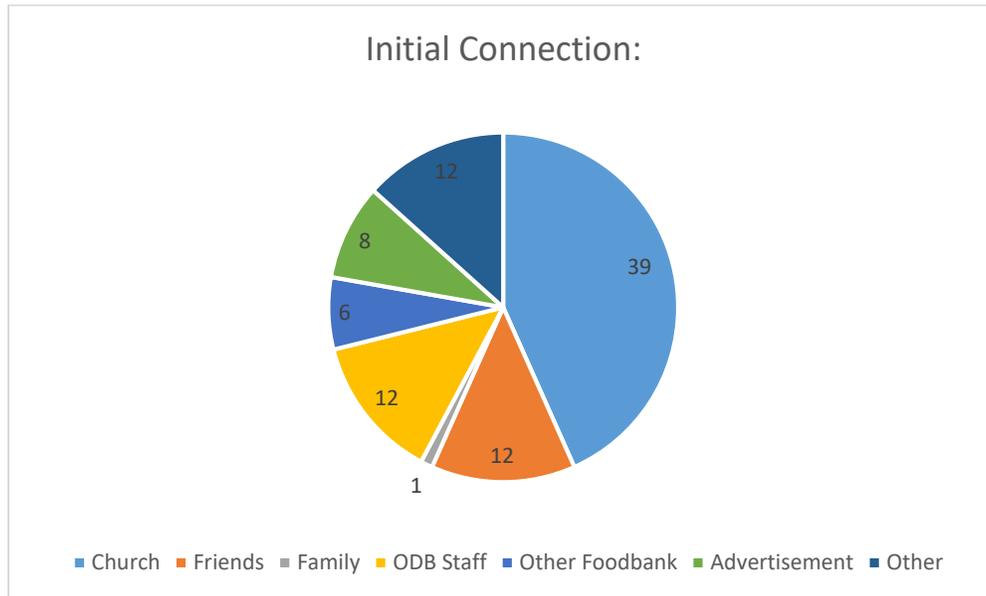
		What is your gender?			Total
		Male	Female	Other	
Would you consider using ODB if needed?	Yes	29	49	0	78
	No	2	2	0	4
	Total	31	51	0	82

### 3.3 How does social capital relate to volunteer participation in the Food and Resource Center?

The inherent presence of social capital between ODB’s volunteer population and clients was evident in the feedback from volunteers in regards to their experiences and what aspects of ODB they found most rewarding. Human interaction and the possibility of building new relationships were two of the most popular answers. One volunteer said they “enjoy visiting with the clients and learning about their lives,” while another said they “have the chance to meet a lot of incredible people and connect with people that [they] might not normally have the chance to meet.” Many of the responses included that they find satisfaction in being able to help others and give back to their community, and one woman said that “it’s nice to meet people and learn about them, particularly when they come from a different lifestyle.” All negative responses were related to the work itself, other volunteers’ lack of training, and the technicalities of the positions.

Ninety two people responded to the question about how they were initially connected to ODB, and the responses varied from family connections to newspaper advertisements. Thirty nine said that their primary connection to ODB was through their church, with multiple referencing a monthly volunteering commitment made by a particular congregation. Twelve referenced a friend or neighbour connecting them, and 12 people said a member of the board or staff from ODB referred them. Only 8 people were initially connected through advertisements or online posts, and six said that they were brought into ODB through other volunteering experiences at food banks. Many of these volunteers were parts of the food pantries and resource centers that consolidated into ODB, or were told about ODB by the Regional Foodbank. Other less common responses included family references, customer status, university major related advertisements, and local organizations and clubs such as Stillwater Makes a Change (SMAC) and Payne County’s United Way.

**Figure 9 - Connections to ODB**



Twenty six volunteers had previous experience working within a food pantry or similarly structured resource center within their church. This was a common link to how several volunteers were initially connected to ODB for volunteering. The prominent groups listed were First United Methodist Church (FUMC), Lost Creek Church, and Stillwater Church of Christ. These are the three ministries that consolidated in the initial creation of ODB. In the consolidation of resources, the volunteers from all of these churches agreed to help serve and support the new FRC, and are essential for the daily hours that ODB offers. The average amount of experience between the nine volunteers with previous experience in the field was 14 years. Seven of these volunteers have over 10 years of experience, and three volunteers have over 20 years of experience.

