



BrightSide at UMN

Uniting Communities,
Making a Difference

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Executive Summary

BrightSide at UMN is a student-led organization that works to eliminate food deserts¹ and food insecurity² in urban areas, specifically in communities within the University of Minnesota student population and in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. The idea of BrightSide roots from a desire to alleviate the symptoms and occurrence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like obesity and hypertension through improved access to fresh food in communities at risk for developing them. Our intention is to work with a local non-profit called BrightSide Produce that sells produce directly to small convenience stores in food insecure areas. It was determined that BrightSide Produce would be a good partner for this project because of their previous and current efforts to improve produce access in the Twin Cities, as well as their interest in collaborating with us in the University and Cedar-Riverside areas. BrightSide distributes wholesale produce in two ways: through a similar fashion to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)³ bundles, where students receive a weekly produce bundle at fair-value, and through direct sale to corner stores. In general, corner stores are too small to be able to buy the minimum that wholesalers require, and are forced to upcharge produce that they likely buy from supermarkets. BrightSide circumvents this by working in two ways: to have a Buyer's Club on University campuses to accommodate the needs of students, and lowers the risk small businesses assume by implementing a buyback program alongside corner store distribution.

The produce bundles fund the sale of fresh produce in community corner stores already in

¹ A food desert is defined as an area, often with low-income residents, that has limited access to nutritious and affordable food.

² Food insecurity refers to the "state of being without reliable access to affordable, nutritious food."

³ Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a combination of a food production and food distribution system that directly connects farmers and consumers.

communities, to encourage fresh fruit and vegetable consumption. The convenience stores are therefore receiving increased sales, and their customers are able to support local business and improve their diets. The students receiving the produce bundles do not have to travel to find affordable produce and are also able to fit more produce consumption into their weekly budgets and schedules. Efforts were made to ensure the produce wants and needs of both the students and neighborhood communities are fulfilled, costs kept to a minimum, and transportation issues considered.

Both the University of Minnesota and Cedar Riverside are places where improving produce access is a need, and conveniently are close to each other. Inhabitants of both areas deal with similar challenges in accessing food, and while specific issues may vary, both can benefit from improved produce access. These areas can be defined as lower-income and qualify as food deserts.

The Problem

Students at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities who have limited access to fresh food due to transportation, location, and finances, are at risk for poor health.

A food desert is an area that lacks fresh fruit, vegetables, and other whole foods, and usually coincides with an impoverished neighborhood. Food deserts are defined as an area that has at least 500 people and must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or grocery store.¹ According to this definition, the Dinkytown neighborhood that houses most University of Minnesota students is a food desert, and the Cedar Riverside community that neighbors the University is considered one as well. Lack of access to fresh market food is a concern for both students and community members when looking to stick to a budget.²

Poor diet can have negative impacts on health. For example, in a study done by Harding et al. in 2008, there was a link between low fruit and vegetable intake and increased risk of Type II Diabetes. Lack of access to healthy food can also have other negative health consequences such as obesity and hypertension. As lack of proper nutrition directly correlates to food insecure individuals, it's necessary to bring attention to what our communities face. In 2015, the US Department of Agriculture estimated about 12.7% of US households to be food insecure.³ In Minnesota alone, HungerSolutions estimated 10.9% of Minnестоans to be food insecure.⁴ The University of Minnesota student population surpasses the national and state average where 18% of students worry their food will run out before they can buy more, in addition to 10% of students actually experiencing food shortages.⁵ Interestingly, the state of Minnesota's food insecurity percentage rests at 10.9%, indicating that the University itself is characteristic of a wider problem.⁴ While we aim to serve the student population we also bring attention to the Cedar Riverside Community. Around 55% of the Cedar Riverside community is below the federal poverty level.⁵ Individuals with low incomes have less money to purchase healthy foods. Small markets, such as those in Cedar Riverside, are not as profitable as food retailers, which makes it less appealing for these markets to sell fresh produce. Accessing grocery stores that serve a variety of fresh food options not within walking distance is difficult for members of low

income communities, like college students and the Cedar Riverside community, due to their decreased vehicle access.⁶

With a need established through this evidence for improved access to fresh, affordable food, one can begin to tackle the need. BrightSide at UMN has the potential to reach upwards of 9,000 food insecure students, as well as community members throughout the Twin Cities. Being that this solution is student-led, focused on the inputs of our stakeholders, and financially sustainable, we consider it to be viable.

