

WRITE TO EDUCATE

Scholarship Contest Winner

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Essay Topic: Describe a problem facing your community and explain how you would help address or solve it. Discuss the impact your solution could have on others.

My community is known for their excellent schools and strong neighborhoods. Many would assume that communities like this do not have issues with food insecurity. However, in 2025, my community's food pantry saw an increase of 25% of new families. This problem is often hidden behind the appearance of neat and tidy neighborhoods. Communities like mine have many people that are affected by food insecurity including families, students, and senior citizens. As a member of the church that operates my community's food pantry, I would like to work toward making nutritious food available to everyone that needs it without the stigma that comes with food insecurity.

Since becoming involved in my church's youth group, I have participated and organized food challenges to stock the pantry. One event that I participated in was for the Super Bowl, but we called it the Cereal Bowl. Members voted for the team they thought would win the Super Bowl by donating boxes of cereal. We divided the boxes under the team's name of who they wanted to win. A total of 132 boxes or 1550 servings were donated. Working in the food pantry has opened my eyes to the number of families that rely on the pantry. While food insecurity is less visible in the community, I know that by the number of people that the pantry serves, the problem is very real. Food insecurity in a small community like mine is easy to overlook. My small town does not fit the stereotypes of having the same problems as a bigger city like Lansing; however, the problem exists in my neighborhood too.

One of the things that surprised me the most since working in the community food pantry is how large the room is that holds the food that feeds my neighbors. I believe that it could help so many more people if my neighbors were aware of this too. If more people were aware, they could also contribute to the problem of food insecurity in my community. To address the issue, raising awareness in the community could help bring in donations and volunteers. One way I could contribute to raising awareness is to work with my own school and at neighboring schools to organize food drives. I also think having a discreet food distribution through schools would help people feel comfortable accepting the help they need.

While the local schools and some businesses do donate to the pantry, there are other ways to help the community. I have heard of some communities having a shared garden that the neighborhood helps take care of and many can gain from the benefits of the food grown there. This would be a long-term solution that I think could also work in my community. Partnerships with Michigan State University and local farmers could make this a success. A shared garden would also give the people who benefit from it a chance to participate in program and provide some dignity to their situation. It might not feel like charity if you are able to participate in the growing and tending of the garden.

Finding ways for the community to become involved can have a huge impact on our neighborhoods. Short-term, providing food will allow fewer people to go hungry. In turn, this will improve the health, both physical and mental, of our neighbors. Families that feel supported can focus more on work and community involvement. Students who are not hungry and don't have to worry about where their meals come from will do better in school. Senior citizens will feel less isolated and seen in our community. The community will grow more connected. Others may even see how our community comes together and inspires them to become more involved in their own communities.

Food insecurity is an issue that reaches all corners of the greater Lansing area. A community that responds to those in need is a strong community. Supporting and educating others on how they can help will further strengthen my community and ensure that no family faces food insecurity alone.

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