### **3.4 What recommendations do the volunteers have for improving Our Daily Bread?**

This part of the survey had open ended questions for respondents to fill in their thoughts and opinions. A lot of positive feedback came in- 19 of the 72 responses were explicitly positive and praised ODB’s handling of volunteers, service to the community, and overall administrative work. Fourteen responded to the question with “nothing” or “n/a” and gave no feedback, positive or negative. There were 28 responses with specific recommendations for the FRC. Within these

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responses, the larger prominent themes were about better communication and transparency, volunteer training, and specific areas for growth and expansion. The oldest respondents had fewer specific recommendations, and were more likely to compliment the current systems within ODB.

The common responses that pertained to communication revolved around better emailing systems and setting clear volunteer schedules. Some suggested shorter shifts, which is a simple issue of communication, while another requested someone more closely oversee and maintain a strict calendar that ensures all shifts are filled. Additionally, one volunteer requested a specific list of daily tasks that volunteers can work on in between clients. Several of the requests and recommendations were things that ODB has already instituted and does through their online volunteer and communication system, which also suggests the need for better communication and transparency in what resources ODB has for their volunteers and clients.

Requests for more volunteer training and new volunteer orientation were the most common recommendations. A few volunteers even expressed frustration with other volunteers who did not know what to do or did things wrong. Other volunteers confessed that it was frustrating to see others redoing their own work. The area most frequently mentioned was the warehouse, where volunteers reported a lack of both maintenance, organized stocking, and overall training and preparedness. One of the older men who volunteers in the warehouse on a weekly basis responded that “[I recommend] consistent volunteer training and coaching, particularly infrequent volunteers. This would be better for guests (some inconsistent instructions regarding quantities allowed, etc.). More consistent maintenance and stocking of warehouse, recycling compliance, housekeeping.” Another volunteer said they wished there was “a daily list of things that need to be done and having people check them off when completed or by some other method letting volunteers know what they can do that day. Also some training in what should be stocked & what should be tossed.”

The specific requests were pointed at things as specific as moving the desserts to the current desk location, to adding aprons with pockets for Personal Shopper volunteers. A few volunteers have recommendations for better serving clients, and pointed towards the future of ODB and the “resources” that contribute to a Food and Resource Center. One 66 year old man recommended “more services such as financial counselling, medical services, job searching skills, etc.” One volunteer recommended giving larger packs of meat to larger households, while another suggested that ODB start recycling. To echo the previous category regarding communication, several volunteers made suggestions for things that ODB already does, such as cooking and nutrition classes, the information for which is provided on their website.

## 4 Discussion

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### **4.1 What are the typical demographics of the Our Daily Bread volunteers?**

According to the information provided by ODB, clients have been 40% men and 60% women, and surveyed volunteers were 37% men and 63% women. There was a significant relationship, for volunteers, between age and gender. Women, on average, were 13 years younger than the men respondents to the survey. The historically women dominated volunteer sector has nearly levelled out with changing times and career paths, however there is not yet uniformity across the genders as seen in this project, as women were a larger portion of the volunteer population and significantly younger than the men. Mothers could potentially be better served with more opportunities to bring their children with to the resource center. Men favoured the warehouse and driving opportunities, which could be related to the more flexible hours that accommodate work schedules. Women were more inclined to work as Personal Shoppers, which is a more relationally focused position. The level of involvement amongst older men could be attributed to their age or place in an older generation, which holds onto traditional views of volunteerism and social involvement. Men also said they enjoyed relational aspects of their volunteer experiences, though they dominated the less interpersonal roles.

Age was measured to better understand the volunteers at ODB, and data provided by the FRC showed 742 clients over the age of 60 (14%), 2,793 clients aged 18-59 (53%), and 1,746 clients under the age of 17 (33%) (Taylor, 2018). For the same age ranges, 53 volunteers who completed the survey were 60 or older (62%), 30 were aged 18-59 (35%), and only two were under the age of 17 (2%). The retiree age range was more popular for volunteering, however the middle aged range was more common for clientele. Additionally, significantly more adolescents were served by ODB than volunteered, with a difference of 33% of the clients compared to 2% of the volunteers. This nearness in age opens the door for relating to clients and building relationships over common life events like having children, graduating, losing parents, and similar shared experiences. Because this survey was only left in the ODB breakroom for two weeks and was emailed to the registered volunteers, many children and adolescents were likely not included in these measures. Additionally, from the feedback on various positions, volunteers were more likely to bring children along to help on special occasions in the warehouse. This is consistent with the research that indicated family volunteering is becoming increasingly popular, as it happily marries family time with contribution to the community (Graff, 2). This type of multitasking is important in a busy and fast paced culture which ODB exists within. From the sample of the retirement aged

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population (65 years or older) that frequently volunteers with ODB, the vast majority responded that they enjoyed using their time in a meaningful way, which could also be related to either a desire for more social interaction or the generational belief that making a positive impact on their community is important.

