

**Belonging as Placemaking: Volunteers Creating Community at the Peralta Hacienda
Historical Park “Food for Fruitvale” Pantry in Oakland, California**

A Project Report

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Belonging as Placemaking: Volunteers Creating Community at the Peralta Hacienda
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Abstract

This project is a collaboration between San Jose State University (SJSU) and Peralta Hacienda Historical Park (PHHP) in Oakland, California. With the goal of strengthening Peralta's Food for Fruitvale program within the larger organization and in service to the community, PHHP and I sought to understand the story of the food pantry in building community and connection in relation to Peralta Park. Taking an appreciative inquiry approach, I focused on volunteers and to a lesser extent on clients, asking about their journey into the food pantry, things they enjoyed about it, the kinds of social support they received, and what was important to them about the pantry, the park and their neighborhood. In this otherwise heterogenous group, volunteers are a close cultural work group driven by a sense of purpose and feeling of belonging. These experiences are shaped by shared norms and understandings such as an awareness of neighborhood vulnerability, social injustice, feelings of duty, and desire for social connection. Volunteers are also motivated by a caring workplace culture, proximity to home and neighborhood membership. These internal and external phenomena appear like a constantly flowing feedback loop of signs, actions, and emotions imprinting into the environment new narratives and histories. Recommendations include harnessing volunteers to organize appreciation events, increased mentoring support by top leadership for the food pantry manager including professional networking opportunities, periodic staff rotation in the food pantry to prevent "us vs. them" feelings, cultivation of younger adult volunteers and accommodation for older individuals, and making time for volunteer education around issues of cultural difference to address potential conflicts among clients or misunderstandings among volunteers.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

For this project I had the opportunity to partner with the staff and volunteers of the Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Food for Fruitvale program with the goal of understanding the motivations of food pantry volunteers and how their experiences build community. As a non-profit with the typical financial pressures of a tight budget and large vision, Peralta Hacienda wants to ensure the future security of its food pantry program. One way to support Peralta's fundraising or marketing efforts is by describing the food pantry's role in creating community within the cultural landscape that is the park and its environs. Over the span of eight months, I worked alongside Peralta food pantry staff and volunteers interviewing 14 volunteers, 11 clients, and several staff and board members. I asked volunteers about their motivations for joining the food pantry and how they valued the park and the neighborhood. I interviewed clients about their general experiences with the food pantry, the community gardens, and the park. I asked both groups to share memories around favorite foods or food memories with the goal of producing a preliminary archive of food anecdotes for use by Peralta in future fundraising, marketing campaigns, or exhibits.

The Peralta Hacienda Food for Fruitvale program, launched in 2019 in Fruitvale, Oakland, takes place in the southeast corner of a six-acre public park and adjacent community center (see Appendix D Map 4). The program has one full time manager, one part-time employee and 25 volunteers. Food is delivered weekly in pallets from the Alameda County Community Food Bank and picked up from local bakeries and supermarkets. The parent organization, Peralta Hacienda Historical Park (PHHP or "the park"), in addition to

the food program, has eight full-time staff, one part-time employee and two volunteers, all of whom work on-site to plan and implement numerous programs and exhibits targeting youth, nearby residents, and visitors (Rasilla 2017). The park is bordered by Peralta Creek on the south side with city streets and single-family homes on the other (See Appendix B Maps 1-4). Recognized by PHHP as unceded native Ohlone territory, the multi-use, multi-layered space includes an 1821 adobe and a nationally recognized, award-winning house museum (Bay Area News Group 2017), once the Victorian home of Mission-era Luis Peralta and his descendants. Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, the non-profit's fiscal sponsor and board of directors, along with Executive Director, Holly Alonzo, and the staff, have worked for more than twenty years to leverage Peralta's national reputation for local benefit, creating exhibits, events, and programs in order to:

“...bring people together to understand each other's cultures and heal historical wounds, take care of the land we depend on, celebrate our rich and varied identities through culture and the arts, and engage in civic life, creating a model for communities nationwide” (Peralta Hacienda Historical Park 2023).

Foodways are an enduring theme in the programs of PHHP. On Thursdays and alternating Tuesdays, beginning as early as 7 or 8am, a river of humanity gathers on the lawn the front of the old house museum. Upwards of 600 people, mostly elderly and young mothers with children, line up in anticipation of the 10:30am start for the week's food distribution. A free farmer's market set-up is under way. The volunteers, many of whom live nearby and come to work on foot, bring food to share with one another during breaks. Maria's pupusas and Xue's chow Mein are top favorites (see Appendix C Photo #7). Carmen always has some little treats for the little ones on hot days. Meanwhile the permanent,

interactive kitchen exhibit in the adjacent house museum combines historical artifacts with contemporary images of foods and faces, texts in multiple languages and objects that engage the visitor in learning about the diverse cultures and practices of present-day Fruitvale residents. Outside the kitchen exhibit Laotian elders tend 12 vegetable garden plots in the park's community garden spaces (Rodas 2022). Depending on the time of year, on-site weekend festivals will celebrate Aztec dance and food, the Khmer New Year, Chicano worker music and food, or Black Mexican heritage. Staff meetings and important gatherings often center food sharing as a way of building connection and community (See Appendix C Photo #4). This facet of community life, food sharing, has become increasingly important for a neighborhood with growing food insecurity, particularly since COVID-19.

As of 2019, between 33% and 37% of the Fruitvale population is food insecure (Alameda County Community Bank), meaning people are unable to access sufficient, healthy food for themselves or their families on a consistent daily basis (United States Department of Agriculture, 2023). Contributing factors include inflation, the ending of COVID-era child tax credits and stimulus payments (Waxman et al. 2022, 6) and for Oakland, the added challenge of lack of affordable housing. Reflecting national patterns, the greatest impact of food insecurity has been on Black and Brown and low-income communities color (2022, 4). As a social determinant of health, food insecurity among vulnerable communities is associated with poor health and chronic conditions (Gregory and Coleman-Jensen, 2017).

Prior to COVID-19 on up to the present, food pantries have evolved from emergency assistance to regular sources of food for families navigating inflationary pressures and the reduction in COVID-era SNAP benefits (Jetha 2023, Chiarella et al. 2023). Nearly half of

food pantries struggle with supplies and operational efficiency (Ginsburg 2019). In terms of sustainability, food pantry volunteers are an important aspect of long-term viability (Hibbert et al. 2003; Miroso et al. 2016; Wills 2017). As places of social interaction, food pantries can foster political and ethical awareness, new social practices and subjective experiences (Cloke et al. 2017). In this sense, food pantries can foster cultures of community.

Food pantries are not the solution to food insecurity and may even perpetuate neoliberal structures of inequality (Berti 2017), but they provide an important stop-gap measure to keep families fed and healthy in the interim. By understanding how they work within the web of social connection we can perhaps strengthen their role as sources of care, healing, ethical and potentially, political development (2017). In the next section I discuss my partnership with Peralta in more detail, as well as my analytical approach to the research, the project plan, and the literature that guided my analysis.

Partnering with Peralta Hacienda Historical Park

I chose to collaborate with Peralta Hacienda Historical Park as a result of my interest in the process of placemaking which speaks to my background in Geography and Urban Planning. I am an explorer by nature and spend many hours walking the streets of Oakland, particularly in older neighborhoods that can surprise me with moments of awe and discovery. I am drawn to dense, highly mixed places where different building styles and social adaptations rub up against each other. Peralta Hacienda is a place of layered histories but also a community striving to create new histories emphasizing healing and inclusion. I perceived an alignment of values with between myself and Peralta, values that reflect caring, diversity, service, social justice and creative expression. At San Jose State University, Dr. Faas and Dr.

English-Lueck cautioned me against my sprawling research interests, helpfully guiding me toward a practical research agenda that would have concrete outcomes for my partner client, Peralta Hacienda. I was grateful in discovering the scholarship and research guidance of Dr. Melissa Beresford with her background in economic anthropology, food anthropology, water security, and analytical methods. I was particularly drawn to Dr. Beresford's own research agenda investigating the moral economies of water; how communities in resource-insecure environments navigate norms of justice and care. The Chicana feminist scholarship of Dr. Christine Vega and Dr. Erika Carillo on Chicana gendered work contributed to my understanding of intersectionality and aging respectively.

My early communication with Peralta Hacienda was with Executive Director, Holly Alonzo, often through email with two hour-long meetings. Alonzo was initially interested in a project emphasizing the oral histories of the food pantry clients. I explained that this approach fell outside the bounds of my graduate school focus but that I would collect some anecdotal stories, made anonymous, that could be shared after my research was complete. Through her I was introduced to the food pantry manager at the time, Terry Lima, who was open to my interest in researching the food pantry community of volunteers and clients. Lima was grateful to have someone interested in her program.

After Terry Lima's departure in April 2023, with the arrival of a new manager, Yuka Matsuno, I had to build trust and spent several meetings with her explaining my project and providing updates. With a background in food justice and an educated skepticism of cultural anthropology, Matsuno was concerned whether my methodology and goals aligned with those of herself and the organization. Over time and with clear lines of communication, we

were able to work together quite well. Finally, by simply being embedded in the site and the community, I developed a solid rapport with the rest of Peralta Hacienda staff who sometimes came to say hello or grab a bite at food pantry potlucks. I volunteered for Park clean-up days and attended several festivals, getting to know the park and the community over time. More recently I have been asked to assist with a grant submission and other fundraising initiatives underway to support the food program. Over the course of this project my role has thus evolved from volunteer-student researcher to that of a researcher-advocate. As a kind of interlocutor for the volunteer community, my research results may in the long run be less important than the process itself, which has shed light on the dynamics of volunteerism and the thick layer of care and insight the food pantry provides beyond just food.

Food Pantries as Change Agents

My research took a multi-disciplinary perspective combining cultural anthropology, geography, and psychology. Three predominant concepts guided my thinking: intersectionality, belonging as placemaking, and volunteer work as social encounter. Intersectionality informed my approach to interviewing and conducting myself as a volunteer; it kept me mindful of my own “insider-outsider” positionality and of the multi-faceted identities (racial, gendered, legal, mental) of research participants, of the organizational culture and of the neighborhood in which I work. The idea of belonging as a key aspect of placemaking was intrinsic to my analysis of volunteer motivations and is based on the idea that belonging is a process, not a fixed state of being. Volunteer work as social encounter is a way to highlight the murky, yet active boundary between volunteers and

clients; it also highlights the power of volunteers to shape community culture, build social capital, and contribute to a social ethos of justice and care.

Intersectionality

My project is situated in a social context of diverse and overlapping life experiences and identities. Within this context, intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) is a useful framework for acknowledging the complex social positions people occupy. This framework is also helpful for building a researcher's awareness of the power dynamics and the privileges of being a university-affiliated "outsider" and how these can re-enforce these same dynamics (Longman and Graeve 2014, 37). Intersectionality is undoubtedly a consideration in why certain people choose to participate in research and others do not (Abrams et al., 2021). In food insecurity research, intersectionality is an important framework for measuring how certain (intersecting) groups may experience excess risk as compared to other groups (DuMonthier et al., 2017). An intersectional approach does suggest that using discrete social categories alone such as race or gender, does not fully capture the boundaries of oppression (Abrams et al. 2021). This is one reason why I chose not to emphasize specific identity categories in my analysis.

Despite my project limitations I have strived to build an insider rapport with my volunteer cohorts over the course of my immersion, creating trust as much as possible and to compensate for my outsider status. With this project's emphasis on placemaking and belonging, intersectionality validates the diverse experiences of food pantry volunteers in their multi-layered identities within the food pantry and the Peralta community. It also serves

as a cultural signal to my collaborators at Peralta who themselves possess multiple intersecting identities and histories within broader systems of power and inequality.

