



UNION COUNTY **FO****D SECURITY SUMMIT**

A SERVICE OF THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

OCTOBER 17, 2024 | ***Kean University***



Welcome



UNION COUNTY
FOOD SECURITY SUMMIT
A SERVICE OF THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



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WHY WE ARE HERE

Food insecurity continues to affect over 7.3% of Union County residents, including 9.2% of our children.

We are here today to collaborate, learn, and find new ways to support these residents. Food insecurity touches every part of our community, and by working together, we can build effective solutions that ensure no one in Union County has to worry about where their next meal will come from





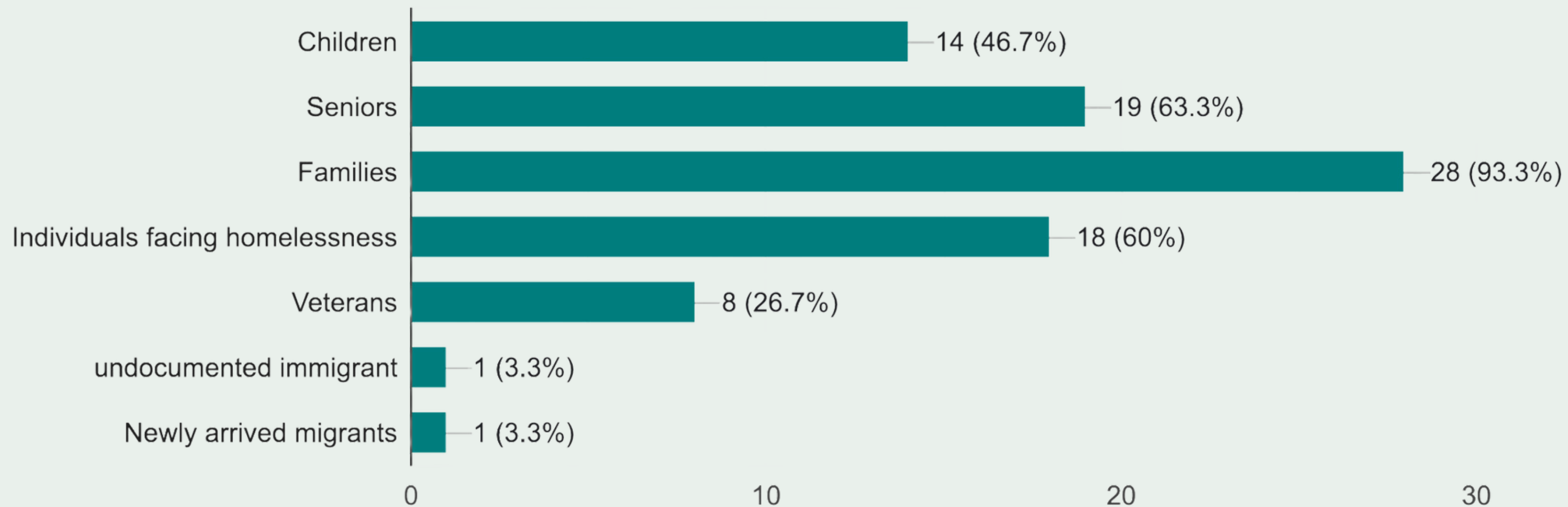
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SURVEY OF FOOD PANTRY PROVIDERS IN UNION COUNTY



What is the primary demographic group that your pantry serves?

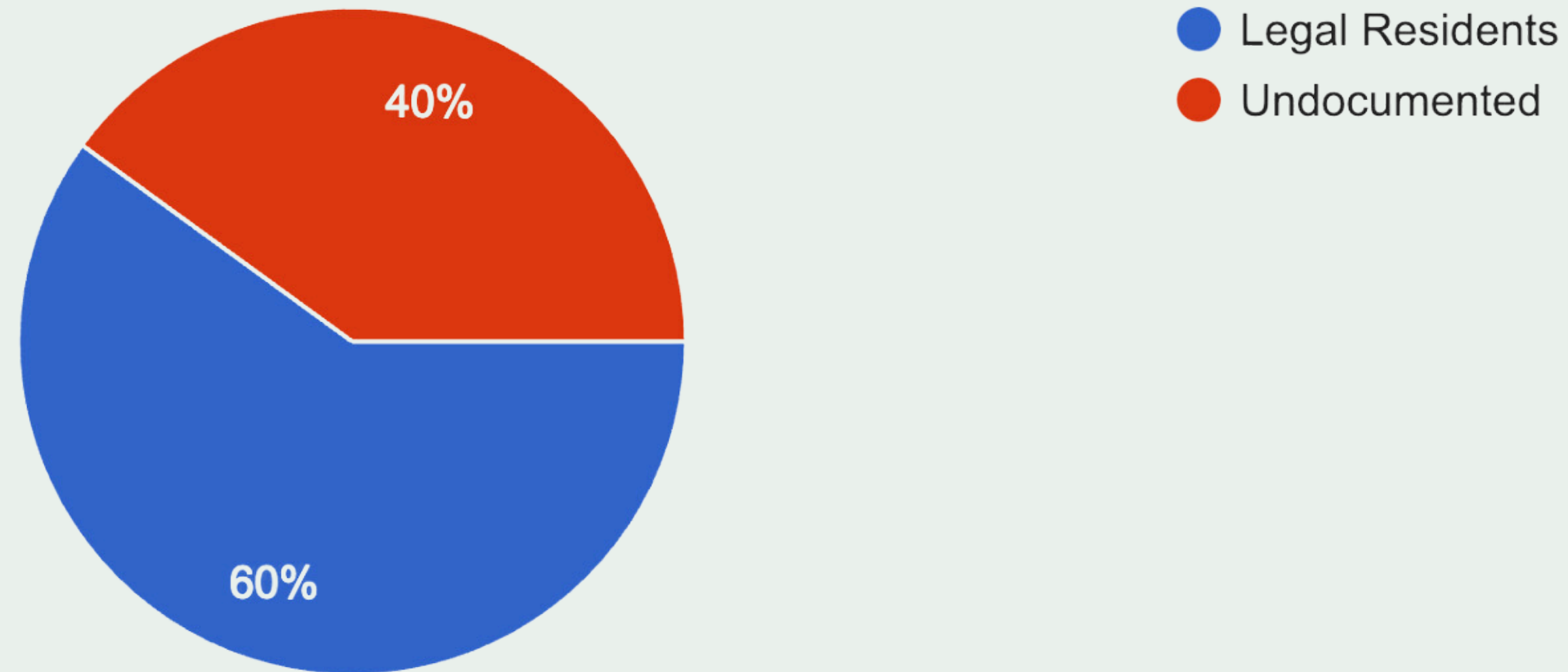
30 responses





Are your clients primarily undocumented or legal residents?

