



Hunger and Nutrition in America: What's at Stake for Children, Families and Older Adults



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About Generations United

Generations United is the only national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. Since 1986, Generations United has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. Generations United acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations, providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.

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Survey Methodology

Harris Interactive® fielded the study on behalf of Generations United from September 24-26, 2012 via its Harris Poll QuickQuerySM online omnibus service, interviewing a nationwide sample of 2,397 U.S. residents age 18 years or older; 303 respondents from this survey sought or received food assistance in the past 12 months. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, household income, and age of children in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. general population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with non-response, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100 percent response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

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Executive Summary



Photo by Denzel Mitchell

The needs of our bookend generations are acute. Nearly a fifth of our country's children (almost 16.7 million) live in households where they lack consistent access to enough nutritious food for a healthy life. About 4.5 million (one in 12) adults age 60 and older are now at risk of hunger or food insecure. Using an expanded measure, nearly 8.3 million (one in seven) older adults are, at times, anxious about whether they will have enough to eat. These disturbing trends cannot be ignored in today's America.

Adequate nutrition helps children and youth concentrate in class, improves their memory and overall behavior, and leads to better health and fewer visits to the doctor. For older adults, access to good nutrition also improves memory, helps maintain healthy physical activity, and reduces the number of trips to the doctor. The benefits of good nutrition are clear. How can we ensure the most vulnerable among us are well nourished?

In thousands of communities, houses of worship, food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters play key roles in providing food assistance to needy children, youth, older adults and families. They bring people of all ages together to help their neighbors during times of hardship and alleviate a painful source of anxiety: where the next meal is coming from. And, of course, a function of the federal government is to address hunger.

Unfortunately, the U.S. economy is in dire financial straits. The prospects of revenue increases and budget cuts threaten the economic stability of nutrition assistance programs and other critical social services. While Americans hope for serious and thoughtful nonpartisan deliberations on how to solve our fiscal problems, many of us fear the economy will not improve any time soon. Meanwhile, millions of vulnerable people depend on strong federal nutrition programs to put food on the table and help make ends meet.

To find out how Americans think we are doing to meet the nutritional needs of our younger and older family members, Generations United commissioned a nationwide survey conducted by Harris Interactive from September 24 to 26, 2012.

When asked about experience with the lack of food in the previous 12 months:

- 33% of respondents had experience with or concern about the lack of food among their family members, friends or neighbors. Respondents ages 18 to 34 were most likely affected. Half of those respondents reported having had such a concern or experience.
- 10% of respondents went without a basic need, such as food, medicine or health care in order to provide food for another family member.

Regarding households seeking or receiving food assistance:

- 74% of respondents who sought or received assistance turned to the government in some way for this assistance. Respondents who had children in the household were more likely to have sought or received government assistance than those without children in the household.

Further, the poll revealed that among those who sought or received food assistance in the previous 12 months, assistance came from the following sources:

- 74% from a government program
- 53% from a family member
- 53% from a local food bank
- 38% from a church or house of worship
- 35% from a neighbor or friend
- 21% from a community garden
- 26% from another source

Accessing food assistance can often be problematic because of barriers such as:

- Income eligibility for programs
- Exhausted food supplies
- Hours of operation for food assistance services
- Age restrictions for access to programs and services
- Transportation to locations providing food assistance services
- Location of those services

To maintain their cognitive and physical health children, youth and older adults (and their family members and friends) must understand how to acquire information on nutritional needs. The survey found that many respondents lack this essential knowledge:

- 24% of adults nationwide do not know how to access information about the unique nutrition needs of children, youth, and older adults. Younger adults ages 18 to 34, and older adults age 55 and older were least likely of all age groups to agree they know how to access information about such needs.

When asked about public support for federal food programs, the survey found:

- 70% of U.S. adults agree that policymakers should prevent cuts to existing federal food assistance programs for children, youth and older adults. Respondents with children in their households were more likely to agree than those without children in their households.

Experience with Lack of Food



1 in 3

Nearly 1 in 3 adults had experience with/concern about lack of food among their family, friends or neighbors.

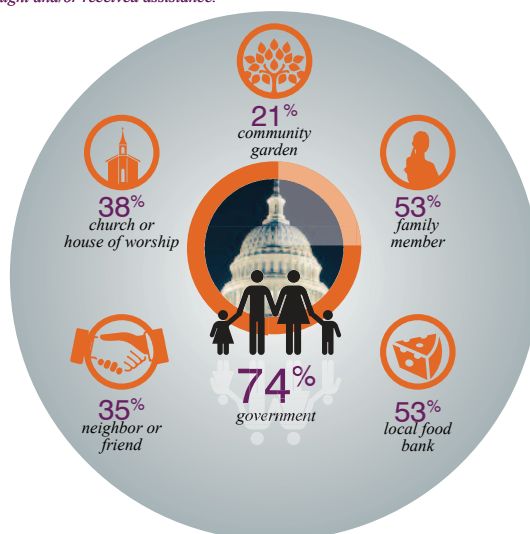


1 in 10

1 in 10 adults went without a basic need (such as food, medicine or health care) in order to provide food for another family member.

Households Seeking or Receiving Food Assistance

Of those who sought and/or received assistance, nearly 74% turned to the government in some way for this assistance. Many sought support from additional sources as shown. Families with children were even more likely to have sought and/or received assistance.



Public Support for Federal Food Programs



70%

70% of U.S. adults agree that policymakers should prevent cuts to existing federal food assistance programs for children, youth and older adults.

Knowledge About Nutritional Needs



24%

Nationwide, nearly one fourth of U.S. adults do not know how to access information on the unique nutritional needs of children, youth, and older adults.

The survey responses point to major challenges facing our country's families, particularly with regard to their younger and older family members. But if the survey statistics show that families are struggling with hunger issues, the numbers also tell another story. The vast majority of Americans are united in their support for protecting federal food programs for our most vulnerable bookend generations. Moreover, in times of need, family members care for each other, placing the needs of others before their own. They too worry about the struggles of their friends and neighbors. Above all, families are resourceful.

To eliminate food insecurity, we must draw on the capabilities and creativity of all Americans. Every generation has its own strengths and inspirations. By working together, we can leverage these assets, combat hunger, and empower our families and neighbors to not only survive, but thrive.

This report identifies ways to effectively address nutrition problems using innovative intergenerational strategies. It lays out a set of recommendations that invite our policymakers, business and community leaders, and advocates to:

- Directly engage older and younger community members in tackling the hunger and nutrition challenges our country faces
- View people of different generations as problem-solvers and sources of support for each other
- Recast single-age interventions as integrated opportunities that improve health, stimulate learning, strengthen communities, and save money
- Cultivate the leadership qualities that exist in people of all ages

Now is the time to champion new strategies by engaging people of all ages to tackle food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Protect and Strengthen Support for Critical Federal Food Programs for Low-Income Children, Youth, Older Adults, and Families

- Protect Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other nutrition programs from negative structural changes, budget cuts and block grant proposals. Eliminate arbitrary eligibility exclusions like barring many legal immigrant adults from the program, and barriers to enrollment such as requiring people to re-enroll in SNAP if they move short distances away, like across county lines. Avoid denying an entire household SNAP benefits if the head of household does not meet work requirements.
- Make SNAP benefits adequate to meet nutrition needs throughout the month. Restore the SNAP benefit increase scheduled to be terminated in November 2013.

Expand Access to and Availability of Critical Federal Food Programs

- Make sure participation rates are high among low-income intergenerational families.
- Improve outreach and access to federal food programs by streamlining enrollment, simplifying applications, and removing barriers, such as requiring in-person office visits for re-enrollment.

- Increase availability of federal food programs for children and youth. Implement the Breakfast in the Classroom program to ensure all children, regardless of family income, start their day with a nutritious meal.
- Expand the number of after-school and summer food program sites. Provide technical assistance and start-up grants, subsidize transportation, and reward states for finding innovative ways to increase program participation and close the hunger gap.
- Increase availability and access to federal food programs for older adults. Support targeted SNAP outreach to seniors.
- Promote the expansion of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to reach seniors in all 50 states. Increase food distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program.
- Track and keep pace with demographic changes to ensure adequate federal funding for home-delivered and congregate meals.