Stakeholders & Customer Segment

BrightSide at UMN operates with a supportive network of stakeholders. These include BrightSide Produce⁴, the University of Minnesota and its student population, communities including Cedar Riverside, the customers shopping at corner stores, recipients of the Buyer's Club packages, the volunteer and youth worker bases, and store owners. The operations of BrightSide at UMN would not function without their support.

There is no grocery store on the campus and food and housing costs rise every year. Additionally, the success of the Gopher CSA program and farmer's markets in the area indicate the student community will be receptive of a similar program.¹⁴ In Cedar Riverside, it has been determined through interviews and research that a desire for better health exists, but it may be difficult to achieve better health through difficulties surrounding English proficiency and healthcare system barriers.^{15, 18, 20, 28} Access to culturally appropriate food was a significant desire of the population as well.¹⁶

Pains for customers generally include not having access to reasonably priced produce in stores that are within walking distance, having to deal with symptoms related to poor diet (including higher stress levels, fatigue, irritation, and malnutrition). Gains from implementing BrightSide at UMN include increased agency in a person's life, simplified food shopping, improved access to cheap and fresh produce, and an improved sense of community.

⁴ Note the differing organizations. There is BrightSide Produce and BrightSide at UMN. BrightSide Produce is an economically sustainable organization that makes fresh produce available in low-income urban neighborhoods in both Minneapolis, Minnesota and San Diego, California. Locally, BrightSide Produce currently collaborates with the University of St. Thomas. BrightSide at UMN follows the sustainable business model and partners with BrightSide Produce in an effort to confront the same local public health risks.

The Solution

1. Partner with BrightSide Produce

Our most important partner is with local non-profit BrightSide Produce. They were built five years ago by two youth from North Minneapolis who wanted their community to eat better. The program currently operates at the University of St. Thomas, and serves 20 stores in North Minneapolis. They have expressed a desire to expand their program, and we were excited about the prospect of addressing student food insecurity in a direct way working with engaged community members. BrightSide Produce will offer support including advising, logistical and financial matters, and allow us to share storage space with current operations at the Good Acre. We will also be picking up produce from the wholesaler together.

2. Buyer's Club Initiative at the University of Minnesota

The Buyer's Club will operate on the UMN campus and will target both students and staff. Bundles of produce will be sold to a group of buyers who subscribe to a weekly bundle. The average price of one of these bags is \$3-5. The Buyer's Club will be created before the corner store initiative to fund that program. Produce is purchased at a wholesaler, packaged by our volunteer team, and picked up by students at a central location on campus. The produce bundles range in price and amount from \$3 to \$20 (with the average cost coming to around \$5), and can be cancelled anytime.

3. Corner Store Initiative in Communities

Corner stores make up our community distribution for the purpose of the pilot. Store owners can buy produce from us close to cost from the wholesaler, which is cheaper than what they may currently be doing. They are also able to assume little to no risk for doing so, thanks to our buyback program where we buy back any produce that is leftover at the end of the week. Doing so allows stores to increase amounts of produce and buy new or different items. Community members buy this produce at savings compared to current amounts, and can therefore buy more. Those delivering the produce to stores will include a team of one student and one community youth.

4. Connecting with Local Youth

Local youth in the Cedar-Riverside community will be employed to deliver the produce to corner stores in the area, and they will partner with a student mentor from the University of Minnesota. Like the local youth currently employed by Brightside Produce, they will be paid \$15.00 an hour

for their once-a-week delivery shifts of approximately eight hours. This unique opportunity allows the youth to connect with University of Minnesota students and provide the students a connection which they might otherwise have made, in a neighborhood potentially quite new to them.

5. Partnership with the University of Minnesota

We plan on partnering with the University of Minnesota to have student volunteers work with local youth to deliver food to stores located in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Additionally, the University of Minnesota will allow us utilization of fleet services for the delivery of produce, similar to how the University of St. Thomas location operates. We would accomplish this by registering BrightSide at UMN as a Campus Life Program (CLP), which allows us departmental affiliation as well as access to additional funds and fleet service usage, office space, and marketing assistance. A potential department to be affiliated with would Boynton Health.

Social Value Proposition

- Brings the **community** together - by providing a student-run service encouraging students to access the fresh produce they need, and supporting local business owners to sell produce to their community at prices that serve both the corner store and the customer.
- **Increases equitable access** to fresh produce, which decreases the prevalence and burden of noncommunicable diseases, returns a sense of agency to people's lives, and is just.
- **Saves money and time** - many do not have access to transportation to purchase **fresh produce**, and the selection of produce within the community is very limited.