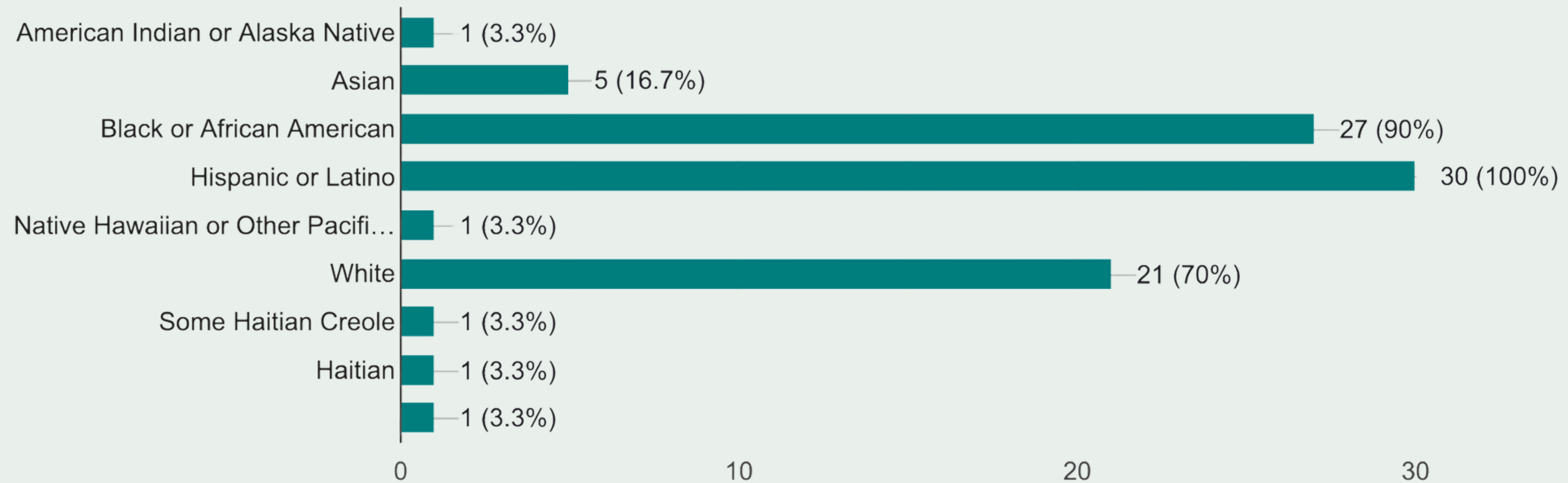
30 responses





What are the primary ethnicities that your pantry serves?

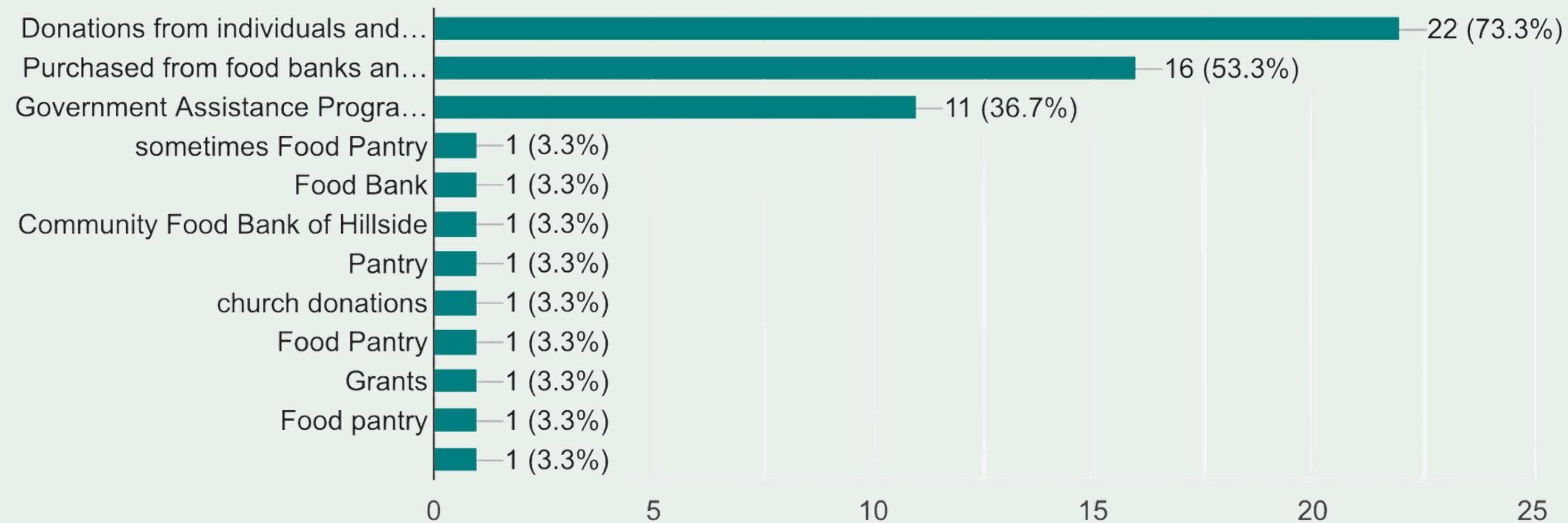
30 responses





What is the main source of food for your pantry?