Belonging as Placemaking

Belonging is a subjective feeling of being “at home”, an integral part of one’s surrounding systems, groups, and physical places (Hagerty et al., 1992; hooks 2009). It is a deep felt human need that fluctuates depending upon other people, places, or experiences (Allen 2020a). Geographers have theorized the significance of belonging as a key aspect of place-making. In food research conducted among second-generation college students, belonging and improved mental health status are associated with access to culturally familiar foods (Wright et al. 2021). For food pantries, research on the experience of belonging is highly site specific and focused on either volunteers or customers. Wutich et al. (2014) found that belonging in the form of strong social bonds in economically stressed urban communities may offset the negative health impacts of disadvantage and stigma. Feminist immigration scholarship attests to a “politics of belonging” which points out that claims to inclusion are contested and redefined in specific geographic places (Mendez and Deeb-Sossa 2022-119). In food pantry spaces where women predominate as community workers, such spaces are opportunities for belonging through the creation of “weak social ties” that transcend class lines and provide sources of information and opportunities (Deeb-Sossa 2022-121; Mengivar 2000; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). When conducting transcript analysis in this project, belonging-as-placemaking presents a way of describing how different participants create meaning individually, as a group, as part of the food pantry and in relation to the public spaces of the park.

Volunteer Work in Spaces of Economic Difference

The Peralta Hacienda food pantry is a dynamic, swirling space of human interaction and change. In choosing to study the motivations of food pantry volunteers I want to demonstrate that such a space of care, hard work, and ingenuity cannot be reduced to a mere example of neoliberal critique. While food banks may be entangled within larger political economic processes, I resist the idea that all food pantries serve a government endgame to depoliticize inequality by offering private sector solutions to a basic human right (Kurtz et al. 2019). Rather, food pantries may articulate transformative, ethical responses to food insecurity in ways that demonstrate new economic forms despite capitalism's perceived dominance (Berti et al. 2021; Cloke et al. 2017-707; and Gibson-Graham 2006). Furthermore, the Peralta Food for Fruitvale program does not fit the mold of the wealthy/religious/white savior model, serving stigmatized people of color because it feels good (Desouza 2019, Poeppendeick 1994). Rather, it is a community program run by and for its members. In this project I adopt Cloke's "in the meantime" approach: acknowledging that the food pantry system is not the perfect solution, but that it is as a political space of engagement and an ethical space addressing need, facilitating conversations and practices around new norms (2017-707). As such, it merits numerous avenues of site-based investigation in the interest of scholarship, policy and planning.

Methodology

For this project, I applied a combination of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Functionalism, and Self-Determination theory: AI focuses on "what is good, what works"; Functionalism addresses the uniqueness of individual experiences despite sharing similar roles; and Self-

Determination Theory identifies intrinsic motivational factors. I also based my interview protocol on early conversations with Peralta's executive director, a result of wanting to mitigate some of the issues of bias that my outsider status presented. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on collaboration and identifying what works in organizations or communities, rather than the problems (Cooperidder 2005; Schmied et al. 2019). It takes a constructionist view that all meaning is socially created, focusing on affirmation, appreciation, and positive dialog. For example, rather than focusing on hypothetical volunteer complaints about client behavior, I focus on the positive social interactions, using that observation as point of reflection to generate positive or uplifting data that can be used later for shaping organizational narratives or addressing change. Applying functional theory, the studies of Clary and colleagues (1998) determined that people in similar volunteer roles do so for different social and emotional reasons. These reasons can include self-protection, values alignment, career development, social connection, education, and self-esteem (Clary). Recently, application of Self-Determination theory by Sheldon and colleagues (2022) demonstrated a connection between intrinsic motivations and level of food pantry volunteer commitment.

Upon project approval from the university Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (April 24, 2023, No. 230456), I arranged a slide presentation of the project plan for Peralta staff and for the Friends of Peralta board of directors. This served as both an explanation of the MOU expectations and as a kick-off for the project. At both events, people were invited to ask questions. Staff expressed appreciation for the concept but gave minimal feedback. The board thanked me but seemed distracted by other matters. This was only one

year after the pandemic had lifted and at this time in the City of Oakland, in Fruitvale specifically, there was a drastic increase in crime particularly for shop owners and residents (Rasilla 2023). The executive director and food pantry manager were present at this kick-off meeting. Shortly after, I would learn that tensions had been building with the then-outgoing food pantry manager Terry Lima. Despite her enthusiastic support when I began recruitment she would soon resign and be replaced by Yuka Matsuno.

I developed an interview guide with semi-structured questions adapted from the functionalist approach of Clary and colleagues (1998) which determined that people in similar volunteer roles do so for different social and emotional reasons. These reasons can include self-protection, values alignment, career development, social connection, education, and self-esteem (Clary). The interview guide included the following topics:

- Origin story about the participant's journey to the food pantry.
- Attitudes about healthy food, food memories, favorite foods.
- Joyful moments at the food pantry.
- Motivational factors related to their volunteer work.
- Perception and value questions regarding the food pantry and the park.
- Aspirational and future-oriented perspectives about the food pantry and the neighborhood in general.

The interview protocol for staff and board was more loosely structured to elicit contextual information about the organization with questions about what they did in their jobs, how they came to Peralta, and any understandings they had about the food pantry.

The recruitment of volunteer participants began after the food pantry manager, Terry Lima, made two or three announcements in English, Spanish, and Cantonese, right before a food distribution, during the first three weeks of my internship with Peralta. Before every distribution set-up there was a brief circling up with the volunteers: the manager presented the day's produce selection and portion sizes, introduced new volunteers, and gave a short invocation of solidarity or reminder about codes of conduct. After these initial announcements, I went around and introduced myself to each volunteer. Over time, I took on a "floater" role which allowed me freedom of movement to familiarize myself with each volunteer or client and provide the manager with someone who was flexible and able to shift gears quickly. Recruitment took place over three volunteer sessions, followed up by phone calls to confirm interview dates and the preferred method of interview, by phone or in person.

Toward the end of recruitment, the pantry had approximately 15 to 19 volunteers, mostly women. By completion of my analysis, the number of volunteers grew to between 25 and 30, four of whom were men. Initially I had set out to interview 12 staff and board members, 12 volunteers, and 12 clients. It became apparent that recruiting non-English speaking volunteers would require more persistence and help with translation. Also, many of the volunteers do not have home internet or high-end cell phones, so face-to-face recruitment and follow-up took patience. Over time, and through familiarity by way of working together, I was able to arrange phone interviews with non-English speaking volunteers who would arrange to have a daughter or a friend help with translation. The consent form was read by me, sentence by sentence, then translated. Likewise with the interview questions. I used my

phone and password-protected laptop to record and save the audio files. One of the volunteers, a student intern, who was under 18 years old, was given a Spanish-language parental consent form which he had his mother sign. I was able to expand my volunteer group from 12 to 14. Four volunteer interviews were conducted in an empty back room on the second floor of the Peralta House Museum offices.

Client recruitment was more difficult due to language and cultural barriers as well as the logistics of translation. I developed a multi-lingual handout in Cantonese, Spanish, and English, but soon realized that face-to-face outreach with customers while standing in line, was the way to go. I started with the lowest hanging fruit, people who spoke English. I found a bilingual client, Norman, who spoke Cantonese and English, and expressed a willingness to help me with translation. I identified a young woman Ruby, also bilingual and a participant in Peralta's other educational internships, who offered to help me. Ruby helped with one or two interviews but her understanding of Cantonese was insufficient to capture rich data. Norman and I both found it awkward to solicit elderly participants in a time-effective manner. As a Vietnamese Chinese American, he expressed some reticence talking with the elderly Chinese, indicating that my questions may offend or be misunderstood in this circumstance. Norman felt that the public social context of recruitment was too culturally invasive. If I had had another six months, I would have tried to make it work, enlisting a professional interpreter and working to schedule face-to-face interviews with these individuals in the privacy of their homes or in the Peralta office. Despite these constraints, I was able to conduct two in-person client interviews with a Mam translator during the food pantry lines, and another two over the phone with Spanish translation. While these did not

produce sufficient data saturation for this research project, they did include some relevant anecdotes around food ways that will be shared with the staff at Peralta Hacienda in a separate document. All clients were read the consent form in their own language and asked for consent which was recorded. These were done in person, or over the phone, and recorded by phone. Average interview time for volunteers was 45 minutes. Average interview time for clients was 15 to 20 minutes. One board member interview was conducted at the member's home and notes were recorded on a notebook. Average interview time with staff was one hour. All audio transcripts were anonymized in Otter AI (v 3.3 2016), cleaned up and names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Project Goals

The primary goal of the project was to gather and analyze data about the motivations of volunteers who work at the Peralta Food and to understand how those motivations contribute to a sense of community at Peralta Hacienda. A secondary aim was to gather perspectives from food pantry clients and staff to better the broader social context of the program. A third aim was to collect food-related anecdotes; short anonymous narratives about favorite foods or food memories – that could be compiled for later use by Peralta Hacienda for curatorial, educational, or fundraising. By applying anthropological theory and methods to this research my hope is this experience, and these results help Peralta Hacienda in its planning, fundraising, and organizational development as it relates to its food-based programming.

Project Deliverables

After completion of data collection and analysis I met with the Peralta food pantry manager, Yuka Matsuno, to brainstorm ideas for presenting my results to Peralta. We agreed it would be useful to present the results in a slide format to the Board of Directors in December 2023. She expressed some concern with staff's general apathy toward the project, hinting at larger organizational issues, and suggested we have a Wednesday pizza night with a short slide presentation to staff. We discussed the language barriers for volunteers using this format and will consider an activity that incorporates Spanish and Cantonese translation along with photos and images to communicate major findings. We are still in discussion about how best to proceed. A copy of the slide presentation and final report will also be sent to the food pantry liaison at Alameda County Food Bank. Finally, the executive director, Holly Alonzo, has requested a compilation of quotes that she can use for fundraising and grant reporting. These will of course remain anonymous and will be provided to Peralta under separate cover. The final project report and slide deck will also be made available to all staff and affiliate members of Peralta Hacienda.

Roadmap

This project report is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1, as described above, outlines the project's inspiration and its theoretical and methodological orientations. Chapter 2 is in article format for consideration of future publication. It includes an overview of the results of the study with key findings. I discuss the key factors that motivate volunteer volunteers to stay with the program and describe the types of understandings, norms, and values they share. These common themes are described with reference to Peralta Park in

terms of how people perceive the park and perceive their neighborhood. In Chapter 3, I reflect on the project outcomes, anthropological impact, project limitations and recommendations for further applied research in community based urban programs involving care and mutual aid.

CHAPTER TWO

FOOD FOR FRUITVALE: VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AND PROCESSES OF PLACEMAKING

Abstract

My project is about the social, spatial, and emotional processes through which volunteers at the Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Food Pantry in Oakland, California, build community. Through the lens of mutual aid, I explore how volunteers navigate and challenge understandings of cultural and life differences. This report is the result of a nine-month collaboration with Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Food for Fruitvale Program (the “food program” or “food pantry”) to understand the motivations of food pantry volunteers and how these contribute to sense of belonging and place-making. For the past five years the Peralta food program has strived to meet the increasing food needs of Oakland residents by offering an inclusive, dignified, and caring space on the edge of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, a community hub with an award-winning museum and numerous on-going programs centering youth development. A more recent addition to Peralta’s wide-ranging activities, the food pantry reflects the diversity and historical complexity of Oakland as a constantly shifting locus of migration and settlement. My research goals were to understand the motivations of volunteers in working at the food pantry, to understand the perspective of clients on the food pantry, and to explore connections volunteers make between the food pantry, Peralta Park, and the neighborhood. Taking an appreciative inquiry approach, I asked volunteers about their journey into the food pantry, things they enjoyed about it, the kinds of social support they received, and what was important to them about the pantry, the park and their

neighborhood. Two primary themes emerged: 1) an intrinsic sense of purpose and belonging driven by awareness of social justice, shared understandings, personal duty, and social connection and 2) extrinsic factors of workplace culture, proximity to and engagement with the park and its activities, and neighborhood membership. These inside/outside dynamics appear like a constantly flowing feedback loop of signs, actions, and emotions imprinting into the environment new narratives and histories.