Increase Income and Access to Supports for Low-Income Families

- Encourage states to develop measures to support employment for low-income families through workforce training programs and innovative solutions, such as work-sharing.
- Ensure unemployment laws and other programs allow work-sharers and part-time employees to qualify for partial unemployment benefits.
- Support clear pathways for cross-certification or categorical eligibility between nutrition programs and other benefits, such as the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
- Support, improve, and promote outreach about tax credits benefiting low-income families, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

Engage the Business Community

- Educate company leadership and employees about how supporting food assistance programs help business by improving community relations, burnishing the company image, and providing tax benefits.
- Encourage employee volunteerism by holding company-wide volunteer days or offering time off for employees to volunteer with food assistance programs.
- Encourage employee contributions to food assistance programs by offering to match such contributions.
- Establish an employee wellness program that promotes healthy eating and lifestyles among employees.
- Establish a worksite farmers' market where employees can conveniently purchase healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles by covering an additional percentage of the cost of health insurance premiums for employees who meet biometric markers, such as a healthy body mass index (BMI), and stable blood pressure and blood sugar readings.
- Offer reimbursements to employees for personal investments in their own health, such as consulting with a registered dietitian or employing a personal trainer.

Support and Promote Approaches Encouraging Healthy and Nutritious Diets

- Ensure SNAP benefits are adequate for families to purchase healthy food.
- Ensure schools comply with new nutrition standards.
- Encourage USDA to move forward on rules designed to make food in child care meals and snacks funded by the federal government healthier as well as rules limiting what food schools can sell or offer outside of the federally funded meals programs.
- Expand support for The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program that provide nutritious options for low-income people of all ages.
- Support efforts to provide produce and other healthy food options in “food deserts” by making fresh fruits, vegetables and nutritious foods available in corner stores.
- Champion nonprofit grocery stores, farmers markets, local vegetable carts and “stock box neighborhood groceries.”
- Increase federal reimbursement rates to providers to accurately reflect the total costs of providing nutritious meals.
- Promote community gardens through collecting and sharing best practices and offering local tax incentives.

Promote Coordination of Food Programs to Better Serve Families

- Promote coordination across federal nutrition programs to better serve family members of all ages.
- Encourage states to develop comprehensive intergenerational strategies to:
 - Help older adults and children and youth gain access to and participate in nutrition programs.
 - Improve delivery and coordination of nutrition and other assistance programs to better meet the needs of family members of all ages.
- Modify age-restricted federal food programs to incorporate comprehensive, integrated, intergenerational approaches.
- Include incentives for using intergenerational approaches in federal legislation, such as those in the Older Americans Act, that encourage joint meal programs with schools.
- Promote co-location of children and older adult food programs so the different generations can interact and bond with each other.
- Remove barriers to the creation of intergenerational shared sites.
- Change the perception of school cafeterias from “filling stations” to intergenerational learning laboratories.
- Replace the traditional “senior center models” with ones that provide nutritious food while engaging older adults in service and other intergenerational opportunities.
- Engage students in volunteer opportunities where they can serve and learn from older adults in food and nutrition settings.
- Position older adults as educators and advocates for children’s nutritional health, and students as educators and advocates for senior nutritional health.
- Involve National Service programs, such as Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve, in focusing on intergenerational nutrition needs in under-served communities.

Program Profile: St. Louis Meal Runners

Program Name: Meal Runners (Part of the St. Louis-area Meals on Wheels, est. in 1973)

Type of Program: home-delivered meals

Location: Lemay, Missouri

Participants: high school service learning students, older adult volunteers, homebound older adults

Number served: 120 homebound older adults served nutritious meals Monday through Friday

Pamela Guest grew increasingly concerned as she watched her volunteers lift the heavy meal carriers and coolers, and place them in their vehicles. It was tough work. Each volunteer was responsible for delivering a hot meal, fruit and milk daily to 16 homebound adults. Without these dedicated volunteers, homebound and frail elderly would not have the hot, nutritionally balanced meals they needed to live independently in their own homes.



Courtesy of St. Louis Area Meals on Wheels

As administrator for the South County Senior Resource Center in Lemay, Missouri, Pamela knew that her volunteers were dedicated to their task and rarely complained. But she was also aware that while their spirits were willing, many of their bodies were struggling under the heavy lifting. After all, the majority of her volunteers were in their 70s.

“Too bad you can’t use kids to help deliver meals,” a friend said in passing one day. That chance remark gave Pamela the solution she needed. “When my friend said that, a light bulb went off,” Pamela explains. “I thought, ‘Why can’t we find a way to get young people involved?’”

Inspired, Pamela contacted the principal of nearby Bayless High School to discuss the possibility. During the conversation, the principal mentioned that the school already offered a class called Student Service Learning that emphasized service to the community. Perhaps the class could give students the opportunity to help deliver meals and earn school credit at the same time.

Following several months of meetings, paperwork and training, Meal Runners was launched—and proved so successful it’s now in its seventh year. Today, over 30 young people take part each year.

All volunteers—students and older adults alike—receive training on intergenerational dynamics. The training helps sensitize them to avoid negative stereotypes.

“The older adults and teens work together in two-person teams to deliver meals to 120 homebound elders in the area,” Pamela notes. “The older volunteers pick up their student partners at school and bring them to the senior center where the students now do the lifting and packing of meal carriers and coolers. Then together, the two-person teams deliver the meals.”

“The feedback has been extremely positive,” Pamela says. “The program has helped break down intergenerational barriers and brought people of all ages together to help their hungry and elderly neighbors.”

“Many of the older adults in the program—both volunteers and the homebound—used to be leery or afraid of kids. Now, they see that young people’s hearts and minds are in a very positive place and that these kids are headed in the right direction.”

“One of our drivers, Mr. Unger, always talks about how much he loves the program and how it’s opened up new adventures for him. He’s been paired with students from different cultures—Bosnian, Korean, Hispanic—that he might never have been exposed to. And, he’s become a mentor for a number of youngsters. Kids are interested in his life story and opinions; they ask for his advice, and he helps guide them in a positive direction. Last year, several students nominated him for the MetLife Foundation Mentor Award. He won! That award means a great deal to him.”

“Meal Runners has had a profound impact on the student volunteers as well. Those who may have started out volunteering in order to earn a grade, now see the need in our community. They recognize how important it is to give back. They are also learning to see older adults in a new and respectful way. They realize that not everyone has someone to look after them, but that everyone needs a level of care and concern. Because of their involvement in Meal Runners, some students decided to pursue gerontology after graduation. One even interned with our agency’s nutrition department.”

Pamela, too, has received national and state awards for “Best Intergenerational Program.”

“The change in mindset is so important! We’re producing the next generation of volunteers, and these kids are setting a great example for their peers and older adults alike!”

Driving for Miss Lola

Right after Meal Runners began, “Miss Lola”, just home from the hospital, began receiving home delivered meals. She lived alone, had no children or living relatives, and seemed to have given up. Her loneliness was evident in the way she lived: When students first started showing up to deliver her meals at midday, Miss Lola answered the door in her nightgown, her hair unkempt. She received her meals in silence and closed the door. But the student volunteers had been taught they should make an effort to speak with their homebound neighbors. One day, a young female volunteer gently asked, “Miss Lola, could I give you a hug?”

That simple gesture turned Miss Lola’s life around. She hugged the student, and both began to cry. More important, they began to talk. The next day, when the student and her older volunteer partner drove to Miss Lola’s, they were astonished to see her dressed and well-coiffed. From then on, Miss Lola always wanted her hug. Those who knew her said the end of her life was happier because of the care she’d received from the kids.

Introduction



Photo by Molly Brown

If the economic downturn had any positive effect, it was this: it raised awareness that America needs to address the twin issues of hunger and poor nutrition. Yet despite the awareness-raising, Americans remain woefully unaware of the full extent of the problem—that *one in six Americans is at risk of hunger*¹ and that children and older adults are uniquely affected.