There were only six students surveyed, and there was no pattern or inherent relationship between their areas of study and ODB's area of expertise. The variety of specialties and degrees is beneficial to both the FRC and the clients because of the wide variety of specialties and fields that they have access to through these volunteers. Additionally, these students are being shaped by their experiences and impacted by the understanding of how food insecurity looks and what the people who use an FRC look like through their firsthand experiences and interactions, which they will carry with them into the professional world and their own spheres of influence. Becky Taylor, the director of ODB, has observed many more student volunteers than what were portrayed by this survey response rate, and sees the FRC as reliant on them for their help. This low level of engagement is not typical of the student volunteers she has worked with in ODB. Many students are invited to participate in surveys electronically, and without a face to face intercept, college students were likely to ignore another email request.

**“Interacting with the guests has allowed me to see firsthand how people are affected by food insecurities...I am pursuing a career in community medicine and am interested in serving underserved populations in healthcare. This experience has really shown me the front stage of food insecurity, which is a very strong social/environmental determinant of health.”**

**–ODB Student Volunteer**

According to the trends in volunteering provided by ODB, there are lapses and dramatic decreases in volunteerism during holiday seasons and academic breaks. This is problematic, because the holidays are a time of intense need for many families, which is reflected in the higher number of clients and households served in the month of January, as seen in Table 2. University students are an enormous resource as they make up a good portion of the population in Stillwater, OK, and many are required to volunteer, however scheduling conflicts could keep many from participating in ODB.

## 4.2 What has the Our Daily Bread volunteer experience been?

A specific question which asked respondents to rank their motives for volunteering was not included in this paper's analysis because of reports that the online formatting was difficult to use. Instead, the primary motives for volunteering were recorded through the feedback associated with favorite positions and responses to the ways the experience has been rewarding, enjoyable, and meaningful. The results were mostly focused on interaction with clients and the satisfaction felt by helping meet the needs of others.

**“I love meeting the guests in any capacity. They are gracious and patient with others. I always hope they will rub off on me.”**

**–ODB Volunteer**

Volunteers were most likely to volunteer for around 3 hours, once a week. This is consistent with the hours of operation for ODB, and the preferred volunteering situation in which a volunteer takes ownership of a particular day. Despite the recent trends in inconsistent volunteering and preferred short term options, the majority of volunteers indicated they would like to volunteer indefinitely. It can be difficult to maintain a volunteer base in a transient college town where so many pass through, however the older population provides stability to the organization and can be a tool in raising up and training future volunteers.

The responses from client volunteers included one woman who serves ODB on a daily basis. This is an encouraging response, as it shows firsthand someone that knows the significance of the work done by the FRC who now wants to give back and further their work. That level of commitment makes the work easier for the few staff members, and also contributes to the community feel and closeness of the volunteers. A familiar face can be valuable and comforting to both those serving and to the clients. For those struggling with pride or embarrassment at needing the resources offered by ODB, knowing the person helping you is a part of the same socioeconomic status could be an enormous comfort. Volunteers could also benefit from knowing the circumstances that brought various volunteers into the doors of ODB, as they lose savior complexes and see those on the receiving end of ODB's services as friends and peers. By building relationships with their fellow volunteers, getting to know clients, and spending time in this particular field, volunteers have a chance to personally destigmatize getting help from an FRC or food pantry, and may even feel more open to using this resource should they ever need it. Only four volunteers reported that they would be unwilling to use ODB should they need it, which was too small of a sample for recording patterns or relationships.

### **4.3 How does social capital relate to volunteer participation in the Food and Resource Center?**

The primary connection point for new volunteers to ODB was through church or a religious institution. Since clients are more likely to utilize a church affiliated resource if they are a part of the church, it is good to see a high level of active volunteers infiltrate the churches of Stillwater, and hopefully spread information about ODB to those who need it. This could work the other way, as well, in which church members invite clients of ODB into their church and build new connections to people with resources and the means to help. The concept of helping the poor and feeding the hungry is a familiar theme in the bible and teachings of Jesus, so ODB's location in a church filled town means a pool of volunteers at their disposal. These teachings are central in many religions, and create a dedicated group of volunteers through local religious institutions. It was three protestant church ministries that collaborated to combine their existing resources to form ODB, and is still predominantly these volunteers that serve in this FRC. These continuing volunteers also have a wealth of experience in the field, which is invaluable to the staff as they start a new resource center. A clear understanding of the client base and the volunteers' backgrounds is useful to ODB as they build new relationships and find new ways to meet needs with the broader range of resources at their disposal.