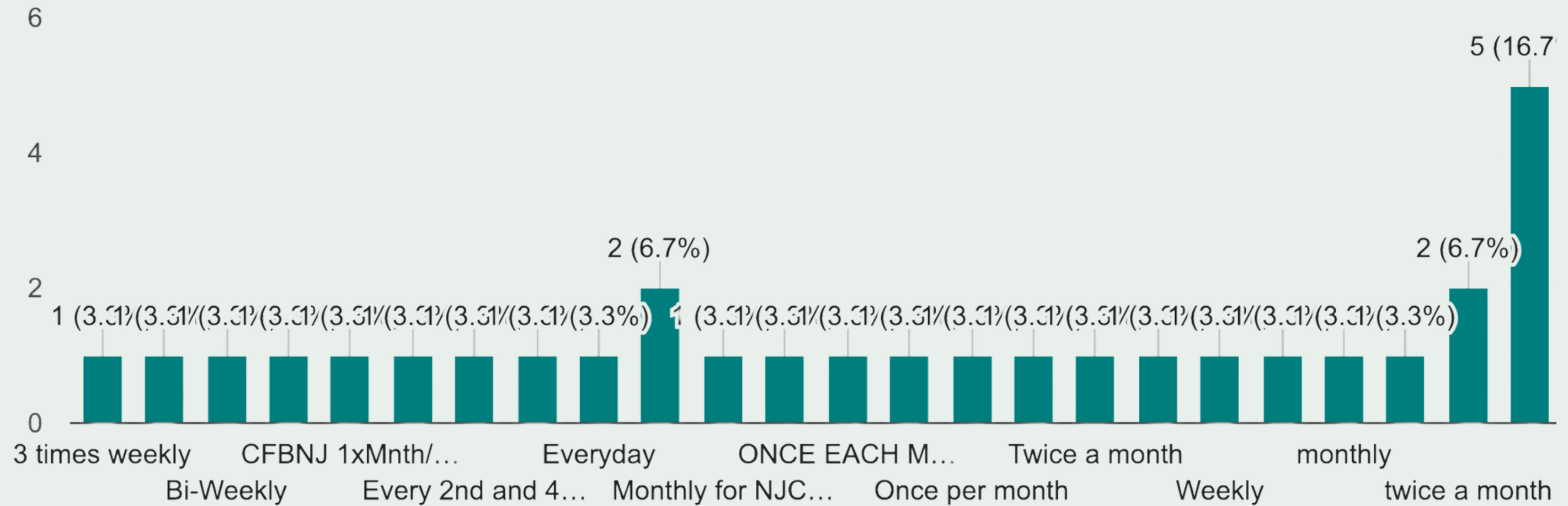
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How often does your food pantry receive food donations?

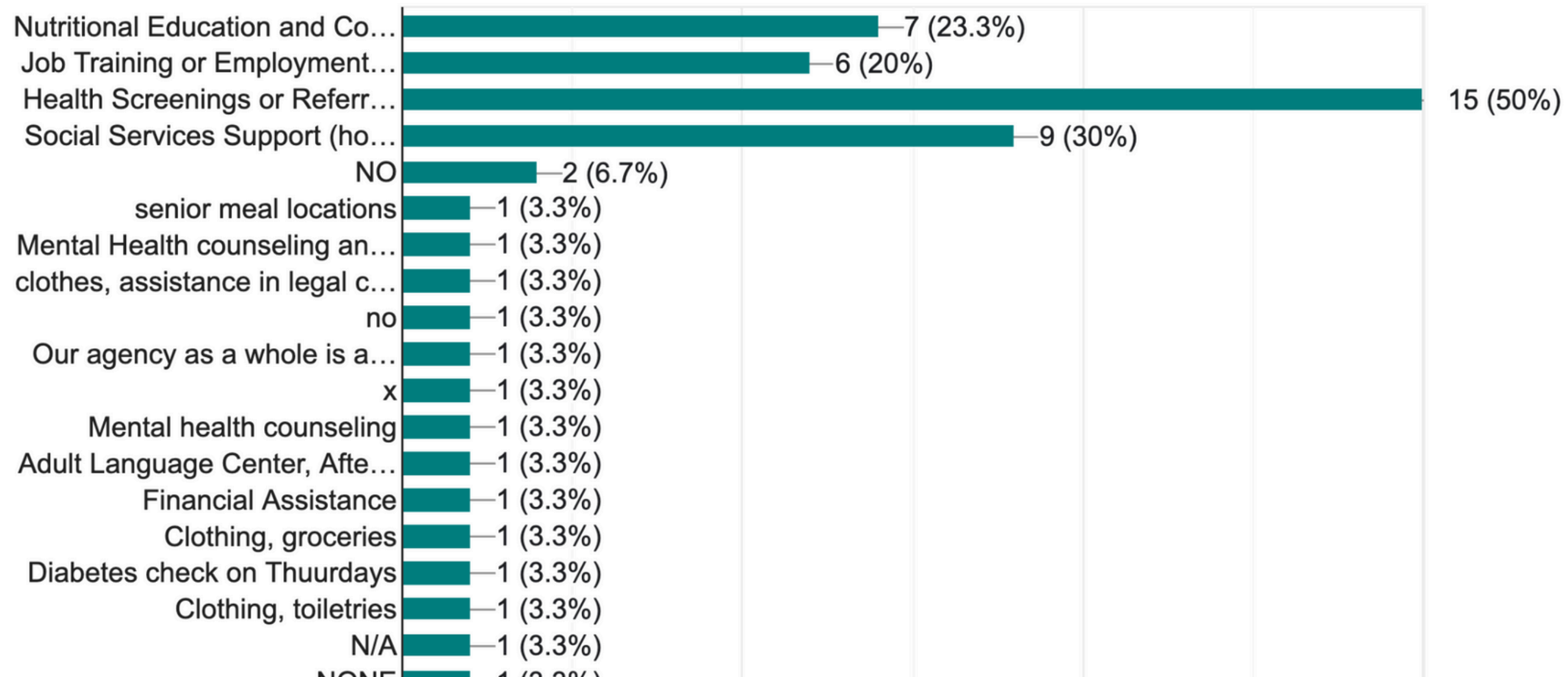
30 responses





Does your food pantry offer additional services or resources beyond providing food?