Alternative Solutions

Resources currently offered on the University of Minnesota campus include Nutritious U Food Pantry⁵, SNAP⁶, and Swipe Out Hunger⁷. Additionally, students can utilize local food pantries but without proper transportation have limited options. In the community of Cedar Riverside, their offered resources currently include SNAP and WIC⁸, as well as food pantries. The use of SNAP

⁵ Nutritious U Food Pantry is a University of Minnesota - Twin Cities student lead group that provides fresh and healthy food students that struggle to get enough to eat.

⁶ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal program that offers nutrition assistance to low-income individuals.

⁷ Swipe Out Hunger is an on campus program at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities that provides meal swipes to students in need. Every semester students are delegated a certain amount of meal swipes per amount they purchase and those swipes are used as cash flow for meals. Students have the choice to donate their extra swipes.

⁸ Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federal assistance program of the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) healthcare and nutrition for low-income pregnant women, those who breastfeed, and children under five years of age.

and WIC depends in part on grocery store access, which contributes to the problem already facing the community in that it exists as a food desert. Food pantries are also not a sustainable solution to food insecurity, and serve only as emergency or supplemental assistance, with the majority of the food provided as shelf-stable and not fresh.

Food deserts are a widespread problem that are currently being addressed in various ways across the nation. One example of a proposed solution to this problem that is currently being used is in Oakland, California. This community has plans to open a market called Community Foods that has quality food and groceries. Once the market opens, it will provide jobs to the community as well as a center for community building and socializing. Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs are popular in many communities within the Twin Cities, but there are currently none that exist in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. The CSA idea was briefly considered this idea, but CSAs tend to be a fairly expensive option which we did not feel would sufficiently meet the needs of this community.

Business Model

Following the BrightSide plan:

1. **Financial:** Use in-kind donations and grant funding to cover startup and ongoing administrative costs, while using revenue from the Buyer's Club plus a small markup on produce sales to cover operating expenses. We expect to generate positive cash flow post-pilot, which will allow continued purchase of the next week's produce and payroll for the youth workers. BrightSide Produce at the University of St. Thomas will be largely managing our cost of goods, including taxes and licensure.
2. **Organizational:** The primary leadership and weekly delivery functions will be performed by student volunteers who are members of the University of Minnesota Campus Life Program (CLP) BrightSide at UMN, or our student group connected to a department at the University. A faculty/staff sponsor will help champion the program within the University and to assist in recruiting students and logistical details. BrightSide Produce Distribution has offered the services of their Director of Development to assist with the start up of our program.
3. **Logistical:** While we will sign up our own Buyer's Club and corner store customers and manage the weekly delivery to them, we will leverage the existing BrightSide Minneapolis program to order from the wholesaler, store produce, manage the Buyer's Club e-commerce site and subscription service, and student worker payroll servicing.

Assumptions

We have several assumptions that are being made and which will be tested in our pilot.

We know that our student body is somewhat different than that of the University of St. Thomas, in part because our rates of student food insecurity are much higher, and so are assuming that this will be a main factor in looking at who will be the customer of the Buyer's Club. We are also assuming that the produce bundle will be purchased, when looking at prices for the bundles compared to buying produce from the stores near to campus. However, we have some comparisons of success to San Diego operations, which work out of a public institution similar to ours.

Additionally, the current operation of the "Gopher CSA," which runs in the fall and operates with about 150 student shares.¹⁴ We are assuming that our customers skew slightly differently, and that we will be successful despite their operations. We also assume participants want to eat better due to the restricted access imposed by living in a "food desert," having limited access to transportation in many cases, and being financially unable to purchase enough fresh food. This is supported through our interviews with community members and medical professionals in the University and Cedar Riverside communities.

It is important to address differences between the student community and a neighborhood like Cedar Riverside. In that distribution can be tailored to request, we assume that this will allow us to serve a diverse group of customers. We must also realize our position as students not of a marginalized or minority community, and so must be aware of our presence, and to realize the need to diversify our team. We are also concerned with the issues of knowledge surrounding cooking and preparation of foods sold, and to this end we assume a certain level of comfort with fruits and vegetables. If this is not the case, we intend to mitigate this issue with the inclusion of recipe cards, cooking nights, or webpage links on BrightSide's main site.