Keywords: Food Pantries, Volunteer Motivations, Community Formation, Belonging, Aging, Mutual Aid, Food Insecurity

Introduction

The Fruitvale district is a lively, diverse neighborhood located in the geographic and historic center of Oakland, California (Rasilla 2023). Known for its legacy of political organizing during the Chicano and Black Panther movements (Herrera 2022), today it remains a locus of community care with long-established community organizations such the Unity Council and Native American Health Center, along with entrepreneurial hustle and cultural expression. Nestled along its main arteries, International and Foothill Boulevards, are bustling, densely packed mom-and-pop stores selling everything from sim cards and cowboy boots to El Salvadorean *pupusas* and Vietnamese pastries. *Frutéras* fruit stands, and taco trucks offer cheap, quick bites for a hardworking population on-the-go (Hernandez 2023).

Home to an international population of 53,000, more than half of Fruitvale is ethnically Hispanic/Latinx, the balance a combination of White, Black, Asian and Native American (Wikipedia 2023). Most Fruitvale residents are renters and 36% are families with children scrambling to meet the expensive cost of living that is the Bay Area (Healthy

Alameda County, 2023). Since the phase-out of COVID-19 era SNAP¹ benefits, the ability to purchase consistent, healthy food has become more difficult. Nearly 40% of the Fruitvale population are now food insecure², meaning people are unable to access sufficient, healthy food for themselves or their families on a consistent daily basis (Urban Institute 2021).

Prior to and since the COVID-19 pandemic, food pantries have become sources of long-term aid, taking on the role of the supermarket for Californians facing food insecurity with implications for policy, private markets, and the nonprofit sector (Jetha 2023, Chiarella et al. 2023). However, as highly decentralized, grass roots efforts, they tend to fizzle out over time. Research into the role of volunteerism in food pantries indicates that volunteer recruitment and retention are likely key aspects of long-term viability (Hibbert et al. 2003; Miroso et al. 2016; Wills 2017). Low staff motivation and high volunteer turnovers can lead to substantial investment of time in training and re-creating relationships (Rondeau et al. 2020). Understanding the motives of volunteers who work in such spaces of caring can provide insight into the social mechanisms that produce continuity. With site-specific information, scholars, policy makers, non-profits, donors, and activists can be better informed in identifying, analyzing and even scaling food programs that build community and perhaps even political potential. Based upon conversations with Peralta Executive Director

¹ SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, a federal subsidy in the form of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards that can be used to purchase food at retail stores and farmers' markets. In California, the program is called Cal Fresh and the EBT's are used like debit cards.

² Food insecurity is measured annually by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Annual Household Health Survey. Food insecure households worry about three things: 1) their food will run out before they have money to buy more, 2) the food they have will not last, and 3) they lack the money to get more.

Holly Alonso, in early 2023, I proposed a project that would explore the motivations of the volunteers and clients (beyond free food) within the food pantry as an extension of the park and investigate how this program contributes to community formation.

Study Background

Six blocks up from International Boulevard and Fruitvale Avenue, nestled between the aging wood and stucco single and multi-family dwellings of Coolidge and 35th Avenues, sits Peralta Hacienda Historical Park. Created in 1985 by community activists, residents, and local government (Albano 2023), PHHP is a cultural community hub comprising six acres of unceded Ohlone land and is home to several nationally significant historic structures dating back to the 1820's Spanish Mission era. The site includes pathways, community gardens, greenspace, an event structure for festivals and workshops, art exhibits, and a parking lot where the food pantry operates. Dedicated to the decolonization of land and creating a safe place for all, Peralta Hacienda's nine staff, Board of Directors, and Advisory Board strive to "heal historical wounds and care for its community" (Yuka Matsuno, Peralta Hacienda excerpt from grant proposal, October 1, 2023). The house and park hum with activity including permanent and rotating museum exhibits and a steady flow of young people who participate in the park's popular subsidized youth programs.

Since 2018, when former manager Terry Lima, a long-time Fruitvale resident who saw that neighbors were struggling to make ends meet, started with a single truck, some plastic tables, food from the Alameda County Food Bank, the operation now serves more than 600 customers six times per month. In April 2023, Yuka Matsuno, an energetic recent college graduate with a professional background in environmental food justice, took over

operations, combining a passion for food justice and efficiency. Every Thursday a six-car parking lot is transformed into a buzzing food pantry by a group of twenty or more volunteers who turn pallets into produce on long plastic tables. This weekly social symphony serves a highly diverse population comprising the elderly, disabled, and young mothers with children.

Formulating the project

Together with Peralta Executive Director Holly Alonso, I designed a project that would help Peralta Hacienda understand the community culture of the Food for Fruitvale program. I focused on volunteer motivations, norms, values, shared understandings, feelings, and attitudes in order to understand how volunteers experience a sense of purpose and of belonging. Taking an Appreciative Inquiry approach that focused on the positive aspects of food pantry experiences, I conducted in-person and phone-based interviews, volunteered during food pantry distributions and other park-related events, as well as sat in on several staff meetings.

Research Methods

Intent: The goal of this study was to understand how food pantry volunteers experience a sense of purpose and of belonging, two key elements that define community. I investigated the motivations of food pantry volunteers and to elicit values, attitudes, and emotions about working at the food pantry within the larger context of the park and the neighborhood. This in turn helped me identify how volunteers embody, enact and encode purpose and belonging within a space. I drew from Eric Hirsch's framework of foreground actuality (the real, every day and ordinary) and background potentiality (the ideal, the possible), to understand how

volunteers situate themselves in relation to the park as an everyday thing and as a concept of the ideal or of hope (Hirsch, 1994, 4 as cited in Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003, 16).

Sampling

Upon IRB approval, I conducted participant recruitment and sampling with the permission of PHHP's food pantry manager Terry Lima and Executive Director, Holly Alonzo. My goal was to identify 12 to 14 volunteers (among the 19-20) for a purposive, non-probability sample. For the first month or two of my weekly volunteer immersion I was introduced by the food manager as a graduate student researcher. This announcement was translated orally several times into Spanish and Cantonese by two bi-lingual volunteers. I recruited participants in person over a period of about one month, gently introducing the idea and then following up with conversations to confirm or deny willingness to participate. I also received a list of all volunteers and their phone numbers from the food pantry manager as well as a list of board members and their contact information from Miguel Alonso, a PHHP manager of cultural events programming. Staff participants agreed to participate in a series of loosely structured interviews intended to build my broader contextual understanding of how the food pantry fits into the larger organization.

Data Collection

Interviews took place in person in a private room of the museum offices and on the grounds of PHHP, or over the phone. Many participants lacked home internet, so the phone became the preferred way of conducting interviews. I would make the call and then record the interview with my desktop. In the case of participants who read and spoke English, if interviewed in person, I read the consent form out loud and asked for their verbal consent

which I noted on paper for later recording on my laptop. Some non-English speaking participant interviews took longer to arrange and were conducted over the phone. Due to the difficult logistics of hiring and scheduling a professional interpreter, I allowed invited participants to bring in a bilingual family member or friend to interpret for them. I read the form out loud slowly in English which was translated section by section by their chosen interpreter after which I would receive and note their consent. For volunteers I asked questions pertaining to their first contact with the food pantry, the kinds of social support they received, what was important to them about the experience and the place, as well as what they worried about. I also gathered basic demographic information and asked how far they lived in relation to the food pantry.

For client recruitment I used face-to-face communication during volunteer hours, attempting to identify a mix of people one-on-one. Initially I recruited people who spoke English and were open and willing to talk later after an exchange of numbers. I found a bilingual Cantonese food pantry client who then became a volunteer and was willing to help me conduct a point-in-time client survey. Through trial and error and a supportive food pantry manager, I was able to identify and interview 11 clients in a combination of scheduled phone and on-site interviews. For clients, due to time constraints I was unable to conduct in-depth interviews with about three out of 11 of them. My Cantonese interpreter felt that some of my questions pertaining to the participants' past, such as when they came to the U.S. and to Oakland, would make him and the participant uncomfortable. These were elderly Chinese or Vietnamese Chinese whom he felt "did not know how to think about the past, they only think about now and the future" and that "my questions about the past might make them feel

uncomfortable”. With this feedback about this cohort, I decided to readjust my expectations for this group and conduct a one-hour, point-in-time survey of the first 10 clients in line to gather basic demographic information and questions about getting to the food pantry and time spent getting there. Many of these people spoke either basic English or Cantonese and so I was able to work with my interpreter to complete 10 entries for the point in time survey. I used pen and paper and then recorded the results on my laptop. For interviews with clients and volunteers, recordings were downloaded to Otter AI (Liang 2016) for transcription and clean-up. Staff interviews were not audio-recorded, rather I took extensive notes while conducting the interviews. Similarly, with fieldnotes, after weekly food pantry work shifts, I went home and typed them directly onto my laptop.

Data Analysis

The goal for data analysis was to identify volunteer motivational factors, norms, values, and shared understandings for me to understand how volunteers experience community belonging and sense of purpose. This in turn helped me identify how volunteers identify with the space of the food pantry in the context of Peralta Park. After cleaning up audio transcripts, I uploaded them into MAXQDA, creating Volunteer, Client and Field Note document groups respectively. First, I coded the Volunteer group, creating structural codes based on my interview questions, for example “Distance to the food pantry,” “Primary motivations,” or “First contact”. Second round coding was based on repetition, spatial relations and X-Y relations (Bernard et al. 2017, 109). For example, I created a code called “Park Importance ” based on an interview question, then the subcodes “Safety and Maintenance” and “Access to the food pantry”. An example of an X-Y code includes:

“Workplace culture” under which I created the subcodes “Friendships”, “Autonomy”, and “Caring ”. The code, “Inclusion/Exclusion”, was created by noticing the mention of comparative, group inclusion/exclusion, or contingent statements such as the following: “I just feel that the Chinese are discriminated against”, “This is my community, my family”, or “the Latina women need it, the Chinese are the only ones that sell it”. Through this process, the themes of belonging and sense of purpose emerged for the Volunteer group.

For some clients I did collect some rich emic data around memories of food practices (for later use by Peralta Hacienda), but generally the code categories were either taxonomic such as “Ethnicity/Language” or space-time related such as the code “Distance” for statements like “It takes me 20 minutes to drive here”. Fieldnotes were coded with place-specific visual themes relating objects, people, and actions to validate or illustrate larger thematic patterns. An example is the code “equipment theft”, referring to an incident that happened one night at Peralta during the period of my research and which was placed under the primary code “safety”.

Study Findings

Volunteers expressed a range of motivational factors guiding their participation in the food pantry. These can be grouped as intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors, feelings within the self that drive one to action, include a desire to help, to act on one’s sense of duty, to cultivate work friendships, to belong to a caring community, and to be tolerant of and learn from differences. Extrinsic factors, things outside self that inspire, stimulate, or pressure one to action, included the following: the convenience of living nearby, living in the neighborhood a long time, relating to the clients as part of the same community, associating

the pantry and the park as part of the social fabric, and being part of a work culture valuing justice, inclusivity, fairness, efficiency, hard work, safety and fun. I also noted a few areas of concern expressed by two volunteers: these concerned pedestrian safety from street traffic and perceived racism or prejudice in client-volunteer interactions. They deserve follow-up but are qualified findings in that they may have been a result of the work climate under the former food pantry manager.

Volunteer Findings: Intrinsic Factors

Sense of Purpose

Sense of purpose is having the intention to do something meaningful that makes a difference to others. Peralta food pantry volunteers share an intrinsic sense of purpose informed by life experience, awareness of social (in)justice, personal responsibility, and gratitude for social connection. The interviews revealed that the feeling of purpose evolved over time. When asked how they first joined the food pantry, volunteers mentioned being motivated by one or a combination these factors: desire to help (11), a friend or family referral (9), neighborly curiosity (5), being solicited for their language skills while standing in line as a client (3), or simply wanting a new activity (2). One participant, a sporadic volunteer living in a tent in the corner of the park along Peralta Creek, talked about wanting a distraction from his traumatic past and daily struggle (1): “I started off just doing it (volunteering) to keep me positively busy, you know? It took the edge from (big sigh) ...selling dope...”

