

# Faith & Food

A faith-based, community meal case study at the Burnaby Hare Krishna Temple

## Final Community Project Report

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In collaboration with the Hare Krishna Temple



# Introduction

## Background & Context

From the onset of our project, we were encouraged to create a relationship between UBC and the Burnaby Hare Krishna Temple (BHKT)— a local faith-based organization. Though geographically located in Burnaby, a suburb of 223,000 citizens east of Vancouver (Census tract, 2011), the BHKT is part of a global community called the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) whose beliefs stem from Bhakti Yoga which emphasizes compassion and service to the world (J.F. Dasa, Personal Communication, 2017). These beliefs and values motivates Krishna followers to share daily meals as a way to build community, serve food and expand membership. Although their primary focus is the spreading of Krishna consciousness, their organization has a role within Burnaby’s regional food system where 11% of household are food insecurity (PHSA, 2016). Community food security exists when residents have stability, access, availability and utilization (FAO, 2006) of “safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food” through means “that maximize self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm, M. and Bellows, A. 2003). This project centralizes around food access as it highlights the BHKT’s current engagement within the local food system.

## Significance

The government, non-profit organizations and NGOs are often the stakeholders tasked with the challenge of addressing community food security through social initiatives, food stamps, government grants etc. However, they can be ineffective at addressing these issues as they often utilize a “deficit based” approach, characterized as being needs driven, problem and externally focused (Engaged Scholarship, 2017). This approach limits the stakeholders’ understanding of

each community's unique circumstances when trying to help address local food access. However, there is little research available on how non-traditional stakeholders such as faith-based organizations address community food insecurity. The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework is an effective approach to engage with local community partners to learn from their diverse insights to ultimately understand how faith-based organizations can collaboratively provide food access to the communities (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Using the BHKT as a case study, we can better understand assets that the Temple possess and how they can contribute in providing food access for Burnaby residents.

### **Project Objectives**

Our project consists of three main objectives:

- 1) To identify key food assets of the BHKT.
- 2) To understand how the BHKT fits within addressing Burnaby food insecurity in providing access to nutritious food.
- 3) To seek potential avenues for future partnerships and collaboration with UBC to address local access to nutritious food.

### **Inquiry Questions**

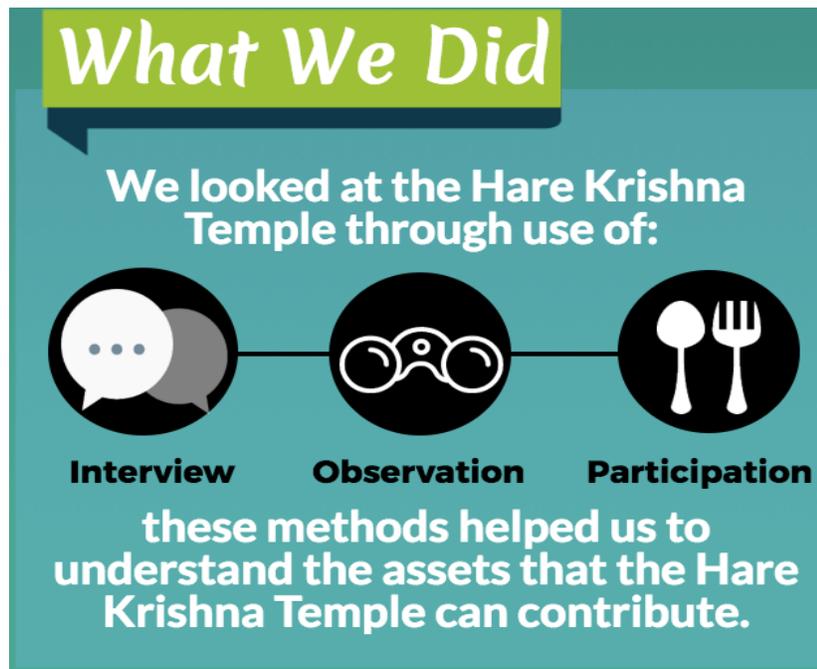
To guide this project, we aimed to answer the three corresponding inquiry questions:

- 1) What assets does the BHKT possess?
- 2) How does the BHKT fit within addressing Burnaby food insecurity in providing access to nutritious food?