- Almost 16.7 million children (one in five) in the United States live in households where they lack consistent access to enough nutritious food for a healthy life².
- Food insecurity among older adults has increased in recent years. About 4.5 million (one in 12) adults age 60 and older are now at risk of hunger or food insecure. Using an expanded measure, nearly 8.3 million (one in seven) older adults are, at times, anxious about whether they will have enough to eat.³
- Those caring for our nation's younger and older generations are also hurting. One in ten Americans reports going without a basic need in order to provide for the needs of another family member.⁴



**1 in 5 children and 1 in 12 older adults
is at risk of hunger in the U.S.**

While some pockets of our country see signs of economic recovery, families across the U.S. are still struggling to meet their nutrition needs. Even those who can put food on the table each day may not have access to healthy meals to ensure their family members of all ages thrive.⁵

Over decades, our nation has created a network of nutrition programs designed to address the needs of people during tough times. Are these programs meeting the needs of our children and seniors today?

It's a question we must ask because America's demographics are changing. By 2020, the number of Americans aged 65 and older will increase by 36 percent from 2010⁶, and the number of food insecure seniors is projected to increase by 50 percent by 2025.⁷ Older adults are living longer. While they may have planned carefully for retirement, many find themselves outlasting their savings. Others lost savings during the recent financial crisis and may even be in danger of losing their homes, compounding the daily stress of meeting basic nutrition needs.⁸ The need for nutrition assistance for older adults is urgent. Yet traditional senior centers, many of which offer food programs, fear that rapid demographic changes may make it difficult to adequately respond without policy changes.⁹ Research shows baby boomers, who are now turning 60 in record numbers, want to engage with their communities but are less likely to identify as "old." They are more likely to avoid senior centers and similarly labeled programs that have traditionally offered critical nutrition assistance.¹⁰

At the same time, an astounding one in five children lives in food insecure households. About 31 million low-income children receive free or reduced-priced meals through the school lunch program; yet only about a third of those receive school breakfast. Even fewer children (2.3 million) participate in the Summer Food Service Program.¹¹ The statistics indicate major challenges in our ability to deliver the nutrition children need during the school year and periods in between. Poor nutrition affects their ability to grow, learn and thrive.

The population of young people known as the "millennials" (those born between the early 80s and early 90s) is the largest in America. The millennial generation also faces an extremely large problem: unemployment. Food insecurity often correlates with unemployment. In July 2012, the unemployment rate among young adults was nearly 17 percent and more young adults are seeking food assistance.¹² Their struggle to find jobs and meet their own basic needs may compromise an unmistakable capacity for activism and desire to serve their communities.

Cuts to food and nutrition programs loom as Congress labors to address mounting budget deficits. How would cuts affect people across the generations? Given demographic realities, should our traditional delivery systems in age-segregated facilities become a thing of the past? What does the promise of new and renewed engagement from millennials and baby boomers suggest for our approach to meeting our country's nutrition needs?

Anti-hunger advocates using evidence-based research have elevated issues around hunger and nutrition among single-age groups. The advocacy community has proposed an abundance of thoughtful recommendations about how to combat food insecurity in the United States. This report affirms many of their recommendations.

However, as advocates for children, youth, older adults, families and people living with disabilities, Generations United proposes an integrated approach to ending food insecurity. We challenge leaders to use an intergenerational lens as they examine how well our current age-segregated systems are really working, and identify opportunities to address food insecurity as an interconnected society.

This report proposes a set of recommendations that invite our policymakers, business and community leaders, and advocates to champion new strategies:

- Directly engage older and younger community members in tackling the hunger and nutrition challenges our country faces.
- View people of different generations as problem-solvers and sources of support for each other.
- Recast single-age interventions as integrated opportunities that improve health, stimulate learning, strengthen communities and save money.
- Cultivate the leadership qualities that exist in people of all ages.



How Our Families Are Faring: Meeting the nutritional needs of our children, youth and elders



Photo by Debra Burris

In states with high rates of unemployment and poverty, hunger has always been an issue. The Great Recession made a bad problem worse. When financial institutions collapsed, a cascade of widespread job losses and home foreclosures left people unemployed and packing up their belongings. A USDA report notes participation in the major nutrition programs correlates to unemployment (and underemployment) rates.¹³

Older adults who previously envisioned stability during their retirement years now depend on family members to meet basic needs. Many of their caregivers saw pink slips appear and proactive planning for the future disappear. These difficulties trickle down to affect younger children and youth as well. Too often, parents do not have the financial resources to provide enough nutritious food for their children's healthy growth and development.

Failing to meet the nutritional needs of our nation's younger and older people has vast implications for society:

- Food insecure children are more likely to suffer chronic illnesses and have higher rates of hospitalization than children who have regular access to healthy food.¹⁴ They may have difficulty concentrating in the classroom and are more likely to repeat a grade.¹⁵
- Food insecure older adults take in fewer critical vitamins and minerals and like children who struggle with food insecurity, are more likely to get sick and be in poorer health. Inadequate nutrition impedes their physical ability to carry out daily activities, compromising their quality of life.¹⁶
- Ultimately, food insecurity will contribute to already soaring health care costs, jeopardize our children's academic success, and threaten the country's future position in a global economy requiring a competitive workforce.

To avoid the struggle against hunger, more people are seeking assistance through government programs and other services. In 2011, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) provided nearly 44 million people with benefits to purchase food, up from 33.5 million in 2009.¹⁷ In addition, more than five percent of U.S. households obtained food from food pantries more than once. Feeding America, the nation's largest network of food banks, reports that nearly three-fourths of its member food pantries saw an increase in the number of clients in the past six years.¹⁸

Olivia and Richard

For much of her adult life, Olivia had known adversity. But the greatest test of her spirit and endurance would come at the age of 53 when she became permanent caregiver for her three-month-old grandson, Richard. The story of how Richard came to be in Olivia's care was a tragedy in itself. The baby's father, Olivia's son, had served in the military, including an 18-month tour in Iraq. When he returned to the States, he had changed. No longer the responsible, patriotic young man Olivia had known, he was angry and troubled; after being discharged from the Army, he turned violent. In the course of a robbery attempt, which also involved his wife, he killed a man. With both her son and daughter-in-law incarcerated, Olivia stepped in to care for her tiny grandson.



Photo by Olivia Chase

The timing was tough for Olivia: she had already raised two other sons and had two other grandchildren. In addition, she had suffered an accident on the job while working as a nuclear medicine tech and had become disabled. For some time, she had been struggling to live on the income from her disability payment, and had moved in with a friend, sleeping on her floor. Olivia knew that her meager funds would not cover her grandson's food and other necessities, but she was determined to care for him.

A long-time activist, Olivia sought advice from an old friend, Jim Graham, who serves on the District of Columbia's City Council. She says that Jim "firmly and fairly" insisted that she seek help from the City and pointed her to the Columbia Heights Collaborative. Ruled ineligible for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) because of her disability payment, Olivia applied to the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program to cover Richard's formula, baby food, and other nutrition needs. She also received help in enrolling Richard in Medicaid.

But then, Olivia notes, it was the community who embraced her. Martha's Table, a valued local resource, came to her aid with groceries and clothing. Richard was enrolled in the organization's day care center, and only recently left there to attend the preschool at Francis-Stevens Educational Campus.

Olivia continues to rely on local food sources, including So Others May Eat, the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, and SHARE. This year, Olivia prepared her Thanksgiving meal from a food basket she received from a local program. Olivia is enrolled in the Grandparent Caregivers Program, administered by the DC Child and Family Services Agency and receives a small stipend that helps her afford to care for Richard. She is also working with LIFT, a program that arranged for her to work one-on-one with a student at American University in negotiating a dispute with her current landlord.

As the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child." Martha's Table, So Others May Eat, SHARE, and the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church make up a large part of Olivia and Richard's village—and they are grateful to have such a wonderful support system. Still, it takes a lot of work for this grandmother to keep things together. The payments Olivia receives are not automatic, her food resources are scattered and barely adequate, and her disability makes everything harder. But if you meet Olivia and talk with her, she expresses only gratitude to all the organizations that help her survive. She says: "I don't have a sense of entitlement, but I am grateful for the support."

Families Speak Out:

What are the experiences with food security for children and older adults in families today?



Photo by Kyle Buffo

How do Americans think we are doing at meeting the nutritional needs of our younger and older family members? Are there barriers we can address with an intergenerational lens? To find out, Generations United recently commissioned a nationwide survey conducted by Harris Interactive from September 24 to 26, 2012.

