

Urban Case Study

Michael is a 20-year-old living in an urban area in New York City. He lives in a two-bedroom apartment with his parents and three younger siblings aged 4, 12, and 17. Michael is a junior at a local 4-year college, studying Accounting. He also works part-time as a private Math tutor for high-school students and earns approximately \$400 a week. He doesn't receive enough financial aid to cover his tuition and often must choose between paying for his tuition, buying books, paying for food, and taking care of his personal needs.

Michael's parents earn approximately \$50,000 a year combined. They work long hours and overtime to make ends meet. Michael's father is undocumented and often works odd jobs. Many months after paying for rent and utilities, there is not much money left for food. Their income makes them ineligible to receive SNAP benefits, so Michael and his family visit local food pantries to supplement their food for the month. Michael tried to apply for SNAP benefits on his own and was denied since he did not meet the eligibility requirements for college students.

Michael and his family do not have a car and rely on public transportation to get around, including going to the grocery store. A Whole Foods recently opened in proximity of Michael's home, but it is not affordable, and Michael and his family aren't able to find cultural foods there. The grocery store with reasonably priced, cultural food is 10 blocks (approximately half a mile) away from their home. Michael and his family typically do not get a lot of groceries during their shopping trips because they have to carry the food home on the bus or walk home. There used to be an affordable international grocery store a block away from Michael's home, but it closed due to real estate developers buying the grocery store and turning it into a high-rise apartment building. Over the past 5 years, the neighborhood has been changing to cater to the higher income earners that have been moving into the area. When Michael and his family do not feel like travelling to the grocery store, they visit their local bodega/corner store. The prices at the bodega are higher than the prices at the supermarket, but convenience and accessibility are important to Michael and his family.

There are over thirty fast-food restaurants within a 1-mile radius of Michael's home. Just on the block he lives, there are five fast food restaurants: Wendy's, Mc Donalds, Chinese Take Out, Popeye's, and Burger King. Michael likes that he can rely on these places for a quick, convenient, and affordable meal. He wants to eat healthier but cannot afford to. It also doesn't help that his younger sister works at Domino's Pizza and brings home food for the family after her shift; which does help to stretch their household's food budget tremendously. Michael often worries about the finances and health of his family, but he plans to help his family become more financially secure once he finishes college and gets a job as an accountant. His goal is to move them into a home where they have more space, and into a neighborhood where food is more accessible.