3) In what ways could UBC collaborate with the BHKT to further provide access to nutritious food for Burnaby households?

## Methods

In order to achieve our objectives and answer our inquiry questions, our team completed two in-depth interviews with two of the BHKT leaders, spent a total of five hours conducting site observations, and participation in an evening festival. These methods were utilized to collect and analyze data pertaining to the BHKT to see how faith-based communities can contribute in addressing the access to nutritious food in Burnaby. We utilized an ABCD framework to create



an asset table to understand current resources and potential future collaborations for projects.

For our site observations, devotees gave us a tour around BHKT which helped us better observe the assets present. In addition, interviews were conducted to further illuminate the

informal assets surrounding their beliefs about food. Finally, informal assets were confirmed through use of autoethnography; participation in an actual community meal enabled first hand insights and informal conversations with other members of BHKT to help clarify our understandings. Consent was obtained from Temple officials and all group members completed the TCPS-2 certificate for Ethical Research prior to data collection.

## Results

By using the above ABCD framework, we found that the Temple possess multiple food related assets. For example, the BHKT has a community meal program that provides approximately 100 vegetarian meals each day to attendees (J.G Dasa, personal communication, January, 2017). For a full list of assets, please refer to table A below. In addition, the devotees and visitors of the Temple provide food through their offerings, which act as a major food source for the Temple’s community meals (J. G. Dasa, personal communication, January, 2017). Daily served meals consists of five nutritiously balanced components (See figure B below).

<b>Asset</b>	<b>Current Utilization</b>	<b>Link to Food Access</b>	<b>Potential Collaboration</b>
Daily vegetarian meals	Krishan faith followers, some local community members	Provides nutritiously balanced vegetarian meal on a regular basis	Have more Burnaby residence outside of Krishna faith utilize this resource to access food
2 kitchens	Used for the preparation of daily meals, partnered with the RCMP for emergency food relief situations	Helps the Temple have the capacity to produce food	Aid in emergency food relief (should a situation occur)
2 hectares of undeveloped land	2 small garden plots	Provides limited onsite food	Can develop into a larger onsite garden to enhance internal food production
Food literacy	Use knowledge on how to	Provides nutritionally	Can continue to prepare food

	prepare a variety of ethnic dishes in accordance with vegetarian, karma-free practice	adequate meals to the public / community	that fits a variety of cultural preferences
Spiritual beliefs surrounding food	Guides Temples actions in providing free vegetarian meals on a regular basis	Believe that food should be given with love to everyone equally	Can use this theological belief to form partnerships with other stakeholders who share similar goals
Volunteers	Prepare, cook, serve and clean up after community meals	Provide food for Burnaby residence	Can scale up to include more volunteers to help provide more meals



*Table A: Assets of the Hare Krishna Temple*

*Figure B: Composition of Daily Meal at the Burnaby Hare Krishna Temple*

Lastly, we have found that excess food from the community meals are either given to the Food for Life Program, a not-for-profit food relief organization (Food For Life Global, 2017), or donated to local groups (J.G Dasa, personal communication, January, 2017). From the conducted interviews we obtain background information on the Temple, their connection to food and their community. Please see appendix A and B for raw interview data and audio material respectively.