The survey found that in the previous 12 months nearly one in three adults had experiences with or concerns about lack of food among family, friends or neighbors. Respondents ages 18 to 34 were most likely to be affected; half of them reported experiencing such situations. One in ten of all respondents reported going without a basic need (such as food, medicine or health care) in order to provide for another family member's needs.

Experience with Lack of Food



1 in 3

Nearly 1 in 3 adults had experience with/concern about lack of food among their family, friends or neighbors.



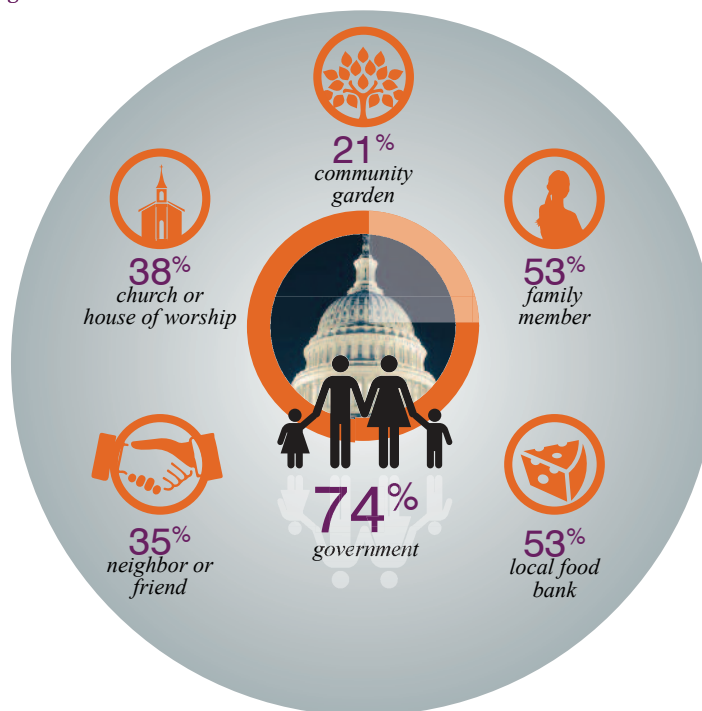
1 in 10

1 in 10 adults went without a basic need (such as food, medicine or health care) in order to provide food for another family member.

About 15 percent of those surveyed sought or received food assistance for their own household. Of those, 74 percent turned to government as a major source of support for their families. Respondents with children in the household (82 percent) were significantly more likely to have sought or received government assistance than those without children (66 percent). Respondents also identified family members, local food banks, houses of worship, friends, neighbors and community gardens as significant sources of assistance. Many reported encountering barriers to access, including: income eligibility requirements, age restrictions, location and transportation issues, program hours and programs running out of supplies.

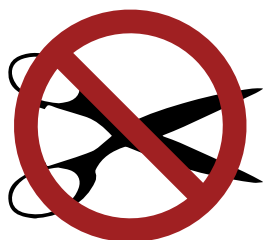
Households Seeking or Receiving Food Assistance

Of those who sought and/or received assistance, nearly 74% turned to the government in some way for this assistance. Many sought support from additional sources as shown. Families with children were even more likely to have sought and/or received assistance.



The need to both protect and improve food and nutrition supports for our younger and older family members is also clear. The vast majority (70 percent) of respondents believe policy makers should prevent cuts to food assistance for children, youth and older adults. Respondents with children in their household (74 percent) were significantly more likely to agree than those without children in their household (68 percent). Nearly one fourth of those surveyed do not know how to access information on the nutritional needs of children, youth and older adults. The youngest (ages 18 to 34) and oldest (ages 55 +) were the least likely to report that they had access to this information.

Public Support for Federal Food Programs



70%

70% of U.S. adults agree that policymakers should prevent cuts to existing federal food assistance programs for children, youth and older adults.

Knowledge About Nutritional Needs



24%

Nationwide, nearly one fourth of U.S. adults do not know how to access information on the unique nutritional needs of children, youth, and older adults.

The responses to the survey point to major challenges facing our country's families, particularly with regard to younger and older family members. But if the survey statistics show that families are struggling with hunger issues, the numbers also tell another story. The vast majority of Americans are united in their support for protecting federal food programs for our most vulnerable bookend generations: children, youth and seniors. In times of need, family members care for each other, placing the needs of others before their own. They also worry about their friends and neighbors who may be struggling, too. Above all, they are resourceful.

To eliminate food insecurity, we must draw on the resourcefulness and creativity of all Americans. Every generation has its own strengths and ideas. By working together, we can leverage those strengths, combat hunger, and help our families and neighbors not only survive, but thrive.

"I was watching a documentary on CBS. It was 1968 and I remember saying, "Why are they looking at hunger in the United States?" The incident that caught my attention was they picked up on a little boy alongside of the room leaning against the wall...

The interviewer said to this boy, "What do you think when you stand here day after day, watching the other children eat and you can't join with them?" He said, "I'm ashamed."

I said to my family, "You know, it's not that little boy who should be ashamed, it's George McGovern, a United States Senator, a member on the Committee on Agriculture."

-Senator George McGovern

From Federal Funds to Food Pantries: Distributing Nutrition Assistance to Families



Photo by Juliana B.

Americans recognize the importance of federal spending on critical nutrition programs in this era of hardship. A recent Food Research and Action Center poll conducted in August 2012 found that 75 percent of respondents were against cuts in food assistance funding for low-income families and senior citizens.¹⁹ This demonstration of support aligns with the findings from Generation's United's poll. While some programs are particularly beneficial to children and seniors, many do not reach all those in need. Improving outreach, simplifying and streamlining applications, and removing barriers to enrollment are particularly important to meet the needs of children and older adults who often face transportation, mobility or technology challenges.

The Language of Hunger

For purposes of this report, we use “food insecurity” and “at risk of hunger” to describe the status of children, youth, older adults, grandfamilies²⁰ and other families whose ability to acquire enough nutritious food is compromised.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses the following terms to define eating patterns related to family income and social conditions:

- High food security: No reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- Marginal food security: One or two reported indications--typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
- Low food security: Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- Very low food security: Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.²¹

The following chart summarizes the potential to strengthen existing programs with intergenerational approaches to offer more benefits for children, youth, older adults, and communities.

Name	Purpose	Impact	Problem	Intergenerational Potential
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a federal mandate to provide food assistance to eligible people Provides electronic benefits for eligible people to purchase food and seeds Designed to expand during difficult economic times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SNAP meets the food needs of children, families and older adults without respect to age If SNAP benefits were counted as income, the program would have lifted nearly 4 million people out of poverty in 2011²² SNAP benefits are quickly used by needy families; 97 percent of benefits are used by the end of the month One in three SNAP recipients are in households that include older adults or people living with disabilities; 75 percent are in families with children. SNAP helps relieve economic pressure on emergency food providers such as food banks, pantries, kitchens and emergency shelters across the country²³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faces potential funding cuts and policy changes that could affect states' efforts to streamline and improve services Could provide an opening for further budget cuts at the state level if transformed into a block grant SNAP is politicized and beneficiaries are stigmatized as "welfare" recipients SNAP supplements, but does not fully provide a family food budget Benefits are strained during periods of food price inflation Some offices that process SNAP applications, such as those in rural areas, are not easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify and streamline enrollment procedures to benefit older adults and families with children Organize intergenerational outreach teams to help increase enrollment, and educate retailers, customers and the community about the value of SNAP
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to serve nutritious meals to eligible children in school and after-school programs and older adults in daycare settings Eligibility is based on individual poverty status and geographic areas where at least 50 percent of the population live at or below the poverty level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CACFP helped more than three million children and nearly 120,000 older adults in 2010 CACFP provides nutritious meals to children and older adults, relieving pressure on people raising children and caring for their older family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ever increasing numbers of older people who enter adult daycare programs could exceed program and provider resources CACFP benefits do not extend to residential care facilities for older adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower adult daycare providers and coordinators of child programs to collaboratively create opportunities for children and older adults to eat and learn together Identify intergenerational shared sites to serve adults and children/youth in daycare programs
Commodity Supplemental Food Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides nutritious food packages primarily to eligible older adults at least 60 years of age²⁴ State agencies store the food and distribute it to public and non-profit private local agencies. Local agencies determine the eligibility of applicants, distribute the foods and provide nutrition education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides commodity foods primarily to older adults who need additional resources to meet special dietary needs²⁵ Helps the economy by supporting producers whose food commodities are acquired by the government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threatened by budget cuts and rising food prices Funding level limits number of older adults served Not available in all states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote intergenerational approaches to nutrition education and outreach among local agencies that distribute CSFP food Provide adequate support to ensure CSFP commodities are available to those who need them in all states