**“Our volunteers are amazing! They range from retired folks to churches to college and high school students. We have created quite the community of volunteers which makes each day fun!”**

**-Becky Taylor, ODB Director**

The older volunteer force that serves within ODB brings more years of experience to their positions, in addition to an inherently higher level of social capital. Their connections and relationships have been established over a lifetime, and correspond to the community they have been a part of, any affiliations they have within organizations, and their experiences within the workforce. As relationships are built between clients and volunteers, different needs and vulnerabilities are expressed. With their increased bank of resources, older volunteers and those with higher levels of social capital are better able to meet these needs by building new connections between individuals. They are also a great tool to ODB as the FRC seeks to expand their resources and integrate new methods for helping those in need.

#### **4.4 What recommendations do the volunteers have for improving Our Daily Bread?**

Several volunteers made recommendations for improvements and systems that ODB has already instigated, which contributes to the overall need for better communication. This could be an issue for the mostly electronic format of communication, which does not effectively serve all volunteers and their various abilities and resources, or it could be an issue of involvement and some volunteers not being as present or involved in ODB, and thus not hearing the same information or seeing the same activities and resources. This problem could easily bleed over into the client population, if they have the same problems with communication and exposure to the different programs and resources that ODB has to offer. The responsibility to inform volunteers of these resources falls primarily on the few members of staff that oversee the greater volunteer population, however the direct communication with clients is largely left to the volunteer population. This makes communication with volunteers even more important. The volunteers' survey responses seem to reflect an understanding of this dynamic, and many requested better training. This change would better serve both volunteers and the clients who they work with and for.

Another recommendation was extended hours or more communication regarding hour flexibility and volunteer opportunities. The second most favoured area for volunteering, the warehouse, was praised for its more flexible hours, wide range of tasks, relative volunteer independence, and specific duties that allow volunteers to use their bodies more than their minds. This area was especially popular amongst men and those who saw themselves as less socially motivated. Having more flexible hours allowed a wider variety of people to serve, including families with children, and people with strict work schedules. With increasingly busy schedules and demanding to-do lists, volunteerism has become less of a societal priority, despite the great need for it. Once a volunteer has been made aware of the issue of food insecurity, it is hard to escape the feeling of responsibility that leads people to serve and meet the needs of those in their community. For those who feel both compelled to volunteer and extremely busy, offering overlapping opportunities such as family times or after work hours makes volunteering more accessible and fun.

## 5 Recommendations

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Based on the results from the survey the following recommendations are made:

- A structured, formal process for volunteer training and orientation. This could be a monthly event where volunteers come in for mass training, or a checklist that a new volunteer has to go through alongside a staff member or experienced volunteer. The specific duties and responsibilities of each position should be gone over to ensure consistency in the completion of tasks and overall order of ODB. Another topic to cover in this training is how best to relate and interact with clients, to maintain healthy dynamics between the client and volunteer, and avoid any belittling or derogatory power dynamics.
- More student volunteers should be recruited as their experiences have not only been beneficial to ODB, but served the students in their individual pursuits. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students indicates that this volunteer opportunity is well suited to the OSU students because of its flexibility and immediate gratification as they see the difference they are making in their own community. Advertisements for additional volunteers could be made to specific Greek houses, as many require volunteer hours. Church college groups are another great place, given the popularity of churches connecting volunteers to ODB. Not all of the student volunteers were required to record hours, so sharing personal stories and testimonials could be beneficial in the process of recruiting.
- Involvement in early fall semester activities on the Oklahoma State campus could be largely beneficial in the recruitment of student volunteers, especially freshman. No first year students completed the survey, but many incoming students are required to complete hours for clubs and scholarships or desire to earn a volunteer award in their time at OSU. Events such as Lights on Stillwater offer contact points for new students and potential new volunteers, and offer an opportunity to better connect with the student community at large.
- Steer new volunteers to an area best suited to their interests or strengths. This could mean assessing what resources or skills a new volunteer or group of volunteers has, and using their similar social circles to communicate the need for more volunteers in a particular area. An example is workmen with experience driving forklifts coming in to work in the warehouse. By best knowing the skillsets and resources of the volunteers, future expansion into a wider range of resources will be easier as those connections can be used.
- If this research were to continue or generate future projects, the student population remains a largely unreached and under researched area. Catering more to the student demographic in future research could better help non-profit and volunteer run organizations recruit and better serve their student volunteers. Additionally, it would be interesting to see what

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amount of the client population at ODB is enrolled at OSU or a similar college. Gauging the university student understanding of ODB and FRCs more broadly could also be valuable, since many students are eligible for their services. To get a better feel for the culture within ODB, it could also be interesting to interview existing volunteers about their perceptions of other volunteers and what they have seen concerning social economic status, commitment, skill, and other peer-level observations. This concept could also be applied to volunteers' perceptions of the clients, and the volunteer's view of their own relationship to the clients. This area of research was made relevant through the survey's feedback regarding the ODB volunteer's pleasure in giving back the community and helping others, which could promote false perceptions of relationships with clients and even egotistical views of personal heroism.