## **Discussion**

In order to understand how the BHKT and other non-traditional organizations fit into the addressment of food insecurity for Burnaby residence, an ABCD framework was employed (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). By focusing our attention on social relationships and shifting away from a needs based approaches (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003), we uncovered features that the BHKT can contribute to address lack of access to nutritious food for Burnaby households. The community meal program that provides free, vegetarian meals on a daily basis is one of the many asset that the BHKT currently provides without any external support. BHKT can also contribute to food aid in a time of crisis through partnership with the RCMP, utilization of their two kitchens and many volunteers (J. G. Dasa, personal communication, January, 2017). A high degree of food literacy (Cullen et al., 2015) enables the provision of a variety of ethnically diverse, nutritionally balanced meals for attendees. Having identified key assets of the BHKT, partnerships that seek to further complement these assets may begin to emerge. For example, the development of the 2 unused hectares of land into an onsite garden could increase food stability for BHKT and also increase food access for Burnaby residence. By having greater onsite production, the Temple may be able to use this food for their community meals and rely less on donations. The diversity of assets that exists between the BHKT and other stakeholders can help make creative and innovative solutions to address food access as diversity enables the search for new approaches that considers differing perspectives (Phillips, 2014).



ABCD techniques have enabled us to understand the BHKT's connection to food in both a concrete and abstract way. A quote from J. G. Dasa (2017) best encompasses this principle when he stated "let the world come and we will feed them" as a fundamental belief of the global ISKCON movement. As students from an academic institution, we may not share the same faith-based theology leading to this statement, but do share a desire to address food insecurity. By seeking to understand the assets, beliefs and values of non-traditional stakeholders, the commonality of goals may become more apparent. From here, we can begin to see how the BHKT can contribute to the provision of food access in a meaningful way. By failing to consider faith-based institutions as viable contributors to the local food system, we are not optimizing the progress towards a more secure food system. The most effective method to address food inaccessibility in Burnaby requires the consideration, appreciation and utilization of all stakeholders who are situated within the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

## **Limitations**

Despite our best efforts to apply ABCD techniques, a complete understanding of the BHKT is limited due to time and resource constraints. We were unable to conduct formal interviews with members who attend daily meals, therefore, limiting our understanding of the way this asset is perceived by multiple stakeholders. Given more time, we recommend conducting interviews with community members who identify as being food insecure to see if this the BHKT's assets are perceived as viable by those who may need it. We are also unable to compare our findings with another faith-based organization as the investigation of our project focused a single organization. Questions remain whether other faith-based organizations share a similar desire to provide food access and if so, how can they contribute to addressing food

insecurity at a larger level? Lastly, even through the use of ABCD, we still do not understand all of the principles behind Krishna faith. Although a four month project is sufficient in fostering an appreciation for the role that the BHKT has, it is not adequate enough to gain a full understanding of this complex intersection between faith and food.

The BHKT suggested to us that they would like aid in initiation of their onsite garden. We recommend that future groups look into collaborations surrounding this topic as large amounts of undeveloped land provides massive potential for both academic research and increased community food access.

## **Conclusion**

Faith-based institutions like the BHKT have a role to play in addressing food insecurity. The BHKT has the ability to provide over 100 balanced vegetarian meals per day (J. G. Dasa, Personal Communication, January, 2017), which directly increases Burnaby households' access to nutritious food. The BHKT has the capacity to increase their own internal food production; 2 hectares of land are available for the creation of an onsite garden (J. G. Dasa, personal communication, January, 2017). This would enhance the BHKT's internal food security and consequently their community meal program. Future partnerships between UBC and BHKT may be able to turn this opportunity into a reality. Academic and spiritual-based institutions historically have been segregated in their actions, however, by utilizing an ABCD framework for our research, it has become apparent that UBC and the BHKT share similar goals. Understanding how the unique assets that the various stakeholders within the community possess may allow successful partnerships to begin to foster with the common goal of providing food that is accessible to all Burnaby households.

# Critical Reflections

## Student 1

I have been fortunate enough to have participated in other community-based experiential learning (CBEL) courses such as the International Service Learning to Uganda, LFS 250 and Geography in Williams Lake. However, each CBEL course surprises me by the amount of learning I experience. Not only is this due to the different subject lenses that are used to investigate the world, but the repeated exposure to these CBEL experiences while integrating theoretical knowledge has allowed me to grow in different areas. For example, in this project collaborating with the Hare Krishna Temple, I was eager to take on a communicator role between our group and community stakeholder as I learned its value in a previous experience. In addition, the ABCD framework was applied in other settings which helped me understand the power dynamic between us as students in relation to the community stakeholders and thus better navigate through it (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Although I did think that communication as a skill was something I have tried to create with community stakeholders, I think it is still something that I hope to improve on. Not only with the community stakeholders but also within our LFS350 team and TAs. The teaching team was a huge resource and reflecting back on the semester, I should have used them more. In addition, communication within the team is just as important as periods that are team-lacked in communication correlated with times of difficulty within our group. All in all, this was another great CBEL experience and I will be taking these nuggets of knowledge wherever I shall go in life.