Elderly Nutrition Program²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provides grants for community-based nutrition programs for older adults who may face losing their independence through congregate and home-based meals □ Provides special health assessments and education services to better help older adults meet their nutritional needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Improves diets and provides opportunities to form friendships and new social networks in diverse settings such as senior centers, schools and faith-based community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ People age 60 and older are eligible for the program, excluding many people from participating in the program □ Program is underfunded and funding amounts have not increased in several years to keep pace with rising transportation and food costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Encourage youth to deliver meals to homebound seniors, which decreases the sense of isolation among seniors and provides youth the opportunity to connect with their elderly neighbors □ Create opportunities for mutual learning and building friendship by promoting programs that involve youth in assisting older adults with shopping, planning and preparing meals □ Increase funding for the program to adequately meet needs and keep pace with transportation and food costs.
The Emergency Food Assistance Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Delivers USDA commodities to states to assist low-income people, the homeless, older adults and other eligible populations needing short-term relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Because TEFAP commodities are grown in the United States, the program helps producers and has an overall positive effect on the nation's farm economy²⁷ □ Considers foods low in sodium, sugar and fat, helping recipients maintain a healthier diet during periods of substantial hardship □ Creates public private partnerships by mixing TEFAP funds with private donations of money and food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Food distribution centers are closing or consolidating because of economic pressure, making access more difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Organize intergenerational outreach teams to help ensure older people and children are aware of available resources
The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provides fresh fruits and vegetables to school children enrolled in qualifying elementary schools □ Targets schools with the highest number of children enrolled in free and reduced-priced school lunch programs □ USDA recommends that schools also provide accompanying nutrition education, but funds provided for the program do not cover these costs. Schools must use volunteer or other resources for this part of the program if they have them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Evaluation showed students consumed a larger variety of fresh fruits and vegetables than students who did not participate in the program, and began to positively influence their families' eating habits²⁸ □ Schools reported that students had improved cognition, longer attention spans, were less hungry through the day, visited the nurse less, and had fewer behavior problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Program not available in all states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Encourage older adults to volunteer in schools where the program is active and engage them in teaching children about fruits and vegetables as recommended but not currently funded by the program

<p>School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, Afterschool Nutrition Program, Summer Food Service Program and Child Care Food Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides meals and snacks to children during the school day, after school and summer months, and to younger children in child care and Head Start programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-income children and youth who receive nutritious meals throughout the day concentrate better, achieve higher test scores and have fewer behavioral problems and better developmental outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too few schools, child care providers and nonprofits take advantage of all opportunities to feed children using federal funds Some low-income children forgo free school breakfast because traditional means-tested, before-the-bell cafeteria breakfast is stigmatized as being "just for poor kids" Competitive lunch offerings with separate serving lines deter low-income children from free lunches to pay a la carte fees or skip lunch entirely Timing: For example, the possibility of missing the bus or being dropped off late and missing school breakfast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the number of schools offering school breakfast, and particularly breakfast offered in the classroom, when children are in homeroom and can eat a nutritious breakfast while the teacher takes attendance and collects paperwork²⁹ Engage older adult volunteers to serve breakfast, including breakfast in the classroom, and providing opportunities for children to benefit from individual attention of older adults Encourage older adults to advocate for initiatives to "blend" serving lines and mix meal options so children do not feel singled out³⁰ Expand the number of summer and afterschool programs in schools and at sites such as Boys & Girls Clubs where older adults can serve children healthy meals
<p>The Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children – or WIC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides supplemental foods to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk Provides health care referrals and nutrition education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2010, WIC helped more than nine million women, infants and children each month, reaching nearly five million children, more than two million infants, and more than two million women³¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food price inflation could comprise the quality of WIC food packages³² Program at risk of budget cuts as Congress negotiates ways to reach a balanced budget agreement WIC is underfunded and therefore particularly underserves children ages two- to four-years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage mentoring programs that recruit older adults to teach young mothers about healthy eating habits and how to maximize their WIC benefits Champion intergenerational home visiting programs to support young mothers and fathers Provide adequate resources for the WIC program to meet the needs of children ages two- to four-years of age

“What really impressed me were the field hearings, and you saw it [hunger] first-hand and you knew it wasn’t something some network maybe dreamed up or whatever and found some isolated cases. I think we began to understand it was widespread and needed to be addressed.”

-Senator Bob Dole

Local Solutions that Engage the Generations: The New Mexico Collaboration to End Hunger

During summer, children in the United States experience higher rates of food insecurity because they are not in school receiving free and reduced meals. The New Mexico Collaboration to End Hunger recognized that over 200,000 children in the state were hungry over summer months. In response, it created the Intergenerational Summer Food Program. The program links children to free breakfast and lunch at community centers, churches, schools, parks, Boys & Girls Clubs and senior centers across the state. In addition, seniors are recruited to pack and distribute weekend food bags every Friday over summer so that children are provided nutritious food. The interaction of seniors, and many times teenage volunteers, packing the bags and then handing them to each child is a fun activity that brought all volunteers back week after week. Seniors also plant, tend and harvest community gardens at many of the summer food sites. This is a particularly rewarding activity to the senior volunteers because many children have never seen how a tomato or other vegetable grows. At several sites, seniors have become so involved with the children that they also volunteer to help with other activities. These include art, dance, cooking, nutrition education, jewelry and drum making - all demonstrating the incredible skill sets of the senior volunteers.³³

Though the federal government may provide benefits and reimbursements, it relies on state and local governments, and service providers to administer programs and services. For example, the federal government pays 100 percent of SNAP benefits and shares administrative costs with states. States decide where and how people can apply for benefits, which technologies to use, and how to deliver services. In addition, state agencies contract with qualified service providers to provide nutritious meals to children and older adults in a variety of settings, including child and adult day care centers, schools, and emergency shelters. States reimburse service providers based on participant eligibility rates.

At the local level, a wide range of community organizations work to meet the nutritional needs of low-income children, youth, and older adults in effective, flexible and creative ways. These organizations rely on volunteers and donors for their resources. Faith-based organizations, for example, administer feeding programs for low-income community members of all ages. In addition, independent food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters provide meals, shelter and services to children, youth, older adults, grandfamilies and other families. These local programs are often ripe for intergenerational approaches.

Program Profile: Hunger Outreach Team (HOT)

Program Name: Hunger Outreach Team (HOT)

Type of Program: intergenerational outreach team

Location: Worcester, Massachusetts

Participants: High school and college students, older adults

The Hunger Outreach Team (HOT) at Worcester State University (Mass.) is not your typical college class. For one thing, your fellow students can range in age from their late teens to their late 80s. (Worcester offers free classes for Massachusetts residents 60 and older.) For another, the program concentrates on helping people at risk of hunger learn about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and access benefits.



Courtesy of Worcester State University's Intergenerational Urban Institute

HOT is the brainchild of Maureen Power, a professor who heads Worcester State's Intergenerational Urban Institute (IUI), where the HOT and other IUI teams tackle tough urban issues, such as hunger, affordable housing, and helping elder immigrants learn English. Maureen is also a pioneer in the area of service learning. Since she began teaching 37 years ago, Maureen has emphasized to students that serving the community is every bit as important as textbooks and term papers.

"The institute channels the energies of students of all ages to address urban issues," Maureen explains. "The team spirit that evolves among the students is wonderful to watch. There's a place for everyone."

"The idea for HOT came after years of students working in foodbanks and food pantries as part of their studies," she continues. "From our experience, we realized we could best help people who are food insecure by opening them up to the idea of applying for SNAP. We began to work closely with our Congressman, Jim McGovern, who is a stalwart of SNAP, as well as the Worcester Community Action Council and Project Bread. In 2008, we received a two-year Commonwealth Core Grant to reach out to elderly adults about SNAP."

"We targeted older adults because many were living on very small incomes and were being forced to choose between food and medicine," Maureen explains. "They also resisted accepting any kind of aid because they thought it was for poor people, not for them."