We are also assuming that people will buy more produce when offered at a lower cost. When offered the opportunity to supplement the diet with more fruits and vegetables we are hoping that the money saved from buying a smaller number of fresh produce would go towards more produce instead of using that money for something else rather than the produce access. This is supported from the information Brightside has on communities currently participating in their wholesale program in north Minneapolis and San Diego.

Pilot Plan

The Pilot is expected to launch in early summer of 2019, with preparations occurring during this spring semester. During the semester, the student group BrightSide at UMN was formed, and university engagement was begun in earnest to attract student volunteers and generate a list of interested Buyer's Club participants, as well as developing funding strategies for the cost of the pilot and associated startup fees. In terms of research, continued conversations will be conducted with nutrition and academic professionals, the Somali community on Cedar Riverside, and active recruitment through University events as well. Towards the end of the semester it is intended to reach out to prospective corner stores for delivery. We expect to start the pilot with 10 corner stores and between 60-80 Buyer's Club members. The income generated by the Buyer's Club (average order is \$5.00 which, yields \$2.00 in profit) is expected to support the

produce distribution to the Cedar Riverside community and its stores, among others throughout the area. The pilot will proceed in two parts, the first being Buyer’s Club distribution only, in order to generate funds necessary to expand to corner stores. Part 2 will see the combined Buyer’s Club and corner store produce distribution. The Pilot is expected to last 10 weeks and complete for evaluation in August 2019.

Financing the Pilot

We anticipate several costs associated with the pilot, namely through the transportation and delivery of the produce, some management costs, and advertising and outreach. These costs are influenced by the overall business model of BrightSide Produce, where the money invested in produce orders is made back through the Buyer’s Club and Corner store sales, in that a slight markup covers delivery costs, youth wages, and the potential for some profit. We are requesting **\$4,404** in start up funds. The funds will be distributed as outlined below, with explanations in Appendix 3:

Estimated Financial Need	
Purchases	Cost
¹ Initial Produce Purchase	\$ 1,200.00
² Packaging	\$ 328.19
³ Transportation	\$ 310.08
⁴ Inspection	\$ 40.00
⁵ Wages	\$ 480.00
⁶ Apparel	\$ 210.00
⁷ Advertisement	\$ 341.97
⁸ Produce stands for 10 stores	\$ 1,500.00
Total	\$ 4,404.14

Projected Profit for Redistribution

BrightSide at UMN is self-sustained being that all of the money spent on produce for distribution will funnel back to our organization through purchases of bundles. This gives BrightSide at UMN

the assurance of success and longevity. The projection below predicts our operating profit and loss the first week we sell to corner stores in addition to the already implemented Buyer's Club. We assume in this calculation that advertisement, storage, packaging, and apparel have already been purchased.

Estimated Revenue		
Description		Amount
Buyer's Club Purchases	70 members @ \$5.00 each	\$350.00
Corner store produce purchases at cost	10 stores @ \$72.50 each	\$725.00
Corner store delivery surcharge on purchases	10 stores @ \$5.08 each	\$50.80
Total Revenue		\$1,125.80
Youth worker pay	\$15 per hour for eight-hour shift	\$120.00
Distribution	Gas and U-Haul Rental	\$44.87
Produce Order	10 stores @ 72.50 each	\$725.00
	70 members @ \$3.00 each	\$210.00
Miscellaneous replacement (Buyer's Club bags, additional t-shirts, etc.)	\$20 per week	\$20.00
Total expenses		(1,119.87)
Operating profit / (loss)		\$5.93

Success Metrics & Looking Ahead

If the pilot is successful, we plan to expand in three ways:

1. Increase scale
 - a. Set up additional Buyer's Club distribution sites and sign up more members.
 - b. Expand volunteer shifts and involvement, with room for UROPs and internships for students, as well as leadership positions within the student group BrightSide at UMN.
 - c. Increase corner store deliveries; every additional 7-8 stores fulfills one new shift for a UMN student and one youth worker.

2. Assist BrightSide Produce Distribution in setting up franchise locations at other Universities and colleges
 - a. Considerations for higher education include Macalester College, Hamline University, Minneapolis Community & Technical College; with plans for a Chicago BrightSide also in the works.
3. Implement existing Brightside offerings at the University and within Cedar Riverside such as BrightSide FarmStands, Neighborhood Pods, and Office Fruit Bowls. To explain, FarmStands exist outside of Corner Stores in the summer, and operate a few hours every week to provide a mini farmer's market experience in addition to the usual produce in-store.