## Student 2

Throughout this project it became increasingly apparent to me that diversity does in fact make us smarter (Phillips, 2014). I have always assumed that working with people I knew would be a wiser decision for completing any task and that working with community partners who share similar philosophies would be more effective in achieving any project outcome. I have

come to realize that this is in fact very wrong. By engaging with faith-based institutions who share very different spiritual beliefs from my own, it became apparent that their unique ideals can add novel approaches in achieving project goals. The same principle can be applied to group work; by interacting with individuals who have very different styles than myself, I have not only benefited by having to adapt my own approaches to better align with theirs, but also in learning from their diverse opinions on the Hare Krishna Temple. Even though it was challenging at the beginning and sometimes felt like we were moving backwards throughout this process, I can confidently say that we have achieved a much more comprehensive final infographic and report than I could have ever come up with on my own. The friction that we encountered really helped ensure that we were considering all possible opinions and trajectories before committing to one set route.

### **Student 3**

This term has been an insightful journey filled with many new ideas and concepts. The bulk of my learning was mainly attributed to LFS 350 and the project that me and my team partook in. Similar to LFS 250, LFS 350 seems to go off the grid of conventional teachings and drives students to pursue more literal and hands on ideas. Things such as interviews with actual community members to working in a group filled with many talented students have been skills that can be carried forward into the future. The teaching team have been supportive and open to question, however some of the instructions that are given seem to lead to complications with the wording and what is expected from us. The team which I was fortunate to be a part of are all very skilled and knowledgeable with intriguing ideas and rich stories/histories. As a unison we did not have a lack of ideas, rather we had too many and we spent a lot of time debating our direction to be the most streamlined and as efficient as possible. In all LFS 350 is a class with no

equal, it is a modern interpretation/change of what classes may be in the future, a more hands on class which teaches skill that we can use in the future.

#### **Student 4**

My CBEL prior experience is naught, however it was a great experience learning through our community partner. When we first started the project, there was excitement within our entire group. I found out after our first temple visit that the public view of the temple was looked down upon. I was surprised to find out the somewhat negative connotations that went with the temple, and I had a bias put into my head after one conversation. I had to learn how to separate bias going into research mode, which was a new experience for me. Project group work is never easy, and a skill that I hope to perfect some day. Prioritizing certain assignments over one another and balancing work loads was hard for me. We tried our very best to divide up the work evenly and not every group is perfect, so keeping that in mind I think our group vibe was great. I feel like there was much confusion on the scope of our project in the beginning, however as the process went on it was easier to narrow down our scope to something feasible to report on. ABCD was something that I struggled to relate to our project somewhat, because there was no real "developing" that I could see. However after refocusing our objective, I realize that there was development in not only the UBC-Temple relations, but development in our learning experience.

#### **Student 5**

My CBEL experience was excellent. While I enjoyed myself greatly, I will start with challenges. It was difficult working in teams. With 3 total semester long group projects and part time work and extracurricular my time outside of class was limited. I found it difficult to miss many of my LFS 350 team meetings, our team voted for a regular team meeting on a day I could not make, which resulted in me making up the time at a later hour. Furthermore it was difficult to

balance various work standards and varying capacities to perform academically. Thus I found this project to be the source of great stress and uncertainty.