Under the grant, traditional-age college students and their elder colleagues joined with low-income youth from area high schools to reach out to the elderly.

"We concentrated on our efforts in senior and public housing sites, as well as local councils on aging," Maureen notes. "We talked with older individuals and let them know that they could be eligible for SNAP. We even developed a SNAP bingo game as a fun way for them to learn about SNAP. The game was a big hit and elder residents learned a great deal in the process. At the end of our visits, we'd leave additional information and explain that we would be back to help them apply and also do any follow-up necessary on their application."

During the grant period, Ending Hunger Together crew developed an excellent working relationship with the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute and the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, which handles all SNAP applications. That collaboration, along with the streamlining of the SNAP application process, made it easier for older people to apply and receive benefits.



Courtesy of Worcester State University's Intergenerational Urban Institute

Over the past two years, HOT members also realized that many of their fellow college students, who were struggling to put food on the table, were probably eligible for SNAP. However, few of these young students knew about the program and consequently hadn't applied. "These students were hungry and running on empty," Maureen explains. "We know college is stressful and we didn't want food to become a setback for students in need. So, we created an office in the Urban Studies department where we help students apply for SNAP in confidence."

Maureen says that the intergenerational aspect is HOT's heart and soul. "Hunger spans the ages. Older adults worry that young people, children and families don't have money for food. Young people worry that older people are not getting their nutritional needs met.

"It's very heartwarming to see the way people of all ages work together. Everyone is deeply committed to HOT. There are no barriers; we all work on an equal footing."

Turning a Nightmare into a Mission

Hunger is a burning issue for Thea Aschkenase, an elder student at Worcester State. As a survivor of Auschwitz, she understands, first-hand, the devastating effect a lack of nutritious food can have on one's body and spirit. And because of her experience, she's determined to do whatever she can to ensure others never have to go hungry.

Thea was rather shy when she first came to Worcester State to earn a degree in Urban Studies.

"In coming back to school, Thea found her voice and then began sharing her story," Maureen recalls. "Now, she speaks at high schools and local chambers of commerce about her personal experiences and about the hunger that exists in the Worcester area. She helps people understand that the issue is real and it's urgent. "Thea is a favorite at South High School where she has been instrumental in helping the Youth Policy Council push for universal breakfast, the first high school in Worcester to do so. She works closely with the principal on their hunger awareness efforts and is well-loved by the students, whom she affectionately calls 'her kids.'

"When our Commonwealth grant ended in June 2010, Thea stepped forward to make sure the program didn't fade away. She came up with HOT name and helped keep the program alive." By all reckoning, Thea Aschkenase could have lost her faith in humanity after her experiences at Auschwitz. Instead, at the age of 89, she has found a new purpose in life: working with HOT to ensure no one goes hungry on her watch.

Food Response During National Disasters

The intensity of global natural disasters is increasing, along with concerns for the safety of millions of families living in densely populated urban areas. Hurricane Sandy struck the mid-Atlantic and northeast regions of the U.S. in October 2012, causing severe storms with flooding that wiped out entire towns in coastal areas. As a result, tens of thousands of people were evacuated to emergency shelters.

Unexpected natural disasters like Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina will continue to test our emergency response systems in the future. A key pillar of federal emergency response is timely coordination with state agencies to provide food assistance to organizations such as the Red Cross at mass feeding sites near emergency shelters.

After the emergency phase has subsided, too many families return to find their homes and belongings severely damaged or destroyed despite the preparations they made. They end up stretching resources to repair their homes. Sadly, many people are jobless after disasters as well.

In such circumstances, the USDA works with states to implement D-SNAP, a program that resembles SNAP, for qualifying survivors who accrue expenses to prepare for, evacuate and recover from disasters. Disaster survivors already using SNAP benefits may qualify for D-SNAP.³⁴ This federal disaster food assistance program can help alleviate anxiety about accessing food during an incredibly difficult time.



Photo by Tianlin Zhu

Intergenerational Approaches:

Using innovation to address hunger and strengthen communities



Photo by Nancy Martindale

The facts are clear. Although our current system of delivering food provides support to millions of families when they need it most, it is failing a fifth of all children and more than one in 12 seniors. We must protect the current programs that provide vital nutrition assistance to individuals of every age. At the same time, we must develop new approaches to eliminate hunger and food insecurity. We must empower our communities to correct a fractured system and embrace approaches that bring all generations together to create solutions.

Intergenerational approaches offer many benefits beyond opportunities to more efficiently address food insecurity problems. When older adults take part in intergenerational activities, they feel less isolated and experience better physical and mental health.³⁵ Children tend to do better in school, develop stronger personal and social skills, and attend school regularly.³⁶ For both older and younger participants, connecting with other generations can impart a sense of purpose and belonging. Also, staff who administer intergenerational programs feel more satisfaction with their jobs.³⁷ When different generations share a common location for their programs and activities, programs can save dollars by sharing overhead expenses and staff. Ultimately, these advantages plus cost-savings help all of us, regardless of age and income, while improving our society as a whole.

Benefits of Intergenerational Programs

For Children and Youth:

- Students with older adult tutors demonstrate improvements in critical reading skills including reading comprehension and sounding out new words.³⁸
- Youth involved in intergenerational mentoring relationships showed increased school attendance, positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding substance use and improvement in related life skills.³⁹
- Children in intergenerational programs demonstrated higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than children in non-intergenerational programs.⁴⁰

For Older Adults:

- Older adults who regularly volunteer with children burn 20% more calories per week, experience fewer falls, are less reliant on canes and perform better on memory tests than their peers.⁴¹
- Older adults with dementia or other cognitive impairments experience more positive effects during interactions with children than they did during non-intergenerational activities.⁴²
- For older adults, regular interaction with children results in an atmosphere that is more “family/home-like” and promotes social enrichment and a renewed interest in others.⁴³

Intergenerational Shared Sites: Saving Dollars While Making Sense

Nutrition programs offer prime opportunities to create intergenerational shared sites – settings where children, youth and older adults participate in services or programs at the same location. In addition to benefitting participants such sites can offer cost savings:

- Less money spent on equipment, administrative costs overhead and rent helps nutrition programs save to increase the quality and level of services provided for both older adults and children.⁴⁴
- With a wider array of options, nutrition programs can better manage shortages in one area by drawing on other sources, as needed. Possibilities include a more effective use of multiple funding streams, including grants, donations and fees for service.⁴⁵

The timing for promoting intergenerational approaches could not be better. America's two largest age cohorts, baby boomers and millennials, are eager for opportunities to serve and get involved with their communities. Imagine the possibilities if we could channel that interest and enthusiasm to address hunger and nutrition.

Innovative approaches range from teams of youth and older adults who develop and implement comprehensive strategies to eliminate hunger in their communities, to student volunteers who help deliver meals for home-bound elders while earning school service learning credits, to community garden projects that serve as learning laboratories where children engage with teachers and older adult volunteers to learn how to grow, sell and distribute varieties of fruits and vegetables.

This report features several program profiles that offer snapshots of the impact and vast potential of intergenerational approaches to address hunger and unite our communities. We hope it inspires policymakers, businesses and community leaders to champion creative, new ways to serve and engage our younger and older community members while addressing hunger and nutrition.

Program Profile: DC Central Kitchen - Campus Kitchens Project

Program Name: DC Central Kitchen Campus Kitchens Project

Type of Program: service learning program

Location: 33 high school, college and university campuses around the country

Participants: high school and college student volunteers, older adults receiving food assistance.

Number served: 1.5 million meals served, 80 graduates from job training, 12,000 volunteers

Robert Egger, founder of DC Central Kitchen, never stops envisioning new ways to attack hunger and food insecurity. His approach to hunger isn't simply to feed, it's to empower and strengthen those who are hungry. Above all, his approach aims to build a sense of community so that hunger is everyone's concern and ending hunger is everyone's mission.

One of Robert's most enduring efforts has been the DC Central Kitchen. As the Kitchen's website explains, "We use food as a tool to strengthen our community."



Photo Courtesy of Campus Kitchen Project Affiliates

Through job training, healthy food distribution, and local farm partnerships, DC Central Kitchen offers path-breaking solutions to poverty, hunger, and poor health.