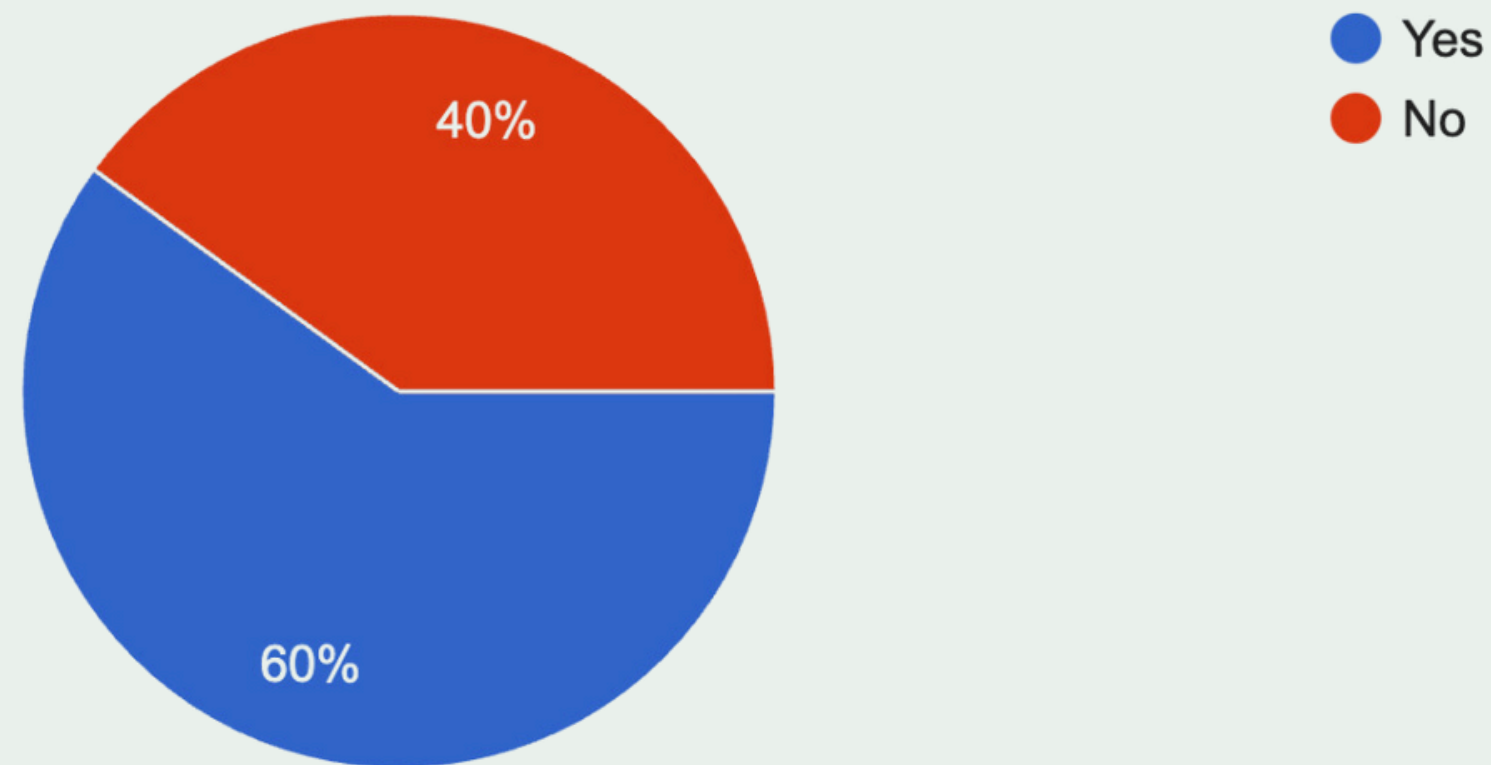
30 responses





Are you aware of the next steps needed to provide additional services or resources to clients?

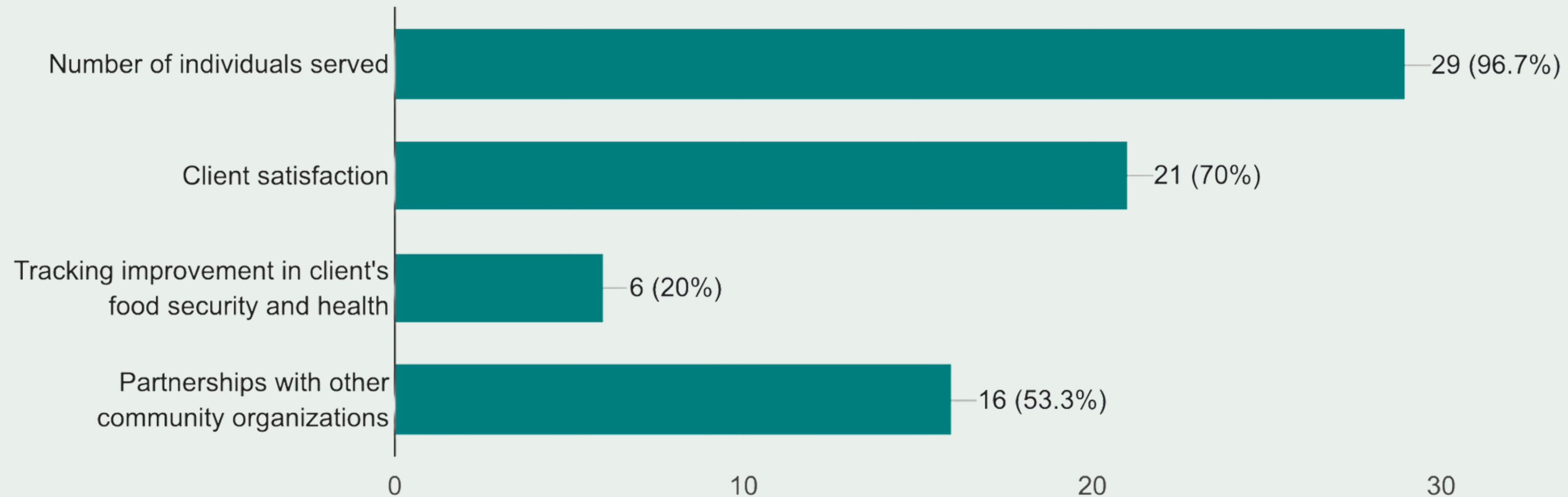
30 responses





How do you measure the impact and effectiveness of your food pantry's services?

