

## *JOSEPH F. SHUBERT LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD APPLICATION*

- 1. a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users.**  
**b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.**

The Southern Adirondack Library System (SALS) has been serving the 34 member libraries of Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties for 61 years. With an annual budget of \$2.4 million, the cooperative library system includes urban, suburban, and rural libraries. The Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls is the System’s central library, and serves the largest population (57,329 people), while the Raquette Lake Free Library serves the smallest (114 people).

SALS, Glens Falls Hospital, and the Comfort Food Community food pantry teamed up to address the challenges of food scarcity, food waste, rural food deserts, and transportation by launching the Fresh Food Collective Farm-2-Library Distribution initiative in the summer of 2018. The initiative leverages the local relationships of four small, rural libraries to the communities they serve by providing fresh produce to residents experiencing food insecurity by partnering with other community-based organizations.

Through this program, we reduced food waste by gleaning produce from local farms, and combatted food scarcity and rural food deserts by distributing the produce through three (and in the program’s second year, four) small, rural libraries: Schuylerville Public Library, Whitehall Free Library, Pember Library and Museum, and in 2019, Argyle Free Library. These libraries were identified as serving communities where food scarcity, limited food pantry access, and transportation all limit access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, participating libraries served communities with the following demographics. Annual library budget information is taken from the 2018 annual report to the state.

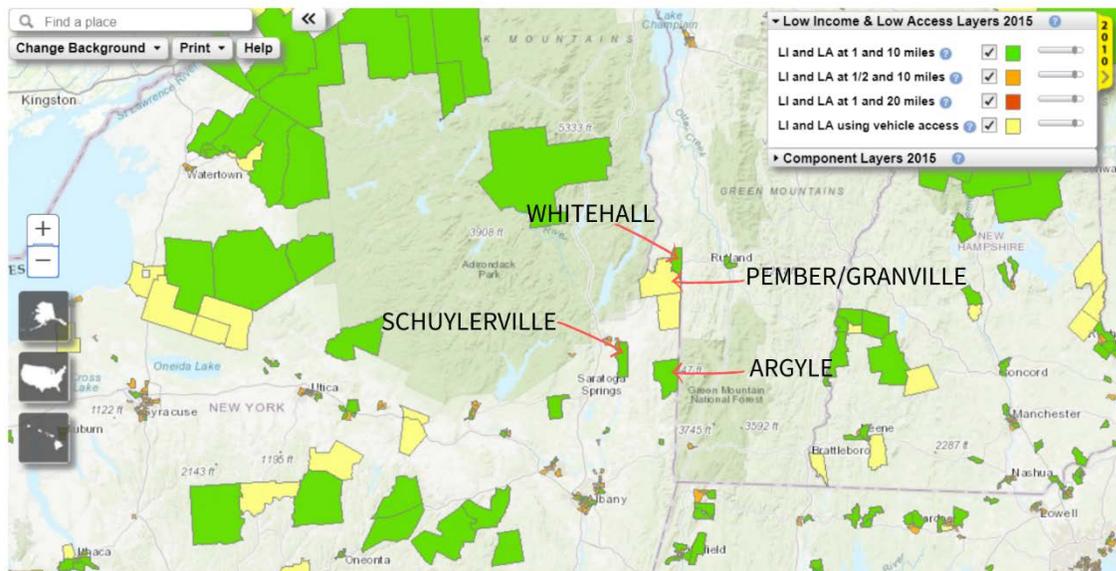
<b>LIBRARY</b>	<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>POVERTY RATE</b>	<b>MED HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>	<b>ANNUAL LIBRARY BUDGET</b>
Whitehall Free Library	4,042	20.8%	\$41,463	\$40,826
Pember Library & Museum (Granville)	6,669	17.1%	\$42,316	\$195,043
Schuylerville Public Library	1,386	9.6%	\$60,536	\$366,458
Argyle Free Library (2019)	3,782	17.1%	\$52,805	\$94,019

The majority of the communities served by this project exceed the average poverty rate in the

United States of 12.3%, as determined by the United States Census Bureau's report, Income & Poverty in the United States, 2017.

## 2. How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?

We used data collected by the Glens Falls Hospital to identify communities that had both low income and low access to fresh fruits and vegetables, known as rural food deserts. We identified which of SALS's member libraries served communities where more than 60% of the households found the price of fresh produce to be a barrier to consumption, and 42% of the households, defined of 2-4 people in a home, have an annual income between \$16,000 and \$32,000. We also used resources like the map below, created by the United States Department of Agriculture, to determine which of our libraries were located in rural food deserts, where there were significant barriers to access to fresh produce combined with food insecurity issues.