When asked what was important about the food pantry – another way of asking about belonging but in a long-term sense – eleven volunteers mentioned feeling grateful, happy, or

appreciated while helping, giving, sharing, or caring. Many also identified with the clients: “This IS my community and working there has shown me how it was to be on the opposite side of giving it away and not receiving it” or “I was a client before and now I want to help my community.” One motivating factor that falls somewhere between sense of purpose and belonging, is an appreciation for difference. More than half of all volunteer participants mentioned language and cultural differences as meaningful aspects of their work at the food pantry. “Cherie”, a woman in her sixties with her white hair always up in a ponytail said, “We don't all speak the same language, but you make your own family.” Communication and mutual understanding become part of the mission. “Tammy”, a twenty-two-year-old volunteer who is studying to become a chef at Laney College talked about feeling valued with her translation skills: “I say something to them (the clients) in Cantonese they're like, ‘Oh my God you speak Cantonese! you're so smart’” (Tammy is laughing, smiling). They’re just, like, so much happier knowing that someone speaks Cantonese, that they could communicate with somebody.”

Belonging

Belonging is defined as having an affinity for a place or situation. It is also a significant aspect of community care work. For volunteers at the food pantry, belonging happens inside the self and conveys a feeling of being comfortable or at home with the various spaces, people, and processes that make up Peralta Hacienda Historical Park. Volunteers’ associate belonging with social familiarity (8) and the invoking of shared understandings (12): “the need for food will grow”, “our neighborhood is funky but beautiful”, “a lot of beautiful people, a lot of bad people”, “there might be gunshots every

couple of months, but it's rare", "we get along" and "we keep learning". It is also cultivated through casual and sometimes close friendships: phone calls to check on each other or ritual hugs to break down language barriers. Birthday celebrations, group chats, phone calls, and potlucks also facilitate belonging.

Volunteer Findings: Extrinsic Factors

My research found three types of extrinsic factors associated with volunteer motivation. The first type of extrinsic motivation is the importance of workplace norms such as caring, tolerance, and acceptance of difference despite language barriers and perceptions of difference. The second includes the major convenience of living close by and having lived in the neighborhood for a long time. The third motivational factor is volunteers' engagement with boundaries such as negotiating and tolerating different forms of language and cultural expression, defining inclusion and exclusion for themselves and for others, and perceiving fairness or justice.

Caring and inclusive workplace culture

The food pantry has its own organizational culture with shared norms and values. These include inclusivity, modesty, flexibility, consistency, hard work, friendly gestures, food, sense of humor, conversation, and anticipating others' needs – the classic qualities of caring. Volunteers with minimal English use food gifts as a way of deepening membership into a predominantly English and Spanish-speaking group (see Appendix C Photo #2). Nearly half of those volunteers interviewed were once clients themselves. Shared understandings suggest lived joys, hardships, and sense of duty ("We do this for our community") as well as awareness of the neighborhood's physical neglect and vulnerability

(“It’s safer here than Chinatown”, “I don’t like bad guys around. Overall, in this community I feel it’s okay. Especially around the food pantry.” A weekly group text chat includes reminders and appreciations.

One woman, a regular, elegantly dressed client who has cancer, someone I got to know but did not interview, comes to the food pantry weekly like a kind of pilgrimage. Her sister comes sometimes to help her and told me once, “She fights so hard to get here. She lives for this trip. She loves all of it, the volunteers, but especially the variety of people.”

Most of the older food pantry volunteers who live nearby show up consistently every week. Some come out of obligation such as “James”, recovering from cancer: “I *always* show up, never miss a day of work.” Most of the volunteers I interviewed back in April and May 2023 continue to work there. They describe the work as contributing to personal development (“It opens my eyes”, “I don’t read the news, so I learn about the world this way”), to cultural understanding and feelings of autonomy and mastery (“I have my little niche”, “It’s second nature”). Work friendships are mostly cordial, not close: “I know everyone but don’t have friends”, “We all get along”, “We work well together”. The exception is a core group of three older female volunteers who know each other’s adult children, exchange phone calls, and look out for each other beyond the volunteer job. These women are the neighborhood watchtowers keeping a look out for the community, especially the ill and the young adults making their way in the world. During food pantry hours they will exchange knowing looks, messages and gestures as if to say, “I got you”.

Spatial Proximity to the Pantry and the Park

Many volunteers live within a five-minute walk of the food pantry and Peralta Park and eight of them talk about the park as part of their daily lives. One summed up: “Honestly the best part is I live right here. This IS my community. I get to walk through the park to get to work.”

Almost all volunteers (11 out of 14) associate the park with activities and variety (e.g., dog-walking, morning Thai Chi, festivals, clean-up days, kids’ camps), staff presence (7), or memories (2). “Fred”, a retired banker, who keeps the food supply shed organized, lives a block away on Davis Street exclaimed, “You’ve got to go to the Khmer New Year festival in the park! You must, You must.” Another volunteer, “Carolina”, who came to Oakland with her parents from Puerto Rico in the 1960’s, brings her grandkids to the park in the summer to burn off steam. For her the park conjures memories:

“I don't know if you know, this guy named Tony is an African. He passed away. He lived across the street. He would do all kinds of stuff. He would decorate the park area. He and his wife brought all his pictures and put them over here on the stairs. And I cooked and brought some food. Because he was my friend. He was always in the garage, making things. Beautiful pictures. He did pictures for a lot of places. He did it for that church in Berkeley at 65th...It is on my fridge. His wife is still alive. She moved out. I don't know where she went. He made me a lot of stuff.”

The 12 community garden plots, tended to for more than 20 years by a group of Laotian American families, were one of the first community activities on the site in the years before it became a full park. These families have become a park fixture, demarcating their garden plot boundaries with bamboo and the spiky stems of palm fronds. Volunteers know the gardens are tended to by a regular group of elderly Asian Americans but only two or three have had direct interactions: “I like coming up there to see what they’re planting,”

“They've given me some greens a couple of times and told me how to cook it. It's like stir fry. Mustard is what the yellow flowers are,” and “They are grandparents, keeping a connection to the earth for their children”. The gardens provide a backdrop for the food pantry, showcasing Laotian gardening skills and changing of the seasons as soil is turned and crops gets planted and harvested. Interestingly, one Filipino-American client (now a volunteer) when asked about the community garden plots, he replied “Can I join?”, to which I did not have an answer. The boundaries of these de facto family plots, despite being on public land, represent a socio-cultural margin between the Laotian community and everyone else - an example of the politics of arrival and how space can become a vibrant, shifting locus of activity with insider-outsider dynamics (Iskander and Landau, 2022).

Boundary Setting

Volunteers want to help their families and community, to belong, and to feel valued. At the same time, social membership entails an element of exclusion (“I don’t know the people up in the office but maybe that’s OK.”) Volunteers identify with the client community and can feel different, even among themselves: “Yeah, we don’t all speak the language but we’re family”; “I feel like people over there at the food pantry are complicated. They look down on people that are Chinese”. Being on the inside also increases awareness of social inequality: “Some of these people (Black neighbors) are too proud to come to the food pantry”, or “I never make it a big thing. Like, ‘yeah, I'm giving you food.’ That's between me and you.” Even “Thomas” knows he is cared for. A resident fixture in the park for the last two years, he is unemployed, on drugs, and constantly on the move. Thomas lives with his dog in a tent along the Peralta creek boundary fence and by force of personality, sheer will,

and being a constant presence in in the park, can sometimes score some supplies from the food pantry.

Concerns

In this project I did allow participants to share any concerns. Most volunteers agreed that food insecurity will continue, and the Peralta food pantry will be around for the near future. Two respondents thought food insecurity would get dramatically worse. Four additional topics emerged from interviews and from participant observation: 1) the importance of accommodating a cohort of aging adults; 2) the physical safety of clients and neighbors and risk to personal property including cars; 3) mitigating racial/ethnic discrimination or misunderstandings and 4) addressing the emotional burnout from continuous exposure to trauma.

Volunteering may be a rational choice based on personal choice, but it has the potential to cause burnout as the years go by and expectations continue (Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). In the context of Peralta Hacienda, this could become an issue as especially as volunteers are asked to contribute more time per week as client numbers increase. That said, the built-in youth internship program with a new cohort rotating in every three months provides fresh energy and an opportunity to plant seeds for their future involvement. Clients tend to live further away, so they identify less with the surrounding community. As older volunteers' health issues emerge, they will need to be accommodated, as they already are, with short breaks, chairs, and scheduling flexibility. The work can be physically taxing, requiring the ability to stand for long periods and move constantly. Despite these potential

risks, the volunteers' generational ties to friends and extended family practically guarantee the steady inflow of new members over time.

Two volunteers expressed concern for the safety of pedestrians lingering in the street outside of the driveway where the entrance to the food pantry is located. Fortunately, since this data was collected, the food pantry manager has changed the line-up system to extend up and onto the park grounds, no longer along the sidewalk bordering the street and exposed to car traffic. Despite this, fender-benders between clients and neighbors periodically occur and require significant time and energy to resolve. A couple of volunteers also mentioned cheating (clients coming two or three times) and selling of food, both seen as unfair and taking up valuable work time to resolve. One volunteer said they felt that the Chinese clients were discriminated against. Another volunteer said he feels that Black people are mistreated and some who live in the neighborhood are afraid to come to the food pantry for fear of being stigmatized for receiving free food. One former volunteer, "Frida", a young Latina mother who cannot afford childcare and wants to return, expressed sadness for the "no child" policy. She would love to come and volunteer with her baby daughter.

Discussion

Intrinsic Factors

This paper is the result of a place-based study where I set out to explore what motivates food pantry volunteers at Peralta Hacienda and how the food pantry contributes to the community. My findings indicated that meeting the food needs of one's community gives older (50+ years) volunteers a deep sense of purpose and belonging. I have drawn on data from a sample of fourteen adults from a cohort of about twenty volunteers. I also conducted

six in-depth interviews with 11 clients to understand their perceptions about the food pantry generally, how they came to the food pantry, their attitudes about healthy good food, and when possible, memories associated with food when they were young. These interviews produced rich, anecdotal data about the social context and point to the value of a future project recording the oral histories of volunteers and clients regarding foodways and food narratives.

My findings are consistent with studies showing that food program volunteers are primarily driven by a desire to do good (Brewis et al. 2010, 4; Mousa 2017, Rondeau et al. 2020). Also, most volunteers share a strong connection with the *place* that is Peralta Hacienda and demonstrate a deep affinity with the people of this community. For them, the caring nature of their work at the food pantry is an integral part of community identity. Furthermore, these volunteers are highly valued by clients and neighbors. Their volunteer work, life experience, and community affiliation comprise a strong group identity and important aspect of social capital for the neighborhood, for Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, and Oakland. They work together to meet the local need of food insecurity but at the same time develop networks of social connections, sometimes deep friendships, that in turn can provide important support for themselves and their networks as they grow older. Like other communities of embedded volunteer communities (Flora 1998, 494), Peralta's Food for Fruitvale volunteers are an important part of this community's social structure and collective identity.

Extrinsic Factors

In finding that Peralta volunteers were motivated by workplace social norms, geographic convenience, and engagement with boundary-setting, I determined that these results inevitably point to the subjective or intrinsic experience of belonging. Anthropologists have theorized the significance of belonging as a key aspect of care, community formation, affinity, and membership (Thelen 2021). As an ongoing process of everyday practice, of negotiation and production, belonging is also elemental to the co-creation and contestation of social boundaries (Antosich 2010). In the context of globalization and immigration, belonging manifests in diverse types of place-based membership (e.g., volunteer food pantry communities) creating new lines of inclusion and exclusion but also new space and possibilities for claims to inclusion (Mendez and Deeb-Sossa 2020, Yuval-Davis 2016).

Identity and sense of place also shape practices and meanings associated with belonging (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2007). In the case of Peralta, volunteers' sense of belonging is shaped by gendered and organizational norms of care (e.g., empathy, friendliness, hard work, efficiency), but is also influenced by the acceptance of culturally diverse practices such as food sharing and gift giving, and the inclusion of new volunteers emerging from criminal justice system. For Peralta's mostly female volunteers a subset of about five volunteers are close friends and the rest are amicable acquaintances who have formed loose social ties. Transcending class, language and other boundaries, such links can expand social capital through non-monetary advantages and opportunities (Mendez and Deeb-Sossa 2022, 121; Menjivar 2000; Dominguez and Watkins 2003).