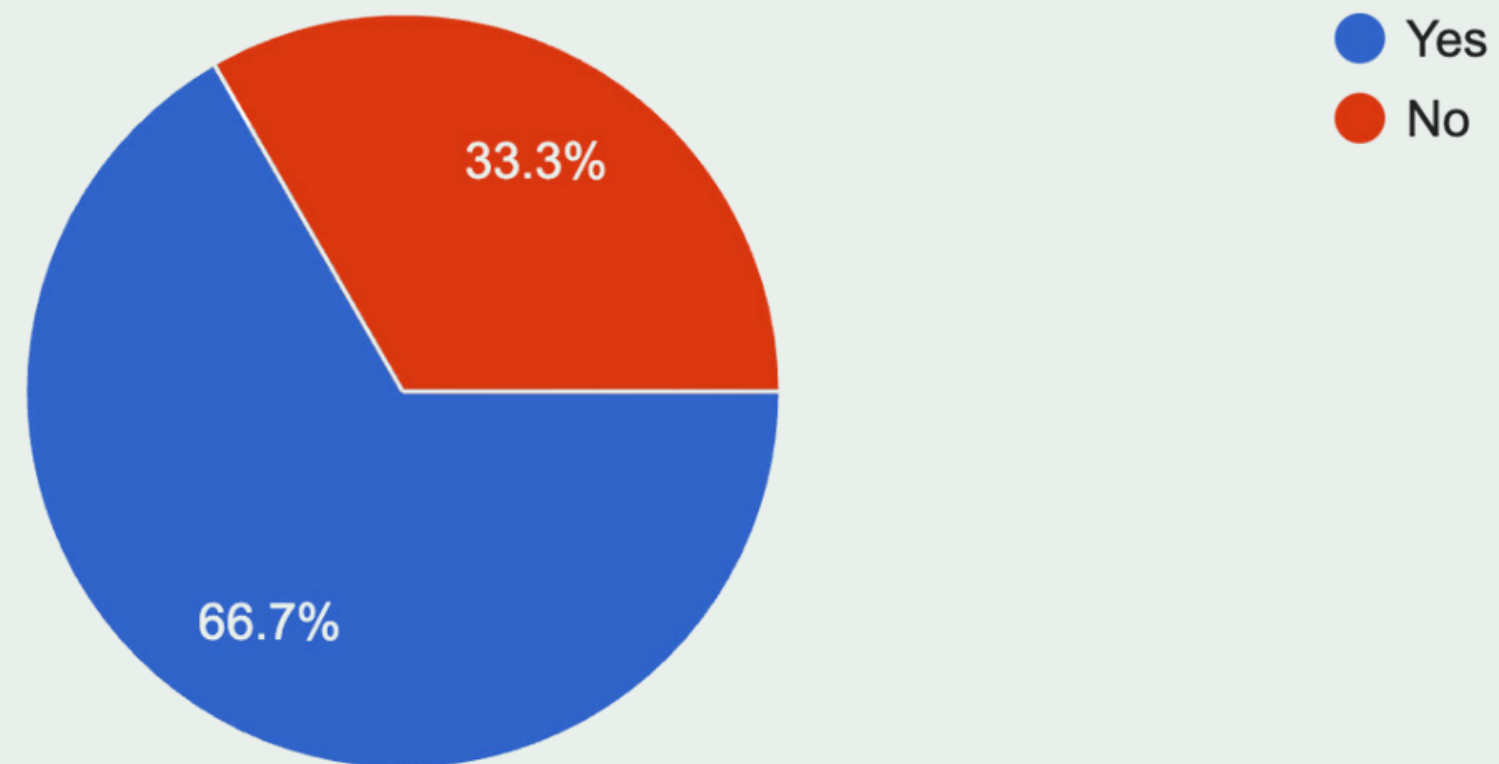
30 responses





Are there any specific challenges or barriers that your food pantry faces in serving the community?