Food Access Research Atlas, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

## 3. What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?

The idea of creating a farm-to-library food distribution network first took hold in 2017, during a conversation with the Glens Falls Hospital, which had partnered with Comfort Food Community (CFC) to create a mobile produce distribution model. SALS volunteered to use its libraries as stopping points for the van. At the end of the summer, we realized the model was flawed: allowing people to access the food for only 20 minutes limited participation, as did requiring income qualification information from participants, a required component due to the

program's state funding.

When we began talking with CFC about the future of the program, we discussed the importance of providing the maximum amount of time possible for people to access fresh produce, and to eliminate any barriers to access, including requiring qualification information. CFC had secured multi-year grant funding from the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) to provide small, glass front refrigerators to each of the participating libraries, and to hire someone to coordinate the gleaning & distributing of the produce. I met with Lillian Slaughter, the Food Rescue Manager, multiple times from May through July to plan and implement the project, plan a marketing strategy, and visit each of the participating libraries with Lillian so that we could answer questions and concerns before we launched. While discussing the need to provide produce with recipes, we realized that not all participants would be able to read or follow a recipe, so we collaborated with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) to provide basic recipes that could be made in two bowls or less and cooking classes at the participating libraries.

In addition, CFC recruited, organized, and coordinated volunteers to glean and farms to provide the fresh produce needed for the project. CFC provided a van and employee to deliver the produce to each of the member libraries. Member libraries then created attractive displays encouraging people to try the produce, and CFC created a picture guide to the produce provided, which included the name of the item, how to prepare it, and how to store it. There were no limits on the amount people could take, or who could take it. We noticed that in the first week or two, some participants were taking large quantities of produce, but as they realized there would be fresh produce each week, the hoarding behavior stopped.

The pilot year ran from July – October 2018. In those four months, nearly 2,500 pounds of fresh produce were distributed through the Whitehall Free Library, Pember Library, and Museum, and the Schuylerville Public Library, bringing new faces into the libraries, creating and deepening relationships with the community while fostering renewed interest in library services from populations that were previously reluctant users. The results of the initiative exceeded the expectations of our community partner, Comfort Food Community. The once-a-week deliveries were doubled, and we piloted a year-round produce delivery to the Schuylerville Public Library, which resulted in an additional 600 pounds of produce being distributed over the winter of 2018-2019.

We have begun our second year of the Fresh Food Collective Farm-2-Library Distribution this July 2019, which will continue through mid-November, and have added the Argyle Free Library to serve an additional community.

#### **4. What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.**

As a result of the program, 62% of participants indicated via a survey that they had tried a new fruit or vegetable, and 100% reported that it had improved their access to fresh produce. One

Schuylerville family made rich vegetable soups from the produce they took home, providing a staple source of dinner for three months. And in Granville, at the Pember Library and Museum, a 76-year-old woman reported delight in having her first taste of a fresh beet.

The three participating libraries in 2018 – Schuylerville Public Library, Whitehall Free Library, and the Pember Library and Museum – reported new people coming into the library and attending programs. On the days of produce delivery, Schuylerville Public Library would open to a line of people waiting to come in to pick up produce. The demand for produce was so great that deliveries increased from once a week to twice a week at all three of the libraries, and one had year-round produce distribution.

The communities served responded in a big way – at the Pember Library and Museum and Whitehall Free Library, donations of eggs came in from people who had chickens, and others shared surplus produce from their gardens. In Schuylerville, which has an active summer lunch program for children and a weekend food backpack program, fresh fruit and vegetables improved the nutritional quality of their meals. New conversations were sparked as people browsed the produce, sharing recipes, ideas for meals, and other resources.

This year's program was so successful that we've added a fourth library, the Argyle Free Library, in 2019, and plan to continue to grow the program as our funding and capacity allow. Demand for the program continues, as evidenced by the phone calls received at each of the participating libraries as well as at the Southern Adirondack Library System, inquiring about the start of the 2019 program.

The Fresh Food Collective Library Distribution initiative recognized the challenges faced by our small, rural communities and addressed them in a way to bring new faces into our libraries while meeting people's needs. Although each of the communities involved has a food pantry, reliance on volunteers means that access to food is limited to a couple of hours a week. By using public libraries as distribution points, we eliminated accessibility obstacles while encouraging people who may not be using library services to come into our buildings, and see what else we had to offer. Collaborating with other community stakeholders dedicated to addressing the issue of food scarcity, nutrition, and healthy eating allowed us to create a program that reduced food waste at local farms and provide fresh, local – and mostly organic – produce to people who would not otherwise have access to it. By providing people with food, we have a chance to get to know new patrons and began to build trusting relationships that will allow us to take on new challenges, like adult literacy.

We believe this project is unique, and that its design and implementation are both sustainable and replicable – by utilizing food waste and addressing food scarcity through partnerships with a local food pantry, we are able to improve the lives of people we serve and believe others could as well.