The identity of food pantry volunteers is shaped by membership in the community generally. Proximity - living in the surrounding blocks of the Peralta neighborhood and having Peralta Park within footsteps of one's home - helps volunteers encode their lives onto the landscape, making it theirs. It is not just a matter of convenience but of creating meaning and history. The desire to work at the food pantry is a process of placemaking and creating a sense of socially recognized membership (Trudeau 2006, 13). Belonging then becomes both a process and a product of individual and social engagement. When volunteers feel they belong, their sense of purpose expands. Volunteers belong when they use words like "bonding", "cherishing", "loving", "looking out for", and "learning." When they feel they belong, they want to stay a while, they experience *hallarse*, at home with themselves.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are based on an analysis of interviews and more than seven months of participant observation. These are more "bucket list" suggestions to build on the existing strengths of the program. Most of these recommendations do not require money, just added attention to leveraging the human capital of the food pantry program and of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park.

Appreciating the heart of the food pantry

- Request the Executive Director, staff, and Board of Directors continue their periodic participation in the food pantry. This will increase awareness of the program's value and help build capacity for thinking about the long-term needs and goals of the program as well as ways to link food program cultural assets with museum programs.

- Volunteers are the lifeblood of this program. Explore a volunteer “appreciation committee” requesting their leadership in identifying awardees and planning small events. This takes the onus off staff and gives volunteers new ways to engage. For those starting to move on due to health, age or other reasons, it is better to acknowledge them now before they leave permanently.

Minimize language barriers and cultural differences.

- While the food pantry cannot solve systemic inequality, it can provide opportunities to educate and heal. For example, with a large percentage of the clients coming from the Chinese American community, many volunteers would greatly appreciate learning about the roots of Chinese American immigration in the Cultural Revolution, just to name one example. Peralta’s strong curatorial expertise and connections could provide insight into how to engage volunteers about such topics for multiple communities. Education can foster empathy and potentially diminish feelings of comparison or marginality.
- Continue to assign a volunteer or part-time staff to coordinate “volunteer interpreter” assignments for staff meetings (numerous volunteers speak Spanish/English as well as Cantonese/English). This takes the pressure off the manager, invites participation, and promotes inclusivity for non-English speakers.

Supporting the food pantry manager

- More hands-on leadership and physical presence from the top will help the food pantry manager feel supported and avoid burn-out. Encourage the food pantry

manager's attendance at professional conferences to help foster their professional linkages and sense of community in the food sector.

- Consider the current grants management consultant (if appropriate) and board fundraising committee as sources to cultivate an individual donor campaign for funding for the food program.
- Continue to explore Clif Bar Foundation and expand individual donor cultivation utilizing staff and volunteer capabilities to tell stories and share testimonials.

Connecting the food program to the museum

- Plan and finance a new temporary display or exhibit in the Peralta Museum as a way of linking the food stories of food pantry clients and volunteers with those in the permanent "kitchen" exhibit. This could be a way to leverage grant funds for the food pantry.

Planning for the long-term

- Any consideration of future growth that entails relocation or a satellite location off-site should include an assessment of current volunteer attitudes and values. The food pantry works because it is rooted in a specific place with strong associations for its surrounding community.
- It is great to see a dynamic link to food pantry hours on the Peralta homepage. The new food pantry manager's name and contact information need to be added, along with any photos and names of new part-time staff. Pictures of the volunteers will add depth to the face of the program. A food-related blog would be a fantastic way to

include Park-created content and to promote the park's programs to the community, donors, and the public.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to help Peralta Hacienda understand how the Food for Fruitvale program contributes to the Peralta community from the perspective of volunteers. I combined an Appreciative Inquiry and Mixed Methods approach to identify the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that shape volunteers' sense of purpose and of belonging. Volunteers are generally older residents of diverse backgrounds who know the community and staff of Peralta and were food pantry clients themselves at some point. They provide mentorship and caring to other volunteers including young mothers and BIPOC student interns participating in workforce development training. Despite language and cultural barriers, social bonds are formed at the food pantry enabling people to share experiences, information and opportunities. This is important for both the food program and for Peralta Hacienda Historical Park because it demonstrates the agency that local individuals have and the impact of mutual aid in creating meaningful social connections and helping people cope with food insecurity. Peralta's Food for Fruitvale program is a site of community care and social engagement that needs to be actively cultivated and protected. The food pantry's dependence on a robust older volunteer cohort combined with young interns is mutually beneficial dynamic that combines mentorship and physical accommodation with lively social encounters. This dependence on neighborhood volunteers must be balanced with an increased organizational investment in professional growth for the food pantry manager and with continued volunteer appreciation events that allow volunteers to shine and to flourish.

CHAPTER 3

PURPOSE AND BELONGING AT PERALTA HACIENDA FOOD FOR FRUITVAL PROGRAM

In this chapter I reflect on the outcomes, key findings, and limitations of my research. I also discuss the implications of people-centered, site-based food security research and the role of community collaboration in future projects with Peralta Hacienda Historical Park. My research revealed that Peralta's Food for Fruitvale program is nimble and responsive to the changing needs of its community. Food pantry volunteers are a highly diverse group of dynamic, mostly older-aged learners who want to help their community, belong, and create social connections that transcend ethnicity, linguistic, and other barriers. In addition to enjoying a workplace culture that emphasizes inclusivity, volunteers are driven by the convenience of living close by and having prior connections to food pantry or the Park site. As for project objectives around client-volunteer comparisons, time and logistical constraints required that I limit these to more basic demographic information (See Tables 1, 2, and 3). However, the project did allow for the collection of client food memories and anecdotes which I will give to Peralta in a separate document.

Outcomes and Key Project Findings

Discovering a Thick Layer of Care

In partnering with Peralta Hacienda Historical Park and its Food for Fruitvale distribution program, I learned that the food pantry is a rich and imperfect, evolving neighborhood institution of mutual care, joy, learning and social connection. Most volunteers live within a two-block radius of the park as compared to clients who tend to live a mile

away or more and come by car. At times, the boundaries between the volunteers and clients shift as clients become volunteers and volunteers return to being clients. Stressful events caused by larger systemic inequalities, such as illnesses, theft, carjackings, and even murder within and outside of the Peralta Park site, add a layer of vulnerability that volunteers must regularly come to terms with (see Appendix D). Work friendships and alliances deepen social bonds that last for years and can extend beyond the food pantry.

The site of the food program *in* Peralta Park with its concomitant uses and personal associations makes for a program with a grounded sense of place. As a result, volunteers feel they belong to the food program and to the park. Volunteers do not identify as much with the larger organization which is something for staff to consider. In a sense, the food pantry has its own community culture, separate from Peralta Hacienda as the parent organization. Peralta staff are trying to connect with food pantry volunteers, particularly during the last month of the food pantry manager's absence.

Identifying a Space of Difference

I started this project with the broad goal of exploring the Peralta Hacienda food pantry as a unique space of caring and agency, one that defied the critical refrain that food pantries are examples of failed neoliberal policies or white dominant philanthropic spaces. I found an organization of overlapping groups and relationships that continuously co-creates itself and embodies feelings of agency, belonging, decision making, negotiation, cultural exchange and boundary setting. Food for Fruitvale participants enact shared values of hard work, fairness and connection despite language barriers. Volunteers engage in shared understandings, small gifts, and food sharing in order to build work-based social bonds that

extend beyond the food pantry. These social dynamics, which manifest in the creation of social capital such as information sharing, contacts, networking, etc., have ripple effects into the surrounding community. Beyond food distribution, this aspect of the food pantry's community function is important to emphasize in grant writing, reporting, media relations, or content creation. My hope is this aspect of the project has been brought to light as a result of this project.

Limitations and Benefits of Research: Becoming a Researcher and an Advocate

Researchers often reflect on their experiences to assess lessons learned and integrate those insights into future projects. My reflections on project limitations fall into the following categories: researcher bias, consequences of site location for academic oversight, and lack of partner oversight creating some confusion and lack of buy-in among project staff.

As a volunteer-researcher for eight months, befriending colleagues and experiencing the day-to-day, I become close with my participant group, experiencing and witnessing moments of gratitude, frustration, and even loss. This brought with it an inherent bias toward the volunteer community which, combined with my Appreciative Inquiry approach, had the unavoidable impact of favoring my results toward the more positive aspects of volunteer life. Navigating my own positionality transformed me into an advocate and a friend. It is certain that my various privileges and status as an outsider enabled and hindered aspects of the research process. For example, my role, race, age and educational status helped me communicate with and move more freely among Peralta staff. Sometimes I leveraged this to the benefit of the food pantry community by making social introductions between volunteers and staff who wouldn't normally interact, promoting park events, identifying a potential

grant source to the executive director, recommending a volunteer to a board position, and helping a colleague edit an official letter. At times my outsider status was not necessarily welcome. Some volunteers refrained to be interviewed. It took me some time to earn the trust of the new food pantry manager who held a healthy suspicion of the field of Anthropology.

A second limitation of this project was its location in Oakland, more than an hour away from San Jose State University and my advisory committee. I chose the location based upon my residence and interest in Oakland, but the consequences were that San Jose faculty were not familiar with the site, the organization, or the neighborhood. I often felt alone in the sense that my advisors were not easily available or close enough to conduct a site visit or truly relate to the context. That may have affected my ability to reach out for guidance and feel accountable. Furthermore, Peralta Hacienda somewhat runs itself: the executive director is rarely there, working primarily from home since her job entails significant grant writing and governmental relations, and the staff are generally left to run the programs on their own, with weekly zoom staff meetings to provide general check-ins. This gave me the advantage of immense freedom and trust by the organization that I could manage on my own.

Fortunately, the arrival of the new food pantry manager, who grasped the project's research objectives, provided some reassurance of the project's relevance. Staff were helpful in providing contact information and meeting minutes. The executive director was extremely busy, and I did not feel it appropriate to ask her for samples of past grant proposals or grant reports pertaining to the food pantry. The Alameda County Community Food Bank liaison for Peralta was open and always willing to engage in conversation or answer my emails.

I did consider whether it would have been possible to design a participatory project wherein volunteers and/or staff were integrated into the research design phase. This was not logistically possible given that this project was part of a student research project that followed a phased schedule and would likely not have been completed within the academic timeframe. That said, if I were to do it again as a professional consultant, I might have designed a participatory process, rather than design and conduct a research project, to build in greater volunteer and staff involvement in the project. This would have required significant organizational investment of time and resources. As is, Peralta is already so pressured by its program commitments and financial needs that it is unlikely a pure participatory format would have ever gotten off the ground. Then again, the more stakeholders are invested in the early stages of a project design, the more they will claim ownership of its findings and outcomes. Finally, if the project design phase had begun *after* the arrival of the new food pantry manager, then perhaps I could have achieved more constructive feedback and the findings greater analytical validity.

Valuing the Volunteers

Through the course of this project and especially since the recent staff transition to a new food manager, Peralta staff have come into closer contact with the food pantry volunteers. My hope is that through my curiosity and my questions, through the hanging around and the general flow of communication, others within the Peralta organization will have developed greater appreciation for the depth and quality of character of the volunteers as individuals and as a community. Completely unrelated to the project, one volunteer has already been assigned a paid position running the food recovery piece of the program.

Another volunteer, the one who lost her old house and had to relocate, has been noticed and is hired periodically for short-term assignments during other Peralta events. This reflects Peralta Hacienda's agility and skill in bringing up its own and embracing the skills and talent of its own community. The increasing awareness that staff have for the food pantry community will inevitably lead to greater appreciation and cultivation of the skills and talents available to the organization.

Anthropological Impact

Food pantries will continue to grow in pockets of American cities that lack livable wage jobs and adequate affordable housing. These "in the meantime" micro-level food strategies (Cloke 2016) which capitalize on local ingenuity and barter arrangements, remain generally unrecognized and under-supported. In this project my goals were as follows: 1) to understand the motivations of Peralta Hacienda food pantry volunteers and participate collaboratively as a volunteer throughout the process and with full transparency toward Peralta staff, and 2) to encourage a deeper understanding of the food pantry's social and cultural contribution to the organization, to the park's cultural landscape, and to the broader Peralta community. Continued outreach and consultation within and from the Peralta Food for Fruitvale community will promote representation in a direction that other historical cultural organizations are striving for.