30 responses



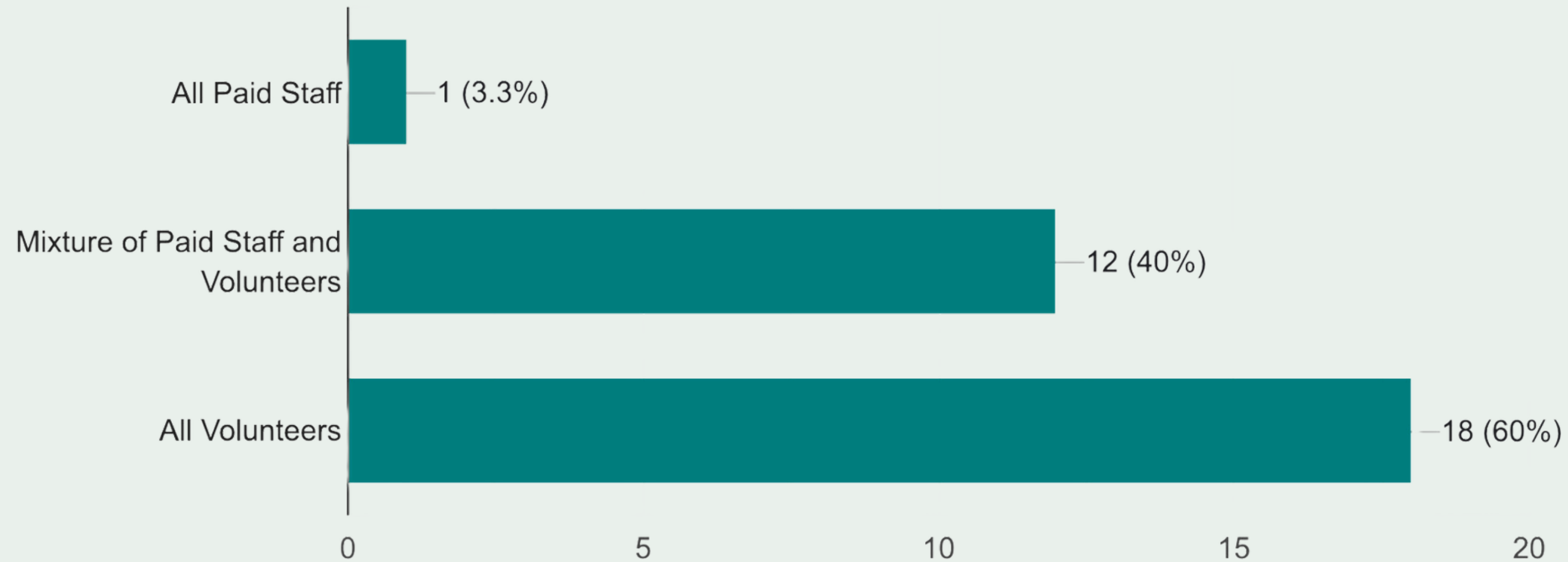
Challenges cited:

- Suburban food insecurity is measured differently than in urban areas. There are fewer supports and a surprising amount of need.
- Getting seniors to come to the pantry.
- Clients are legal residents and undocumented.
- Adequate space is always a challenge; sourcing a regular and economic supply of healthy culturally appropriate foods
- Limited space for distribution. Need more fresh fruits and vegetables
- Lack of protein given and language barriers
- Amount and quality of food
- Abundance of clients we feed anywhere between 400-600 individuals and families
- Getting to go containers & cutlery.
- Space/more storage
- Food shortage
- Many newly arrived clients request fresh fruit and vegetables as opposed to canned fruits and vegetables. We would like to have more fresh produce
- Culturally Sensitive Food
- We need a truck to deliver food to those who cannot get to the pantry.
- Amount of food.
- Need additional Food resources



Staff consists of:

30 responses





COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

In Union County there are areas where the poverty level, unemployment, housing, substance abuse and other issues across many pillars and developmental journeys indicated a widening divide between these municipalities and the county as a whole, as well as compared to the entire state.

These communities represent areas where the barriers to individual and family success may be the greatest and where there are the greatest opportunities to improve the quality of life for residents of these communities.

These are the Communities of Opportunity.

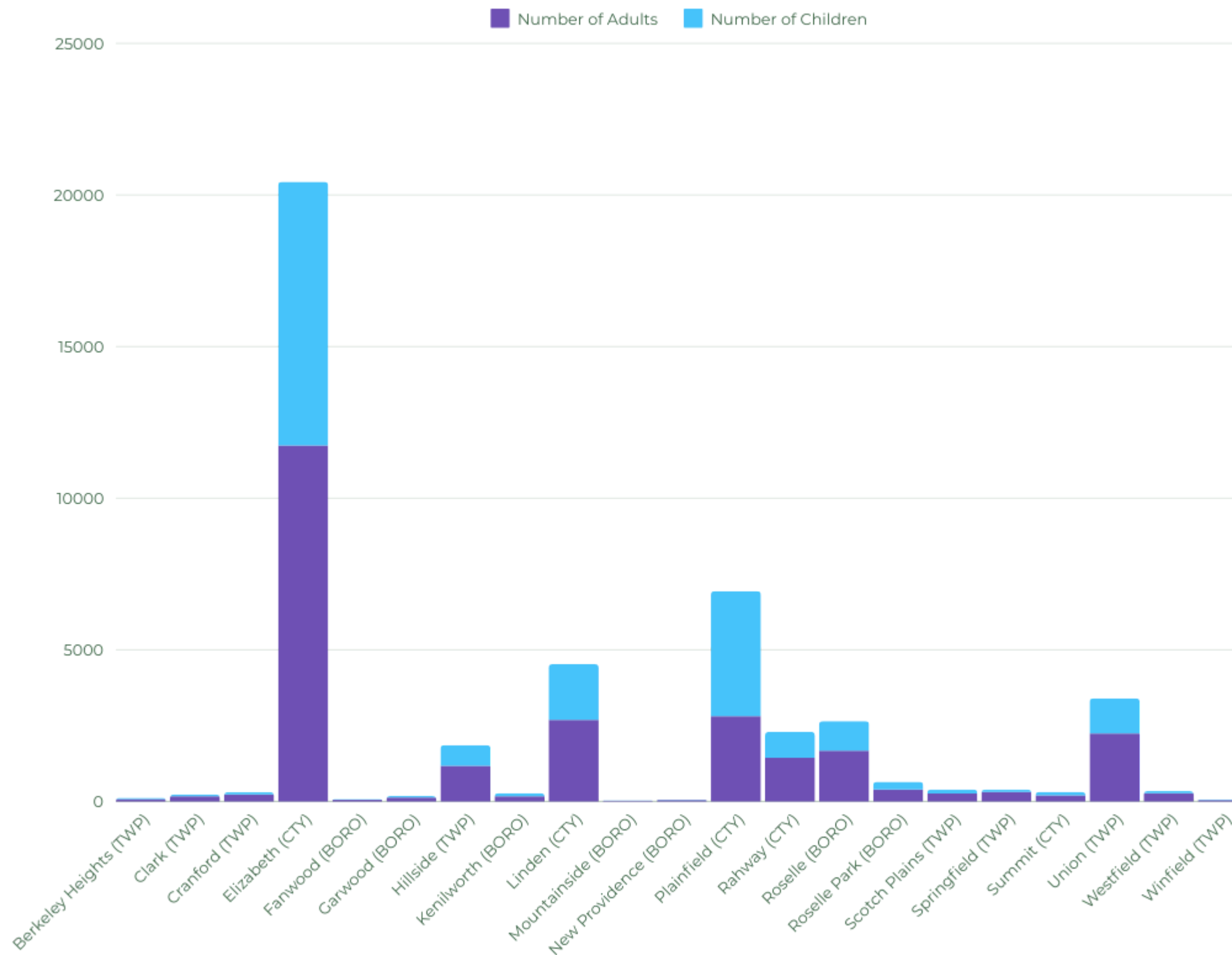
Elizabeth | Plainfield | Linden | Union | Roselle | Rahway | Hillside

COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

Communities of opportunity are areas that require concentrated efforts to tackle the challenges faced by individuals and families, including:

- Income Disparity in relation to Cost of Living
- Graduation Rates
- Substance Abuse
- Access to Healthcare
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
- Foreign-Born Residents
- Unemployment

Elizabeth | Plainfield | Linden | Union | Roselle | Rahway | Hillside



TOTAL ACTIVE SNAP RECIPIENTS PER MUNICIPALITY

This chart illustrates the number of active SNAP recipients enrolled in the program over the past nine months.

There were 26,171 adults and 19,342 children enrolled in the program (45,508 total)

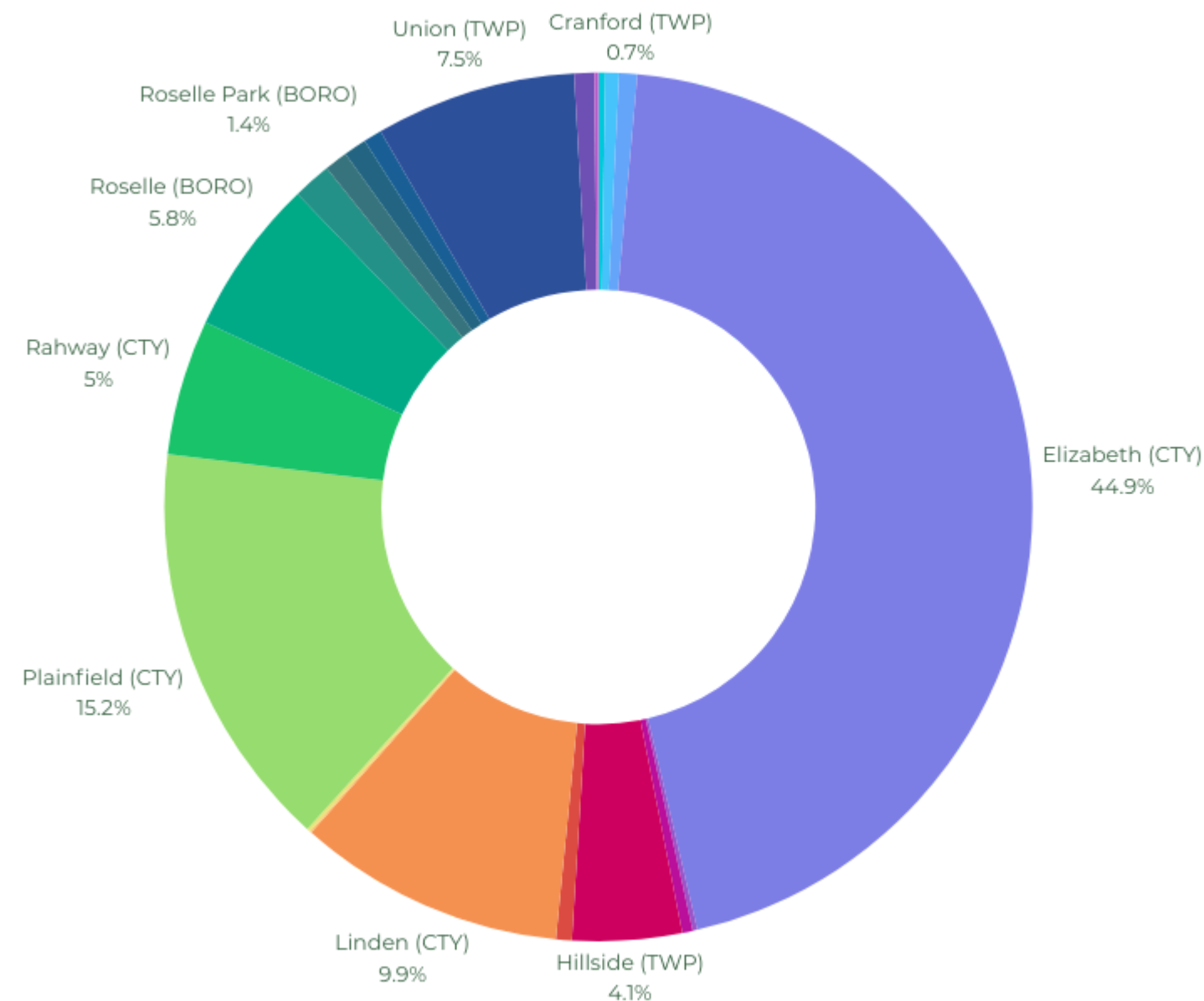


TOTAL SNAP ALLOTMENT PER MUNICIPALITY

This chart illustrates the total amount of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program dollars allocated to each community in Union County.