Since its founding in 1989, DC Central Kitchen has prepared 25 million meals for low-income and at-risk neighbors in Washington, DC. The 5,000 meals the kitchen distributes every day are distributed at little or no cost to 100 nearby homeless shelters, transitional homes, and nonprofit organizations, saving them money and nourishing their clients.

One of the Kitchen's jewels is the intergenerational Campus Kitchens Project (CKP), which meshes community service for students and with a model approach to relieving hunger. CKP empowers the next generation of leaders to implement innovative models for combating hunger, developing food systems, and helping communities help themselves.

Robert founded the project in 1992, when the graying of America was fast becoming a topic of concern and many schools were taking a renewed interest in service learning. In Robert's mind, as America aged, a growing number of older adults would be in danger of food insecurity, yet current programs, such as food pantries couldn't answer the problem. By getting young people involved in service to seniors, CKP could offer a kinder, gentler solution. "It's a terrific way to help older people who are terrified of the future and who are broke financially and spiritually," he says. "We don't want to just feed people's stomachs, we want to do it in a way that gives them a reason to live so they want to eat another day. And we want young people to feel good about giving back to their elders."

Intergenerational by design, CKP operates in 33 schools around the country, partnering with high schools, colleges, and universities to share on-campus kitchen space, recover food from cafeterias, and engage students as volunteers who prepare and deliver meals to the community.

According to Robert, “We fervently believe that this type of intergenerational program can reveal the power of community to address problems and build bridges between the generations. The sense of being needed bonds people. For example, here in Washington, DC, students at Gonzaga College High School became fast friends with many of the seniors they serve through their campus kitchen. Now, the older adults flock to Gonzaga football and basketball games and are a very vocal cheering section.”



Photo Courtesy of Campus Kitchen Project Affiliates

Along with developing strong relationships with older adults, CKP student volunteers learn a wide array of skills through their service work. “In the past, school cafeterias were treated as filling stations where students came to fill up on food then leave. But we believe cafeterias should be a dynamic learning lab,” Robert explains. “By encouraging students to run their own Campus Kitchens, we can help them apply the lessons learned in college classrooms to real-life situations.”

CKP students develop partnerships, plan menus, run cooking shifts, organize drivers, garden, glean, and teach nutrition education to children and families. They keep track of all of the paperwork (to ensure everything's being done safely), organize fundraisers, develop curriculum, and recruit new students to get involved.



Photo Courtesy of Campus Kitchen Project Affiliates

As a result of their service learning, CKP student volunteers are acutely aware of hunger issues and continually look for new ways to end food insecurity. “Their activism can help spark some of the important changes that need to take place throughout our society,” Robert believes. “Currently, federal policies are divided: one for seniors; one for children. If we treat age groups separately, we build false generational divides when we should be building bridges. Hunger affects all ages, so we should gear our federal policies for all ages.”

Robert believes CKP students will lead the way in revamping America's approach to hunger. They have the experience, they have the skills, and they proven they have the heart to get the job done.

Key Issues and Recommendations



Photo by Robert Targett

Preserving Investments and Strengthening Federal Food Programs

In 1961, Mr. and Mrs. Alderson Muncy of Paynesville, Virginia used food stamps to buy a can of pork and beans to bring home to their 15-member family. They were the first to use food stamps since the Great Depression.

The food stamp program started as a hunger prevention experiment that eventually became the nation's premier nutrition safety net. People hailed it as an example of our country's commitment to help children, families, individuals and older adults avoid food insecurity. The program has evolved over the years and today is known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP has expanded at certain times and been subjected to devastating budget cuts, but it has remained a vital bulwark against hunger and poor nutrition.

More than 50 years have passed since the Muncy's purchased their can of pork and beans. As of July 2012, more than 46.6 million eligible people use SNAP benefits to purchase food for their own extended families.⁴⁶ That is up significantly from 2007, when approximately 27.6 million people used these vital benefits.⁴⁷ Simply put, SNAP and other federal nutrition programs currently serve as a critical lifeline for millions of individuals and families

Economy on the Precipice

At the time of this writing, Congress and the Obama administration are negotiating ways to avert the "fiscal cliff," a worrisome confluence of economic measures to take effect beginning fiscal year 2013. The activation of \$500 billion in tax increases and mandatory spending cuts across the federal budget are concurrent with the expiration of emergency unemployment benefits, cuts in Medicare reimbursements for doctors and other changes. The potential fallout could further destabilize the financial footing millions of people are trying to regain after the Great Recession began in 2007.

To achieve a deficit reduction agreement, policymakers are considering scaling back or eliminating critical social programs. The specter of across-the-board spending cuts threatens the future of federal nutrition programs. Options include cutting funding, transforming programs into block grants, reducing benefits and restricting participation. Before taking such drastic steps, policymakers should heed research that shows each dollar a beneficiary spends in SNAP benefits yields \$1.79 for the local economy.⁴⁸ Investments in SNAP and other nutrition programs not only effectively address hunger, they stimulate local economies and have a demonstrable multiplier effect.

“Public charities, food banks and church pantries are doing more than ever before, but they can't keep up with the need. We can never end hunger only through the wonderful work of local charities. Like other Western democracies, we must end our national problem of hunger through national and political leadership. Charity is nice for some things, but not as a way to feed a nation. We don't protect our national security through charity, and we shouldn't protect our families and children that way either.”

-Actor Jeff Bridges

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Protect and Strengthen Support for Critical Federal Food Programs for Low-Income Children, Youth, Older Adults, and Families

- Protect SNAP and other nutrition programs from negative structural changes, budget cuts and block grant proposals. Eliminate arbitrary eligibility exclusions like barring many legal immigrant adults from the program, and barriers to enrollment such as requiring people to re-enroll in SNAP if they move short distances away, like across county lines.⁴⁹ Avoid denying an entire household SNAP benefits if the head of household does not meet work requirements.
- Make SNAP benefits adequate to meet nutrition needs throughout the month. Restore the SNAP benefit increase scheduled to be terminated in November 2013.

Expand Access to and Availability of Critical Federal Food Programs

- Make sure participation rates are high among low-income intergenerational families.
- Improve outreach and access to federal food programs by streamlining enrollment, simplifying applications, and removing barriers, such as requiring in-person office visits for re-enrollment.
- Increase availability of federal food programs for children and youth. Implement the Breakfast in the Classroom program to ensure all children, regardless of family income, start their day with a nutritious meal.
- Expand the number of after-school and summer food program sites. Provide technical assistance and start-up grants, subsidize transportation, and reward states for finding innovative ways to increase program participation and close the hunger gap.
- Increase availability and access to federal food programs for older adults. Support targeted SNAP outreach to seniors.
- Promote the expansion of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to reach seniors in all 50 states. Increase food distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program.
- Track and keep pace with demographic changes to ensure adequate federal funding for home-delivered and congregate meals.

Funds and Food: Improving Nutrition Through Easier Access, Increased Family Income and Tax Credits

Low-income families have a hard time putting nutritious food on the table. While federal nutrition programs certainly help, many people do not access those programs due to onerous enrollment procedures, limited availability and accessibility and sometimes a profound fear of stigma.

We can help low-income families meet their families' nutrition needs by removing those barriers and creating jobs, offering financial support for continuing professional education, and protecting the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit and other benefits.

Creating Jobs for Families

People need stable and full employment in order to purchase adequate amounts of nutritious food. In addition to traditional households affected by the economic downturn, non-traditional households such as those where grandparents are raising grandchildren face unique challenges in finding jobs, addressing family commitments and meeting nutrition needs. Solutions will require federal and state governments to work alongside employers to develop and implement policies that offer full employment opportunities, job training and innovative options such as work-sharing, while meeting the needs of diverse families in a challenging economy.

Clearing Pathways to Benefits

For families in transition, securing basic benefits from programs such as SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and energy assistance can be overwhelming. Many are already contending with huge challenges, such as looking for housing, juggling child care, caring for aging parents, seeking employment and taking job training classes. We must find ways to simplify the enrollment process for basic benefits. Some states have taken steps to make it easier for families who have enrolled in one benefit to enroll in others for which they qualify through processes known as categorical eligibility and cross-certification. For example a family enrolling in TANF would automatically be eligible for SNAP benefits. These solutions allow families to focus their energies on caring for loved ones and pursuing employment opportunities rather than filing multiple applications and battling eligibility requirements.