Like the adjacent field of Cultural Resource Management (CRM) which is making strides to advocate for historically marginalized voices in the planning and execution of museum exhibits (Lyngwa 2020, Macdonald 2020), economic and cultural anthropologists are increasingly aware of the importance of involving community stakeholders in project

initiatives and practices related to resource scarcity and community health (Quimby and Beresford 2023). The focus on enhanced knowledge sharing, interpretation, and meaning making among food project stakeholders necessitates greater community participation in key conversations about planning and decision making.

The discipline of anthropology is particularly situated to support advocacy initiatives where food and culture are intertwined. The field can facilitate rich dialogue between Peralta community members and other stakeholders, putting into practice the goals of decolonization and community healing by supporting the process of conversation, storytelling and history-making. In places such as Peralta Hacienda connected to contested histories of conflict and trauma, anthropology can serve as a healing bridge, a way of describing the diverse range of experiences and perspectives present within the Peralta community; it can facilitate the acknowledgement of past and present injustices and advocate for their redress.

Anthropologists themselves have the ethnographic toolkit required to approach and illuminate sensitive topics within a constructive framework.

On a practical level, ethnographic case studies and comparative narratives of neighborhood food programs provide opportunities for a multitude of policy-relevant research including: the shifting nature of female-dominated community food work; impact assessments measuring changing food choices and family health practices due to food pantry volunteer work; and the impact of participatory research on food pantry worker political outlooks and interest. Furthermore, place-based case research, combining anthropological, geographical, and other social science perspectives, supports more nuanced planning and budgeting for public parks and recreation programs. A user experience approach in the

research, design, and evaluation of on-site public park community centers would be invaluable to solving food insecurity block by block, particularly in budget-strapped towns and cities. Participatory food security research within the emerging field of moral economic anthropology, could shed light on how ideas of justice and obligation at the neighborhood block-level play out in times of resource scarcity or stress (Beresford et al. 2022, 3).

In line with this growing shift of community-centered research within anthropology, my project aimed to identify the intrinsic motivational drivers of Peralta's Food for Fruitvale volunteer members. By investigating the motivational aspect of the food pantry program, I was able to elicit many examples of agency and autonomy, ethical expressions of care and empathy, and normative agreements about fairness and collaboration on the part of volunteers as key stakeholders. Projects like this are one example of how anthropology can become part of a community's story, contributing to the field's greater social relevance beyond academia (Shackel 2004).

The Future of the Peralta Food for Fruitvale Program

“To make a long story short, this whole food pantry has fed me in a couple of different fashions - mentally, spiritually, and physically.” (volunteer)

“It makes me smile because I'm passing people in the park that I've helped. And they speak to me and it's like they thank me, and it just feels good.” (volunteer)

Peralta Hacienda Historical Park has become an indispensable part of a particular corner of Oakland. In this eight plus months I have been a volunteer and researcher, I have

observed the organization blossom in the wake of COVID-19, the roll out of new exhibits, strengthening of its youth curricula, growth in its Board of Directors, establishing a foot into the door of the San Francisco Foundation, and doubling of the capacity of the Food for Fruitvale program, among other achievements. It is also constantly evolving in major ways outside the scope of this project such as: 1) as part of a national historic site master plan Peralta Hacienda is in various stages of modification, approval, fundraising, and advocacy, 2) the executive director may consider succession planning within the next decade, and 3) funding and political pressures may affect capacity and shift the mission's emphasis.

As a small organization with a big heart, Peralta has significant sources of social and cultural capital that encourage experimentation and growth. Peralta's Food for Fruitvale is a lean, efficient, low-overhead, caring food model that works. Assuming a successful fundraising drive, the food pantry will continue, and it is likely that the food recovery piece will grow. This aspect of the food distribution program is a result of the passage of SB 1383 which requires that by 2025 California will recover 20 percent of edible food that would otherwise be sent to landfills, in order to feed people in need. At this point food recovery items account for no more than 10% of all food items, the rest comes from Alameda County Community Food Bank.

In line with Peralta's organizational practice of integrating neighborhood members into its program staffing needs, I foresee expansion of certain volunteer roles into broader leadership positions of small committees that help the food manager with volunteer appreciation and other initiatives to keep volunteers. The new food pantry manager is young and committed to growing the food program and her own role within the organization. In the

distant future it is possible that someone from the immediate community, a local resident, may take over the job as this person will have a long-term vested interest in keeping the program going for themselves and their neighbors.

Bridging the food program with the Peralta Museum reflects what we know about the history of Oakland is a history of arrivals and placemaking. This history comes from the intimate telling of stories and memories from those that experienced different facets of its history, firsthand. As the older Fruitvale generation passes on, it will be through their memories, their stories of food and place that they will continue to persist. Peralta is in a good position to facilitate difficult conversations with the food pantry community regarding trauma, immigration, discrimination, and urbanization. Museums like Peralta Hacienda play a crucial role in the display and representation of the material culture of the everyday lives of traditionally overlooked cultures (Ryszewski 2022). In this sense, the food program contains a vibrant stew of human connection and history to explore and honor in the years to come.

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Figures

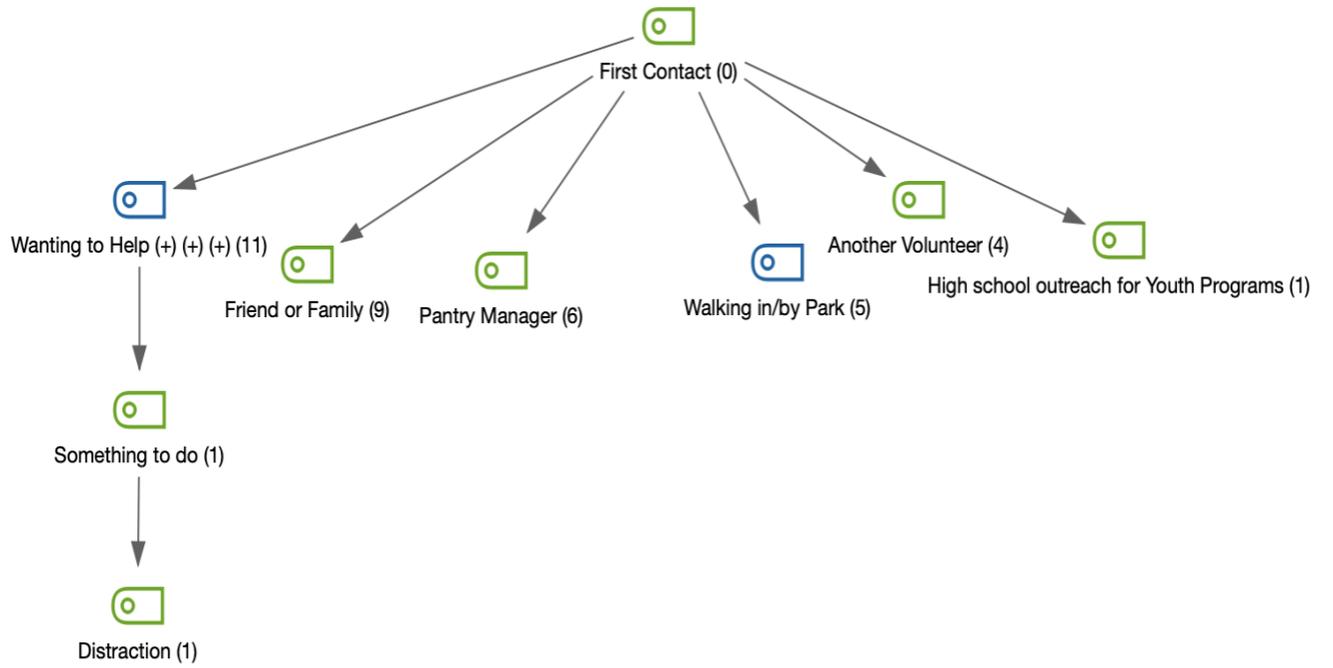


Figure 1. Frequency of Volunteer Mention of Initial Reasons for Becoming a Volunteer
Source: A. Edmondson from MAXQDA Software Visuals Tools Analysis.

Tables

Table 1 Gender Distribution for Clients and Volunteer Interviewees

Gender	Clients	Volunteers
Male	4	4
Female	6	9

N= # Participants

Table 2 Ethnic Distribution of Participants

Ethnicity	Clients	Volunteers	Total
African American	0	1	1
Puerto Rico	0	1	1
White/European	0	4	4
Mexican	1	1	2
Vietnamese Chinese	1	1	2
Chinese	1	3	4
Filipino	1	0	1
Guatemalan	3	1	4
Laotian	2	0	2
Black/African American	1	2	3
SUM	10	14	24
N = # Participants	12	13	25

Table 3 Distance to Food Pantry: Clients and Volunteers

Distance to Food Pantry	Clients	Volunteers	Total
Further Away	3	2	5
Medium Close	3	2	5
Close to FP (+)	3	8	11
SUM	9	12	21
N = Participants	12	13	25

Index:

Close to Food Pantry (FP) = home is roughly equal to or less than half a mile away from the food pantry

Medium Close to FP = Between .5 and 1.5 miles to the food pantry (or 15 to 30 minutes walking).

Further Away - Equal to or more than 10 minutes driving

Note: Table drawn from interviews and a point-in-time survey administered by the author in May 2023.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Interview Protocol and Questions

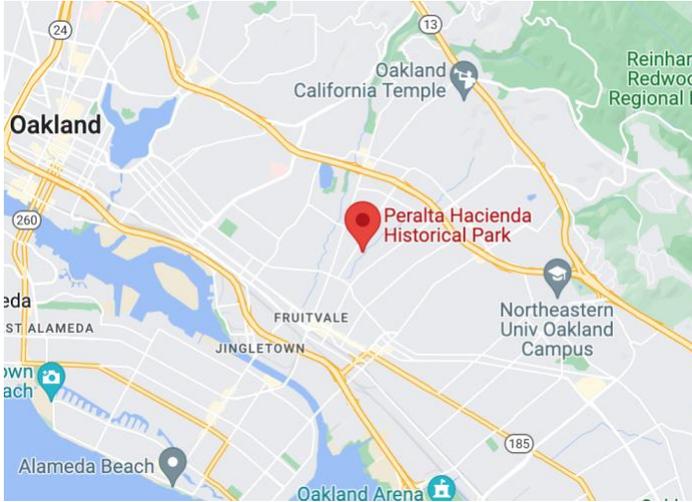
The purpose of this interview is to gather information about how the Peralta community experience the food pantry. I am conducting a study to learn about the cultural and personal life experiences that motivate individuals to participate at the food pantry. This is part of my interest in learning how communities and neighborhoods address food insecurity. As you know, I am a student researcher. Part of this project is for me to gain experience designing and conducting research. My hope is that the Peralta organization and the food pantry can use the results of this study to build on its efforts to meet the changing needs of the community. Let's get started:

1. Can you tell me where you live and how long you have lived there?
2. How long does it take you to get here (to the food pantry), whether on foot, or by car?
3. Tell me about when you first heard about the food pantry and how you decided to come.
4. What was that initial experience like?
5. How does that initial experience compare to what the food pantry is like today?
6. How well do you know the other people at the food pantry? Do you have any friends here? Did you know them before joining the food pantry or since you started coming?
7. Other than actual food, what other things or experiences are shared or exchanged because of the food pantry?
8. How would you describe good, healthy food?
9. What are some of the barriers to getting good and healthy food?
10. Why do you think these barriers exist?
11. What should be done to solve the problem of lack of access to affordable, healthy food?
12. Tell me about your own experience with food when you were little. What were some of your favorite foods? Did your family ever go hungry? What was that like?
13. Describe how easy or hard it was for your family to have food growing up.
14. How have your attitudes to food changed over the years?
15. Can you think of any social factors that have shaped how you think about food?
16. Thinking about Peralta, the Park, and this neighborhood, what is important to you about it?
17. Is there anything about the food pantry that you worry about?
18. Tell me 2 or 3 things you like about the food pantry? Why are they important to you?
19. If for some reason the food pantry closed, who could you rely on to get food?
20. Have you ever been to any of the other programs at the park? Which ones?
21. If you were invited on a tour of the museum, would you be interested? if not, why not?
22. Describe what is going on over there in the community garden?
23. If you could name three fun or positive things that happen at the food pantry, what are they?