- If this project were to be replicated, student engagement could be increased by interacting more interpersonally and interviewing face to face. Not planning the survey administration for the week of a university holiday could increase response rate, and leaving the survey open for a longer period than two weeks could help access more volunteers. Ensuring an easy and uniform formatting of the survey questions digitally could also help older or less tech savvy respondents to complete the survey fully.

## 6 References

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## 7 Appendices

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### 7.1 Our Daily Bread Volunteer Survey

You are invited to participate in an honors thesis project about volunteerism in a Food and Resource Center. This research is being conducted by Becky Corbin, a senior at Oklahoma State University, under the supervision of Heather McLaughlin of the Sociology Department at Oklahoma State University. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

#### **Procedure:**

If you decide to complete this survey, you are encouraged to answer all applicable questions, but are free to stop at any time. The questions cover basic personal characteristics and information regarding your age, gender, and current city of residence. You will also be asked to rate your experience as a volunteer at Our Daily Bread, list previous food pantry volunteer participation, and critically reflect on your time at ODB. The question formats vary, and include rating scales, fill in the blanks, and multiple choice questions. Please read any instructions listed alongside each question, and mark each response appropriately. This survey will take around 15 minutes to complete.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Participation:**

There are no known risks or benefits to participating in this survey.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The information you give in the study will be anonymous. This means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data in any way. The completion of this survey will be indicated by its placement in the securely locked box provided, which will be emptied of completed surveys on a daily basis by the researcher. The researchers will not be able to remove your data from the dataset once your participation is complete. This data will be stored in a password protected computer indefinitely after it has been physically input by the researcher. The physical copy of this survey will be destroyed after the data has been added to the online format.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

The primary researcher in this project is Becky Corbin, a senior at Oklahoma State University, who is using this project to complete the requirements for a degree in Honors Applied Sociology. The project is being actively supervised by Dr. Heather McLaughlin, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Oklahoma State University. If you have any questions regarding the survey or your rights as a participant, you may contact Becky Corbin by phone at 918-949-8489, or by email at [becky.corbin@okstate.edu](mailto:becky.corbin@okstate.edu). Heather McLaughlin may also be contacted by email at [heather.mclaughlin@okstate.edu](mailto:heather.mclaughlin@okstate.edu) or by phone at 405-744-6124. If you have additional questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or by email at [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

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### Participant's rights:

This study is anonymous. Your choice to participate in this anonymous survey is completely voluntary, and at any point you may choose to skip a question or stop answering altogether. This survey is being distributed through email and through hard copies at *Our Daily Bread*. You may complete the survey online or in person, but please only submit one copy. There is a drop box available in the volunteer lounge for completed surveys. Thank you for helping with this project, and for contributing your time to our local Food and Resource Center.

### Tell Us about Your History of Volunteering with Our Daily Bread (ODB)

1. When did you start volunteering with ODB?

Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

2. Do you still volunteer with ODB?

Yes

No

If no, why?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How often do you volunteer at ODB?

- a. I am a one-time volunteer
- b. Once a month
- c. Multiple times a month
- d. Once a week
- e. Multiple times a week
- f. Daily

4. On a typical day, how long is your volunteer shift at ODB?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How much longer do you expect to volunteer with ODB?

\_\_\_\_\_ (months/years)

6. How did you get connected with ODB?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your volunteer position at ODB? (Circle all that apply)

- a. Front of House/Intake
- b. Personal Shopper
- c. Back of house/Stocking
- d. Driver
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which volunteer position is your favorite, and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What is your primary motivation for volunteering with ODB?

- f. Required volunteer hours



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16. Are you a current university student? (if no, skip to question 17)

Yes

No

a. If yes, what university do you attend?

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b. What is your major(s)?

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c. What year classification are you?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Grad

d. Are you required to volunteer for school or club credit?

Yes

No

e. If so, what organization or club requires it? (list all that apply)

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f. Would you consider this a good student volunteer opportunity, and why?

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17. What is your age?

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18. What is your gender?

Man

Woman

Other \_\_\_\_\_

19. What town/city do you currently live in?

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20. What recommendations do you have for ODB to improve their volunteer experience?

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**Thank you for your participation in this survey!**