93% of SNAP dollars that flow through Union County are allocated to 7 municipalities:

- Elizabeth (45%)
- Plainfield (15%)
- Linden (10%)
- Union (8%)
- Roselle (6%)
- Rahway (5%)
- Hillside (4%)



ELIZABETH

- Elizabeth had 46% of the total child abuse neglect investigations in Union County in 2017. We were unable to find current/comparative data that is specific to this municipality.
- The high school graduation rate in Elizabeth was reported as 72.8% at the time the assessment was prepared. It is currently 75.4%
- During the Point in Time Count in 2019, Elizabeth had 77% of the homeless population. As a data source was not provided, we are unable to provide an accurate comparison.
- At the time the assessment was prepared, vacant housing unit rate was reported at 4.6% in Elizabeth, which was much higher than the county rate of 1.8%. The current rates as reported in the 2020 decennial census is 1.3% in Elizabeth, while Union County is 1.4%
- 9% of individuals under age 65 do not have health insurance. The rate was 23.3% in 2021.
- The rate of Individuals 65 and older living in Elizabeth are living in Poverty increased to 19% from 15%
- The rate of children under 18 in Elizabeth living below the poverty level increased slightly to 22%. The rate was 21% at the time the assessment was originally prepared.

HILLSIDE



- 15% of children under age 18 are living in poverty. This rate has not changed.
- The rental vacant housing unit rate is 1.5 compared to the county at the time the assessment was prepared. It is currently hovering around 1.3x compared to the county.
- Median Household Income in Hillside is \$64,000, about 80% of the amount of Union County at the time the assessment was prepared. It has increased to \$82,850 and is nearly the same amount as the county median
- The median value of owner-occupied housing has increased too \$300,200 from \$232,500.

LINDEN

- Linden has lower median gross income and median family income levels as compared to the county, but the percent of people in poverty is equal to the county poverty percentage of 10.3%. The poverty rate has since decreased to 7.7%
- 33.5% of the population of Linden is foreign-born, and 50.9% of people in Linden over age 5 speak a language other than English at home. The rates remain consistent.
- 23% of the population age 25 and older in Linden have a bachelor's degree or Higher, compared to 34% in Union County. The rate remains consistent

- 15.3% of people in Linden do not have health insurance. We are not able to directly compare the data as a source was not provided, but the current rate for uninsured individuals under 65 is approximately 12.7%
- 7.4% of individuals in Linden, under age 65 are people with disabilities (2014-2018). The rate has decreased to 6.6% (2017-2021).
- 30 Narcan deployments in 2019, increasing to 78 in 2020, and 54 YTD (as of August 2023).

RAHWAY



- There are 25.1% foreign born persons who reside in Rahway. Current rates are consistent, hovering at approximately 26%
- 32% of people in this community speak a language other than English, down from 40.6%
- \$81,368 is the Median household income for Rahway, up from \$74,164. No analysis was provided to account for purchasing parity or inflationary effects.
- The poverty rate has increased to 8.5% from 7.93%.
- 8.9% of individuals under age 65 in Rahway do not have health insurance, down from 12.7%.

ROSELLE



- The graduation rate for Roselle is 88.1%
- Homeowner vacant housing rate is now on par with the county rate, previously being 2.5x greater.
- 8.2% of people are living in poverty, down from 10%
- 9.9% of the population under age 65 do not have health insurance, down from 12.4%.

PLAINFIELD

- Plainfield includes 38% of the population who are foreign born
- 69% of individuals over five speak a language other than English at home, up from 51%
- Plainfield has 17.1% of the population who are living below poverty levels, down from 20.9%.
- 24% of children under age 18 are living in poverty, down from 27%
- The median gross income is 25% lower than the county median gross income, which is consistent with past rates.
- 20.6% of the population over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, up from 16%. This is still lower than the county rate of 35%.
- 22.3% of the adult population in Plainfield do not have a high school diploma, down from 27%
- 58% of occupied housing in Plainfield is renter occupied, compared to previous rates of 54%. This is about 1.5 times greater than the New Jersey rate

UNION

- The number of individuals age 65 and over is slightly higher in Union Township, with 16%, that of the county. Current rates are consistent with previous rates
- The gross median rent is \$350 higher than the county figure of \$1,407, increasing from the previous \$200 difference recorded.
- 6.9% of residents under 65 have no health Insurance. Current rates are consistent, hovering at 7.1%
- 6% of children in Union are living in poverty, similar to the previously reported rate of 7%
- 240 Union Township residents were admitted for a substance use disorder in 2018, the fourth highest in the county with 40% of admissions for heroin. 2021 statistics show a similar rate, at 264 admissions
- Of the 14,900 veterans in Union County, 1500 live in Union.



DATA INTEGRATION

SYSTEMS OVERHAUL

Union County DHS is undergoing a systems enablement initiative to transform how it delivers services

DATA ANALYTICS INFRASTRUCTURE

The goal is to develop a robust infrastructure for collecting, managing, and analyzing data across human services programs

STANDARDIZED DATA COLLECTION

The initiative will standardize data collection processes, improving data quality across DHS and its partner organizations

DATA INTEGRATION

DHS will gain the ability to integrate data from multiple sources for comprehensive insights.

REAL-TIME PERFORMANCE

The system will provide real-time data on performance metrics, enhancing program monitoring

DATA VISUALIZATION

These tools will drive insights through visual representations, supporting decision-making

IMPROVE DECISION-MAKING

The initiative empowers DHS to make data-driven decisions that improve program outcomes and service delivery efficiency



IDEAS FOR ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY

Community Gardens and Urban Farming Initiatives

Transforming underutilized spaces into sources of fresh, healthy food for our communities

Mobile Food Pantries and Farmers Markets

Bringing nutritious food directly to food deserts and underserved neighborhoods

Healthy Food Incentive Programs

Providing financial incentives to encourage healthier eating habits for low-income residents.

Food Education and Cooking Classes

Empowering families with the skills and knowledge to make healthier food choices.

School and After-School Meal Programs

Ensuring that children receive the nutrition they need, both in and out of school

Food Recovery and Redistribution Networks

Partnering with local businesses to reduce food waste and redistribute surplus food to those in need



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What strategies have worked best for your organization in meeting the growing demand for food assistance in our community?

What partnerships or collaborations have been most beneficial to your efforts in addressing food security?

What challenges do you face in ensuring that clients have access to nutritious, culturally relevant food options?

How do you involve your clients or community members in shaping the services you provide?

What is the one innovative approach you've tried, or would like to try to improve food access?



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CLOSING COMMENTS





THANK YOU!



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