24. If you could change one thing about the food pantry, what would it be?
25. Imagine the food pantry 5 years from now. What would it be like?
26. Imagine this neighborhood (Fruitvale, surrounding Peralta Park), suddenly got \$1million. What would you want to do with that money?
27. Imagine you are on TV: If you could say one or two things about this neighborhood that you are proud of, what would they be?

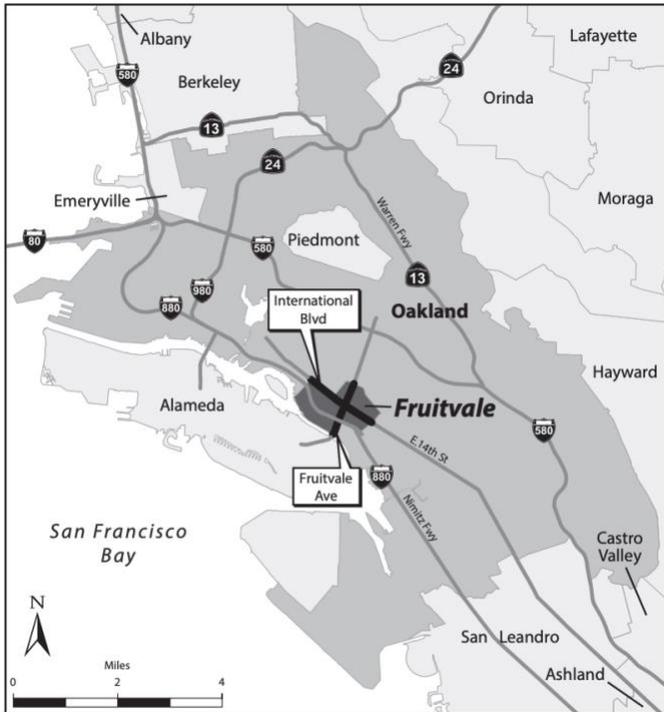
Appendix B Maps 1 - 5

Map 1 Google Map of Peralta Hacienda within Oakland



Source: Google Maps

Map 2 Fruitvale in the Context of Greater Oakland



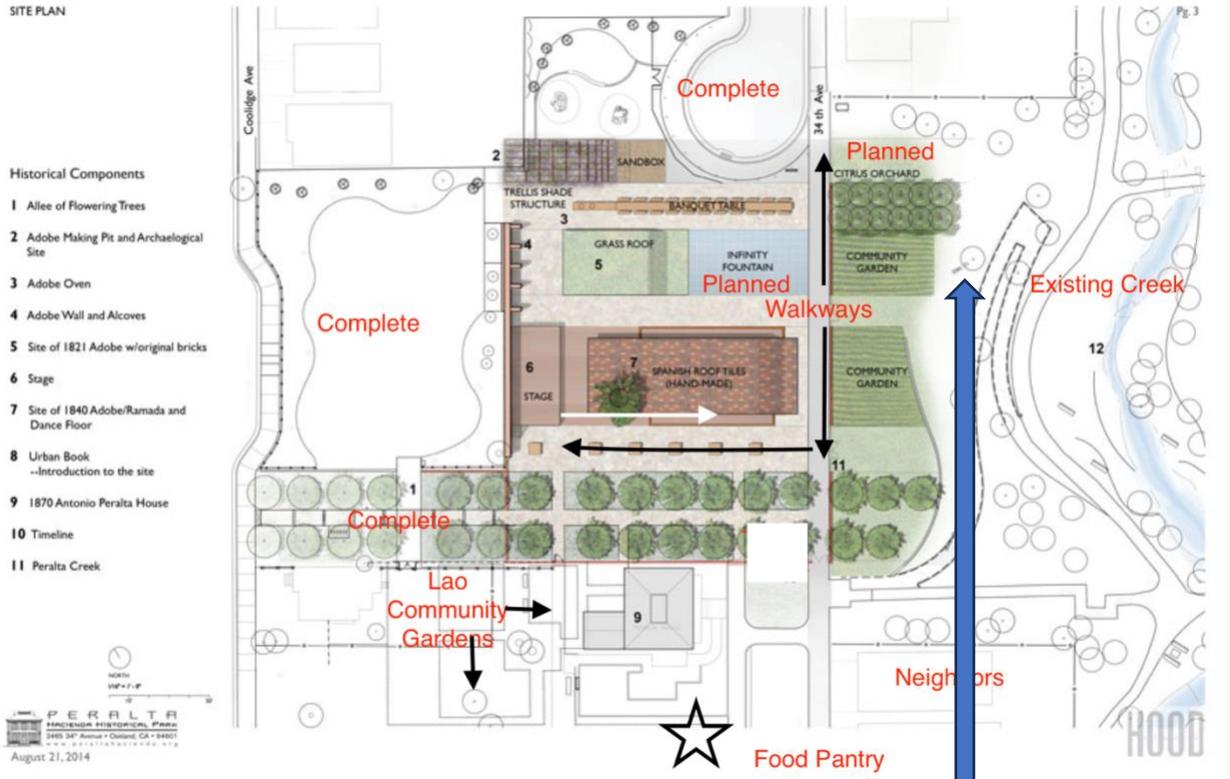
Map of the East Bay emphasizing how the neighborhood of Fruitvale is part of the broader San Francisco Bay Area. Map created by Matt Zebrowski.

Map 3 Google Map of Peralta Hacienda



Source: Google Maps

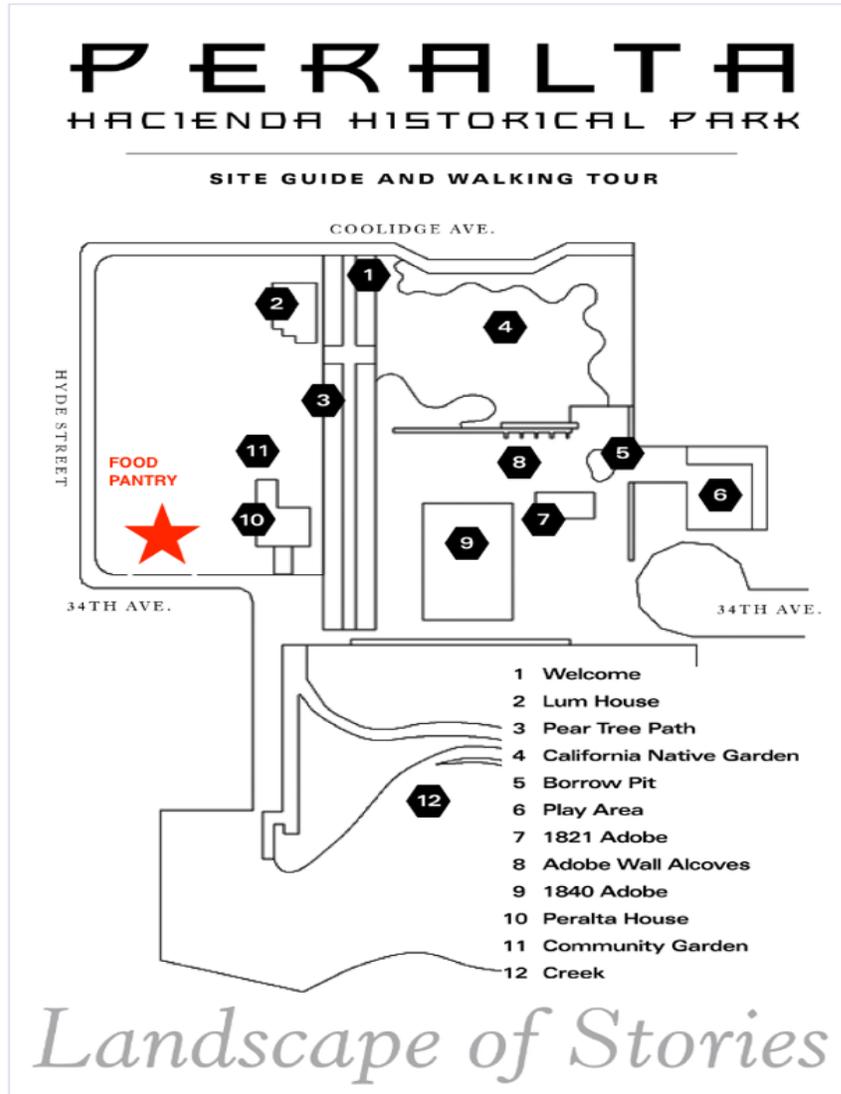
Map 4 Site Master Plan Showing Existing and Planned Elements for Peralta Hacienda Historical Park



Source: (Above and below) Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Website
 Note: The Peralta Food for Fruitvale pantry takes place in the parking lot of the park bordered by Hyde Street to the south, and community garden plots and the historic Peralta House Museum just north. Labels modified by A. Edmondson on 11.7.23.



Map 5 Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Walking Tour with Food Pantry along Hyde Street Border



Source: Peralta Hacienda. Map of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park walking tour. Red star for the food pantry was added by the author. Each number on the walking tour is linked to an online narrative with questions to prompt reflection.

Appendix C Images of Community-Making at the Food Pantry Numbered 1 - 7

Photo 1 Volunteers Getting Ready to Open



Source: Anna Edmondson

Photo 2 Gift Giving



Small gifts such as these beans from the Lao community garden plot to the Food Program at Peralta, symbolize gratitude and trust - facets of a community that we cherish.

Note: Hmong community garden members give gifts of fresh green beans to food pantry staff and volunteers. Source: A. Edmondson

Photo 3 Food Pantry Customers



Waiting in line for food is also a social activity where friends have time to catch up. Many of our Chinese American clients are women providing for themselves or their aging parents.

Source: A. Edmondson; caption courtesy of A. Edmondson for Peralta Hacienda

Note: Waiting for the pantry to open can be a social activity among friends.

Photo 4. Volunteer Appreciation Lunches



Source: A. Edmondson

Note: Volunteer appreciation lunches are a time for staff and volunteers to get to know one another through food sharing.

Photo 5 Client Social Activities While Waiting in Line



Peralta Food Program is not just about food: it is also about connection. This group gets creative as they wait in line. A game of cards is a great way to pass the time, laugh, be competitive, all in good fun.

Source: A. Edmondson; caption for Peralta Hacienda

Photo 6 Care for Disabled Clients

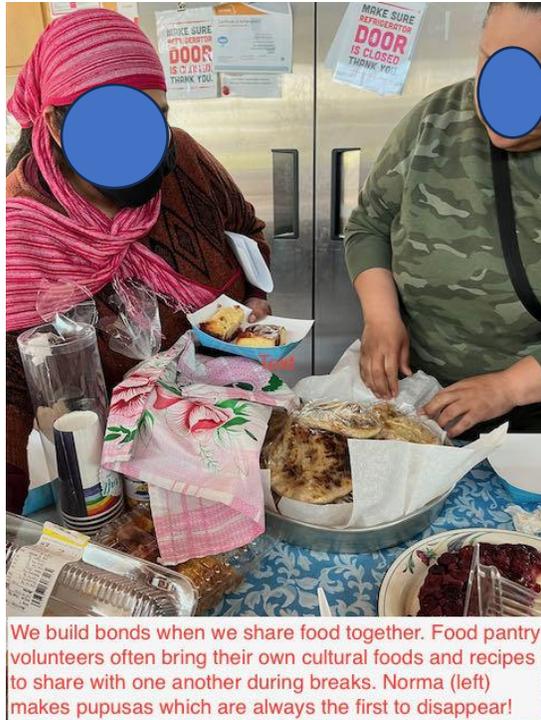


Part of Peralta's food mission is to create space, safety, and dignity for our most marginalized populations, that includes our Asian American elders and the disabled.

Source: A. Edmondson

Note: Disabled clients are given special consideration to ensure their physical safety.

Photo 7 Volunteers Sharing Food from Home During Breaks



We build bonds when we share food together. Food pantry volunteers often bring their own cultural foods and recipes to share with one another during breaks. Norma (left) makes pupusas which are always the first to disappear!

