

Due to a schedule conflict, I was unable to participate in canvassing. However, knowing which houses or apartments came to the door during canvassing was important, so I teamed up with Nora (who did participate in canvassing) to help collect any donations. That way we could be sure to return to those enthusiastic families for pick-up.

Nora and I traversed the first three floors of the Craighead apartment complex and collected two arm-fuls of food. We interacted with an interesting cross-section of individuals and families: some were younger, and some were older; some had kids, and many did not. Of all the residents who answered, only one declined to donate; she said she has a picky eater, so she makes most things from scratch.

I learned a few things that day. For one, I have no desire to live in the Craighead/Sisson apartment complex. They are drab, dingy, and actively falling apart in some cases. But I also learned that the state of the apartments does not necessarily reflect the generosity of the residents. All but one person answered the door with food in hand or nearby.

The activities and discussions we have had in this class often parallel my experience in Scouts. I share this in my *Braiding Sweetgrass* summative piece, but the parallel values found in *Braiding Sweetgrass* are not unique. Every year, all of the Scout troops, Cub Scout packs, and Venture Scout crews in Great Falls come together for a city-wide service project much like TOTSME. Put fliers at each door, wait a week, then make the rounds to pick up bags of food. Each unit has a section of town roughly proportional to its size. Because it is a regular event for all of Great Falls's roughly 60,000 residents, the amount of donated food is staggering. I was a member of the largest troop in the state, Troop 1, with around thirty active youth at its pre-Covid peak. Usually, only half of them participate in Food Bag Drop-off/Pick-up, but that's still fifteen Scouts racing to collect as much food as we can to try to beat Troop 110. (Spoiler: we usually do.)

The friendly, cross-unit competition is key to the success of Food Bag Drop-off/Pick-up. Troop 1 was *determined* to remain the number one unit for most food donated, which drove us to collect a truly insane average of around 1,000 pounds per year. Now imagine the sheer volume of donations collected by every troop, pack, and crew in the city. It is easily over 10,000 pounds. *Per year.*

Great Falls has serious issues with food insecurity. The median wage in Great Falls is not enough to survive on. The Great Falls Food Bank website says that around 10,000 people in Cascade County are food insecure. That is over 12% of the entire county. In addition, Great Falls and the county at large do not benefit from the investment and growth of other counties like Missoula and Gallatin, so there is little pressure to increase wages. While 10,000 pounds per year is not enough to solve this alone, it can help. When kids have food, they will have more energy and motivation, which can help them further their education. When parents are less worried about how they can afford meals for themselves and their dependents for even the next few days, they can devote more energy to advancing their careers or education with the ultimate goal of improving their quality of life.

However, this alone cannot solve the problem of food insecurity. To truly *so/ve* it, we must pursue a multi-faceted strategy: improve and expand affordable housing, reduce the ludicrous amount of bureaucracy engrained into programs for low-income individuals and

families, or enshrine the right to stable housing in our governmental institutions so those in poverty will no longer have to worry about where they will sleep tonight. By absolving the cost of low-income housing, individuals and families have a stable base to operate from to help them get a stable job with a stable income. Food banks will still play a vital role in this, but they cannot end hunger alone.

Service is the act of giving back. Honors students were given an amazing opportunity to study their passions with a sizeable portion of the cost of college covered by scholarships. However, such generosity must be returned, so we turn to service. Many honors students would have participated in service projects with or without the gift of scholarship, but now we have an obligation.