I appreciate the challenge of this course, because this is what made the course great. With strong academic literature to support my community engagement I felt an excellent opportunity to develop my professional skills and add an new excellent experience to my resume. I feel more confident in my capacity work in messy teams, which is awesome because I love working with people to make community contributions. Furthermore, I enjoyed connecting with my community partner as we share similar beliefs and building new relationships is exciting to me. Ultimately the course has been a success and for future generations I would not make the course any easier, because the challenge and struggle of the course is what makes it so valuable. I would consider making it a 4 or 6 credit course, because the time dedicated to doing well it is far beyond any other of my university degree.

### **Student 6**

The CBEL project was a new way to learn for me. One thing I noticed was that it is quite hard to take a stand on an argument such as, faith based organization does contributes to regional food security. For example, the Hari Krishna temple served food for free to its followers and on paper this should support regional food security. However, when I looked at it from a food insecure person's perspective, who was not a follower and did not want to become a follower of the Hari Krishna temple, a question arose: would that person feel comfortable going there to get free food? Because I am in a privileged position who have never truly experienced food insecurity so I won't be able to answer it, but I can imagine it would be uncomfortable. We can say that faith based organizations contribute to regional food security because we know some followers are food insecure, but it is hard to answer to what extent, because we weren't able to

find or interview anyone who were non-followers of Hare Krishna temple. Also, although the priests never explicitly said it but free food seemed to be like a way to convince people to join their temple. These kinds of things were difficult to bring up in our infographic or AERP because I felt that we had to take a strong stand on an argument. Another pressure I felt from sources I find hard to pinpoint was to paint our partner in a rather positive picture, so we are not rude to them. These pressures are hard to learn and experience through normal lecture based classes.

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# Appendix A - Interview Data

## Infrastructure/Food

**Q1: What kind of infrastructure does the temple have for the community meals (kitchens, sinks, dining areas)?**

A: 2 main kitchens. Yes and no...an emergency situations can churn out many many meals. they can cook right outside with fire pits, and they can churn quantities meals. (4,5,6 of them going at a time). They are not allowed to eat in the temple itself. they can eat in the dining area though. They rent tents during the summer.

**Q2: What makes Burnaby temple so “spiritual” and in what ways can food be used to achieve these goals?**

**Q3: Is the space being optimized/being used to the fullest capacity?**

A: Food forest is something in the works. Definitely room for improvement. Permaculture from Australia and more tropical.

**Q4: Where do they get their food?**

A: Offerings and donations to Krishna.

**Q5: How is any excess food dealt with following a meal?**

A: They save it and give it to their food for life program, or they take home the food as leftovers. They have the means to store and re-give out food.

**Q6: Does the temple use/have a compost system?**

A: They DO have a compost and recycling program. They were doing their own composting for their garden, so they had to discontinue due to labour. Part of the recycling. Burnaby is good for recycling/compost. Disposable plates, but they are recyclable. - not allowed to use styrofoam b/c it doesn't recycle. Some places use plates made out of leaves and then recycle them. Clay pots, same deal.

## SCHEDULE

**Q1: Do you ever offer meals outside of your temples with partners or community meals?**

A: SFU, Annual festival in Stanley Park

(Vancouver Ratha Yatra 2016. (n.d.). Retrieved April 09, 2017, from <http://events.iskcon.org/event/vancouver-ratha-yatra-2016/>)

## PEOPLE

### **Q1: Who are the people that help to prepare the meal?**

A: Volunteers or Devotees! 3 people roughly per meal (prep, cook, clean).

### **Q2: Who are the people that attend these feasts?**

A: Family, very diverse but mostly ethnically south asian

### **Q3: How many people are typically at the community meals?**

A: serve on average 100 meals daily.

## PURPOSE

### **Q1: How are foods chosen each week?**

A: Varies a lot on what people want to make. Encompasses all health needs. Carb with legume, vegetable preparation etc (on another note page). Curd: Milk that is made with a souring agent. And it's the same texture as meat. Transformed into a nonviolent source and a better flavour. People who donate, they ask for things that are put in the preparation. Across the board, it's a balanced diet.

## **Appendix B - Interview Audio Recording**

Audio file of the complete raw interview data From January 17th, 2017 can be accessed from:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1j14AzmySn4dlp5TGxUeExUeXc/view>