Source: A. Edmondson; captions for Peralta Hacienda

Appendix D Fieldnote List of Notable Events

This list of events, however incomplete, provides further context into the rhythms and disruptions of neighborhood life during the time of my research.

- March 2023: Volunteer immersion and participant recruitment begins.
- May 18th, 2022: Terry, the food pantry founder and manager, loses her nephew in a shooting. He was a father and the owner of Lucky Three Seven Filipino restaurant a few blocks away on Fruitvale Avenue. There is a citywide crowd funding campaign for the surviving son.
- Terry's sister dies a month later: she is stressed about financing the funeral service, considers crowd funding from the clients, but decides against it.
- April 2023: Terry resigns from Peralta Hacienda and a new manager is hired, Yuka Matsuno.
- A volunteer is awaiting test results from a medical procedure. She is anxious. She is on a special holistic diet.
- The food pantry is serving 250 people.
- The neighbor across the street brings home made butter cream cake for volunteers. His eyes bulge unusually. He has a warm smile. He bakes for fun. He receives food from the pantry occasionally. He dies three months later from a heart attack. He was familiar with two of the volunteers who talk to his girlfriend, check in on her in the street before distribution starts. one knows the woman and will catch her eye if she's around, will nod hello from afar.
- A new young intern brings homemade short bread cookies to share. They are delicious.
- One of the Cantonese speaking volunteers brings delicious chicken and noodles with ginger and cabbage. Another sometimes brings pupusas.
- One of the high school interns taking a videography class at Peralta and volunteering in the food pantry, has received news that he is moving to Michigan so his family can pursue a better life. His birthplace is Guatemala. He and his family have moved nine times. He is 16 years old.
- One of the Lao community gardeners comes and offers Yuka (the food pantry manager) a bag of purple and green long beans.

- Volunteers collect spoiled produce to share with the Hmong gardeners who turn it compost.
- Another Hmong community gardener was car-jacked last week in the parking lot – their belongings stolen; they were punched in the face.
- A volunteer helps organize a barbecue celebrating Terry’s birthday. The next week the grill is stolen from the patio.
- Large items are stolen from the Peralta festival structure. Staff purchase a large metal container with a thick steel lock.
- A consulting Ohlone observer gives positive input on Peralta’s youth fieldtrip program curriculum.
- In the winter storms a tree falls onto the neighbors’ place next to a volunteer couple’s apartment. The rain ruins everything and they must find new housing further away. They start a long legal claim to get money for the property damage.
- “James”, the unhoused tenant in Peralta Creek, is found writhing in pain on the nearby bench one day. He doesn’t have a spleen because a tree fell on him. He has an untreated infection. We call the ambulance, and he is to be taken to Highland Hospital. One of the volunteers who always stays the longest, offers to take care of his dog while James is in the hospital.
- A COVID testing table is set up in the food pantry offering paid COVID tests for clients. Clients are paid \$5.
- Food pantry numbers climb from 250 to 300, then up to 400.
- Two formerly incarcerated men start volunteering. They can come when they don’t have probation officer meetings. They bring gifts of cold sodas as thanks to the volunteers. They are cheerful and hard working.
- Several more clients become volunteers. One must be nearing eighty.
- Skirmishes happen at the registration desk when “double dipping” clients try to come in a second time. They cause a lot of drama and prevent the line from moving.
- “Thomas”, a permanent volunteer for all of Peralta Park’s small repairs, has become a regular. He enjoys the company since he loves alone.

- A regular client is back from visiting Mexico City with her sisters. She is glowing. She left her husband and son at home. She is normally on-call 24 hours a day caring for them. Her son is semi-disabled after brain surgery. Her husband has had seizures and is also semi-disabled. She raises special birds. Her fingernails are newly polished. She beams as she recalls Mexico City, especially the restaurant below the ancient ruins.
- The lineup system no longer uses numbers written on people's hands. Instead, the system is determined by last name, color codes, and time slots. The distribution goes faster, saving an extra hour toward the end. This elimination of numbers is partly designed to reduce triggers or stress for some of the clients who've experienced the trauma of immigration processing.
- One volunteer, originally from Cuba, is the "master of the pallets" and of breaking down the boxes. He helps other volunteers hand out fruit and they chat freely in Spanish.
- A shooting takes place on the street bordering the park one Saturday night. A young man, the neighbor of part-time staffer Alyssa and two volunteers, was shot and killed. They knew the victim from when he was young.
- All volunteers are invited by Yuka, the food pantry manager, to a volunteer appreciation potluck lunch. Afterward, volunteers attempt making pinatas with balloons, torn up old, printed schedules, and paste made from whole wheat flour and water. There are not enough chairs. Eating is informal, some people stand. Volunteer tee shirts with the Peralta logo are offered to volunteers. Staff come down and grab some food. Some forget to say hello to the newer volunteers.
- One night two roller carts are stolen from the back fence area.
- One night the videography equipment for the Oakland 200 film class for young adults, is stolen from the office. This is a \$7000 setback for Peralta Hacienda. Staff are demoralized. A media campaign is launched including a TV news story and a Facebook crowdfunding campaign to help cover the cost for the new equipment. This takes a few weeks and sufficient funds are raised.
- Two staff depart from Peralta's youth program department. One new staff person arrives.
- September 2023: There is a gas line break near the food pantry. Clients are told to evacuate away from the street, into the park. Volunteers also wait with them until the break is repaired an hour later. This results in a new line system that clients like. It

takes place inside the park, away from the street. It is safer, especially for the elderly and the young mothers with children.

- October 2023: Volunteer numbers reach 25, 30. Clients increase to 500. New families from Central American continue to arrive and are guided by volunteers through the registration process.
- October 2, 2023: Food pantry manager Yuka Matsuno submits a first-time grant proposal to the Cliff Foundation.
- Mid-October 2023: Executive Director Holly Alonso receives word that San Francisco Foundation has committed to give the food pantry a grant of \$20,000. The food pantry manager's grant for her salary is ending in a few months so the pressure is on to find the budget for her salary. Holly asks me and staff person Miguel to brainstorm and draft a plan for a crowdfunding campaign.
- Late October 2023: Yuka, the manager, is away on leave. Three Peralta staff come and help while she is away. They are kind and helpful. A fender-bender occurs this during distribution: a neighbor is turning into her driveway and a client's car bumps into her car. It takes hours to resolve the issue. Their cars block the turnaround into the parking lot. The food program will need to make amends with the neighbor.



Source: A. Edmondson

Appendix E Participant Highlights

I. On Feeling a Sense of Purpose and Belonging

Volunteer: *“I've been to food pantries where I felt like I should not be here. And we're not like that there...I like how we're a family and we can bring everybody in as a family. And I think that it's beautiful.”*

Volunteer: *“Everybody's friendly. Yeah, we don't all speak the same language. And it's home. It's family. Not always by blood. But you make your own family.”*

Volunteer: *“After I was serving these people I would come home and feel like 400 pounds! It felt good because I was able to be a part of that team that feeds these families. And not only that, but it was also my NEIGHBORS (emphasis). My neighbors were thanking me because I was helping them pass out food. It felt good. It makes me smile because I'm passing people in the park that I've helped. And they speak to me and it's like they thank me, and it just feels good.”*

Volunteer: *“I feel happy to be a volunteer, to help people, so I don't need to stay home all the time.”*

Volunteer: *“Well look, it's community, it's family. This morning, I was just talking to the younger Hispanic kids, right? And we're trying to figure out what to do with the groceries we got today. And he said, ‘Well, would you scramble the eggs?’ I said, ‘You could poach the eggs.’ He didn't know what that meant. ... I spelled it for him. And he looked it up in his phone. And he said, ‘Oh, okay, because he has special dietary needs.’ So, I told him poaching the egg in the water is better for him. It's healthy. So now, he's going to try that. And then I said to one of the other kids who is leaving, going back home, I said, ‘Well, you*

could send your stuff on the Greyhound.' And they both looked at me they didn't know what Greyhound was. He had to look up Greyhound on his phone. And now they know that it's a long-distance bus service. And you could stick a box of personal items and send it! It's little things you know. And I said, 'you gotta learn something new every day. If it's one little thing.' And I like sharing my knowledge, my little tidbit off the wall. It makes me feel good.

Volunteer: *"I like helping the community. I like seeing the smiles on people's faces."*

Volunteer: *"I feel good when I help people. The only thing I can say is it has opened my eyes. I can help those people and I feel good for that."*

II. On the Connection with Peralta Hacienda Park

Volunteer: *"It's not just the park. It's a community. People come there for help. People come there to exercise. That's where people walk their dogs. I love it. It's brought a lot more of our people to that park. It's safe for me too as well. Like I feel safe compared to years ago. I felt like I couldn't walk to that park. I feel safe now. I feel like they've brought more life into it, if that makes sense."*

Volunteer: *"I like to have the park right here. I don't really know the people that work here in the building. I mean, I wave, but that's about it. And I mean, I don't have to know them, you know? Right. But I really couldn't tell you too much about him. I like the fact that they have programs."*

Volunteer: *"Honestly the best part is I live right here. This IS my community. I get to walk through the park to get to work."*

Volunteer: *"I watched the whole park, it built basically from the ground up. It's beautiful. I mean, I think that our community has come together so well. What's important to me is*

basically that we keep everything the way that it is. I love that. It's like I hate when people coming in to destroy our stuff. I take pride, I look at all of them, like people put hard work into this park over the years. It's just beautiful to me."

III. On Difference [in the context of the food pantry and the neighborhood]

Volunteer: *"The different backgrounds of the volunteers. It opens my mind."*

Client: *"But they're nice people. It's like learning another culture altogether. When I first came, it was just Oriental. I didn't see other cultures. It was just the Orientals. Now you have Guatemalans and Hispanics."*

Volunteer: *"This is one way of effectively tapping into what is happening, you know, in chatting with various people, ...and it does hurt to see the same people over and over and over again."*

Volunteer: *"The diversity. Right next door to my house is spoken. Mam, Spanish, Farsi and English are the least spoken. And right next door to that it's mostly Spanish and English. And on the other side, it's Spanish and English. And then final houses and like five houses on the block. Um, it's mostly Spanish. Across the street it's Chinese and once again...It's the diversity that I am accustomed to."*

Volunteer: *"I see a lot of different kinds of people. And the volunteers are nice. They understand Spanish but I only speak a little Spanish. The Hispanics, sometimes I talk Spanish with them. And they are happy I'm talking Spanish. And they see that my ethnicity is Asian."*

IV. On the Food Pantry and Safety [in the context of the neighborhood]

Volunteer: *"Safety is the most important and it's interesting. I don't like bad guys around. But overall, in this community I feel so far, it's okay. Especially around the food pantry."*

Volunteer: *“I feel it's safer than in Oakland's Chinatown. Sometimes I walk home from the food pantry, it's kind of a late.”*

Volunteer: *“I know my neighbors. I go to the stores I know people around and now that I'm a volunteer I know even more people. I go and I say Hi...I shop at Safeway in Fruitvale a lot. It's fine here. I feel safe. I can't help what happens in that street, but after I go in my house and close that door and say I'm happy.”*

V. Sense of Community [in the context of the food pantry and looking back]

Volunteer: *“I understand that people speak different languages. I liked it. I feel comfortable working with them.”*

Client: *“To me things are not as community as when I was growing up. My community took care for me. Everybody took good care of everybody. That don't happen now. It's not about taking care of nobody. If you did something on Eighth Street, by the time you got home you got two whoopings: one from home and one because your neighbor saw something you wasn't supposed to do. It takes a community to raise a child. We're not on that point no more. Everybody keeps to themselves. There's a whole lot of solid walls up.”*

VI. Shared Understandings

Volunteer: *“It's our community. We look out for each other. We help everybody.”*

Volunteer: *“You know, they appreciate everything (the mothers with little children). Oh my god, you know they don't have it (in their country) as good as in Puerto Rico. It is hard for them, these young families.*

Volunteer: *“We all come there to serve the community.*

Volunteer: *“Okay, so the food is very important for the Peralta community*

Client: *“To make a long story short, this whole food pantry has fed me in a couple of different fashions - mentally, spiritually, and physically.”*