We hope to expand to more cities, beyond Minneapolis and San Diego to Chicago, in the coming years. We hope that the success of BrightSide at the University of St. Thomas is a reasonable indicator for the expansion to the University of Minnesota, despite their differences. We feel that our solution to issues surrounding food access supports sustainability, community involvement, and diversity, and hope that this is reflected in this proposal.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Meet Our Team

Clara Holder



Carley Meyers



Clara is a junior at the University of Minnesota studying Nutrition with an emphasis in Dietetics. She anticipates working as a dietitian following graduation, and has interests in working in rural communities or abroad as part of the network of humanitarian aid.

Carley is a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Health Services Management and minoring in Nutrition and Leadership. She intends to work in a non-profit healthcare organization that support under-served communities, and highlights social issues such as famine, malnourishment, and food-waste.

Appendix 2: Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone that has helped us to work on this project! We have been so lucky to have had so many members of the University and the community who are excited about our project and have supported us in so many ways. We are grateful to have found so much support, and are encouraged by the passionate, motivated souls in the cities!

The officers of student group BrightSide at UMN: Tess, Rachel, Bharat, & Mara

Advisors throughout the process: Cheryl Robertson, Megan Voorhees, Fred Rose, & Anita Pagey

Insightful conversations and tips from professionals: Ashley Bress, MDA; Melissa Laska, MPH, RD; Rebecca Leighton, RD, MPH; & Rhys Williams

The incredible partners we have in BrightSide: Adam Kay & Daina Strub

Students and youth workers at BrightSide UST: Maddie, Paul, Steve, & David

The original team members of Nourish the City: Kelsey Ward, Josie Anderson, Jeff Holland, and Shannon Allen

Interviews and discussions with University students: members of Acara Changemakers student group, Will Macheel, Libin Said, members of the January PA 5743 class and Fall 2018 GCC 3:5003 class

Appendix 3: Financial Summary

Cost Definitions

¹ The initial cost of produce will equate to \$600. The expectation is to make all the money back, however, we assume the need for the first Buyer's Club produce purchasing to ensure sustainability to ensure no loss due to uncertainty of first week.

² Packaging for Buyer's Club bundle pick up, includes a case of 1000 biodegradable pre-printed "Thank You" retail bags (\$58.19 from Amazon) and three portable folding tables (\$39.99 each from Amazon) for Buyer's Club distribution. Additionally, packaging pallets from WholeSale Produce be rented weekly at \$15.

³ Transportation: costs include ten weeks of gas and U-Haul for produce distribution. The first six weeks of gas include traveling from campus to U-Haul rental facility (1.4 miles), to WholeSale Produce (1.3 miles), and then back, totaling to 5.4 miles per day trip and 32.4 miles over the course of six weeks. The average cost of gas is \$2.18 per gallon and the distribution vehicle receives on average 12 miles per gallon. For the first six weeks \$5.88 for gas is needed. The four weeks following will include a trip to U-Haul rental, WholeSale Produce, Cedar Riverside (2.0 miles), and Como area (1.8 miles) and back. The total mileage per distribution day would equate to approximately 13 miles. The distribution truck and gas price would be the same. In four weeks we would travel about 52 miles. For the following four weeks it is an additional \$9.45. Considering the cost of U-Haul rental is necessary if BrightSide at UMN is not registered as a club and cannot access University fleet services by the time of pilot. To rent a 10' U-Haul truck for one day is \$19.95 plus \$1.19 per mile. Over the course of ten weeks we would expect to pay \$294.75 for rental services.

⁴ Commercial transportation inspection to ensure it is suitable and adequate cleanable for use and capable of maintaining temperatures necessary for the safe transport of food.

⁵ Youth workers will be paid for their distribution services at \$15 per hour. It's expected to have four youth workers total, however, each youth worker will rotate weekends because only one is needed per week until we expand.

⁶ T-shirts and hats for produce distribution and Buyer's Club. T-shirts cost \$10 each and hats cost \$5.

⁷ Posters and flyers are needed for advertising and promoting our organization. Printing 500, one-sided, colored flyers from Staples[®] would cost about \$159.99. Printing 100 colored posters to display on the University of Minnesota's campus is \$100 on Canva.com. A standard heavyweight 24" x 36", mounted, laminated poster with the addition of a mount for Buyer's Club from Staples[®] would cost \$81.98.

⁸ Every store needs a one time purchase of a produce stand for advertising our organization in addition for display of the produce they sell to the community in Cedar Riverside. Produce stands cost \$15 each and we anticipate serving 10 stores the first week of distribution to Cedar Riverside.

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