Keeping Tax Credits for Low-Income Families

Among working families, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) lifts substantially more children out of poverty than any other government program. Statistics show EITC reduces child poverty by nearly one-quarter and yields substantial benefits by encouraging single parents to enter the workforce.⁵⁰

Similarly, the Child Tax Credit (CTC) helps working families by offsetting the costs of raising children, up to \$1000 per eligible child. The credit is partially refundable so working families can still benefit from the credit even if their income is so low that they owe little or no federal income tax. However, families who earn less than \$3,000 per year are ineligible for the credit, and some families only receive partial credit.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase Income and Access to Supports for Low-Income Families

- Encourage states to develop measures to support employment for low-income families through work-force training programs and innovative solutions, such as work-sharing.
- Ensure unemployment laws and other programs allow work-sharers and part-time employees to qualify for partial unemployment benefits.
- Support clear pathways for cross-certification or categorical eligibility between nutrition programs and other benefits, such as the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
- Support, improve, and promote outreach about tax credits benefiting low-income families, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

Food that Counts: Supporting Healthy and Nutritious Diets

Nutrition is not only a matter of putting food on the table, but putting the right food on the table. Struggling to stretch their food budgets, some families may forgo fresh fruits and vegetables for less nutritious options. According to Generations United's poll, nearly one-fourth of those surveyed may not be familiar with the types of food that make up a healthy diet for children and seniors. Some may live in areas known as "food deserts" where stores simply do not stock nutritious foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, whole-grain products, low-fat milk, and foods low in sugar and salt. The problem is especially evident in low-income areas where healthy food is often not available. When it is available, it's often high in cost and lower in quality.⁵¹

Hungry But Overweight

One in three American adults is obese. In the last 30 years, child obesity has tripled.⁵² But the obesity problem may not just be due to over-consumption. The paucity of healthy food options plays a key role. People living on low incomes and in areas with limited access to fresh foods often resort to consuming meals that are high in fat and carbohydrates and low in vitamins, minerals and essential micronutrients. Adding to the problem: these unhealthy meals are accessible and cheap. The long-term implications of a nutrient-poor diet include diabetes and heart disease among many other serious health problems.

Nutritious Federal Food Programs

Recognizing that children need nutritious food, Congress created the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The program targets schools with the highest number of children enrolled in free and reduced-priced school lunch programs and provides them with fresh fruits and vegetables to distribute to students. Teachers offer the food in the classroom while giving lessons about nutrition and healthy foods. Children can then bring this nutrition information home to their siblings, parents and grandparents, laying the foundation for a lifetime of healthy eating habits for family members of all generations.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is another federal program that provides nutritious food options. Through state agencies and Indian Tribal governments, the program provides food products to low-income Americans in need of short-term hunger relief. TEFAP commodities are distributed in conjunction

with private donations to food banks, pantries and local charities. TEFAP packages include canned and dried fruits, canned vegetables, fruit juice, meat, poultry, fish, dried egg mix, peanut butter, rice, grits, beans and cereal. Food banks report these packages are among the most nutritious foods they distribute to hungry Americans.⁵³

In addition to the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program and TEFAP, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, WIC and the major federal school nutrition programs promote good nutrition through meals and snacks that meet USDA dietary guidelines and National Institute of Medicine recommendations. These programs require sufficient administrative and financial support to reach eligible people of all ages, in all states.

Program Profile: Five & Fit

Program Name: Five & Fit

Type of Program: nutrition education for preschoolers

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Participants: preschool age children, older adult volunteers

Number served: 280 families and children

All the children gathered around Ms. Yvonne for their first taste of kiwi fruit. “If you like it, rub your tummy and say ‘I LIKE IT!’” Ms. Yvonne told them. “If you don’t, stick your tongue out and say, ‘YUCK!’” Precious followed Ms. Yvonne around for the rest of the hour, saying “I LOVE IT!” It was the beginning of a special friendship.

Strong friendships and healthy foods are at the essence of Five & Fit, a program started in 2008 by the Intergenerational Center of Temple University in Philadelphia. The program came about when the Intergenerational Center’s director, Dr. Andrea Taylor, discovered that sugary soft drinks and potato chips were often typical breakfast foods for many Philadelphia preschoolers.

“It made me wonder: if they were eating such calorie-dense, nutrient-lite ‘foods’ early in the morning, what were they having for lunch and dinner?” Andrea says.

She knew that unless something changed, these young children – and others to come – wouldn’t get the nutrition they needed to excel. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a poor diet can lead to obesity even among pre-schoolers. In fact, nearly a third of low-income preschoolers in the U.S. are overweight or obese. The CDC reports that obese children are more likely to have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes, which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

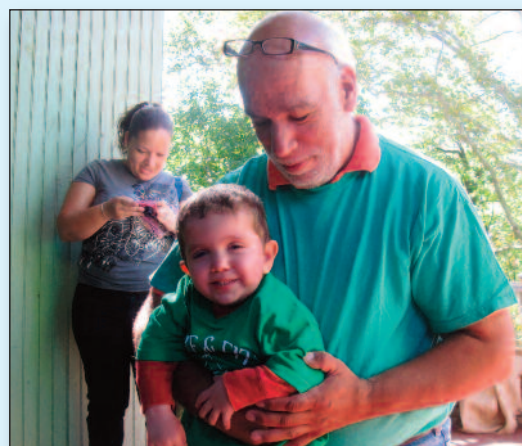


Photo Courtesy of The Intergenerational Center of Temple University

Andrea was determined to help turn the situation around for Philadelphia's young children. "For the program to succeed, we needed to involve parents, family members and formal caregivers, and help them change their own behaviors with regard to healthy food choices and regular exercise, Andrea notes. "We decided the best way to do that would be to engage older adults.

"By mobilizing older adults to influence the circle of caregivers that surround young children, it becomes a win-win situation for all," Andrea explains. "We reach young children during this very narrow window that shapes their relationship with food for the rest of their lives, and older participants have the opportunity to change the trajectory of young people within their community."



Photo Courtesy of The Intergenerational Center of Temple University

Guided by the University's Center for Obesity Research and Education (CORE), Andrea created Five & Fit to teach preschoolers about healthy food choices and offer fun ways to increase their activity levels. Yvonne Thompson-Friend, who serves as program coordinator, says Five & Fit concentrates its resources in two low-income areas where children face greater nutrition challenges.

"One is heavily Latino, the other is primarily African-American. In these communities, wisdom from elders is held in very high esteem, says Yvonne. "Many of the young mothers need help or support in learning to shop for and cook with healthy foods. The older adults act as a kind of surrogate grandparent, drawing on their own experience raising children to provide valuable tips for young parents on how to encourage children to eat healthy and get active.

"We adapt our activities to address the specific cultural backgrounds of each site's student population. For one of our events in the Latino neighborhood we walked around the town square with festive and lively music that brought out entire community. Everyone enjoyed themselves, danced and learned about healthy eating.

"We got all ages involved at the African-American site as well. Teens came in and cleared an area for healthy planting, older adults helped children plant individual seedlings in the new garden, and when the plants were harvested, everyone in the community shared the bounty."

"The program has benefited everyone," Yvonne says. "Children are eating new fruits and vegetables and asking that these foods be served at home. Parents have discovered that their children are open to trying new foods and actually prefer many healthy alternatives over less nutritious food. The parents are also grateful that their children's teachers are making nutrition and activity a priority, and for the older adults who are building relationships with their children."

Dr. Andrea Taylor adds, "The teachers themselves have a better understanding of what prevents or reduces obe-

sity specifically for pre-school age children. They enjoy incorporating Fit & Five ideas and activities into their lesson plans and love knowing that the children are excited about the program and enjoy learning from the older volunteers. The teachers think of the Fit & Five staff and volunteers as their allies in promoting important changes in the community.

“As for the older adult volunteers, working with the young children has given them a new outlook, and they’ve become effective children’s advocates. Many are improving their own eating habits and exercising more.”



Photo Courtesy of The Intergenerational Center of Temple University

Fit and Loving It

It's beautiful day in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park and Five & Fit volunteer Miguel Ramirez catches little ones as they come down the slide, smiling and squealing with delight. Playing with the kids is part of Ramirez's "job" as leader of one of two teams of Five & Fit volunteers. As a team leader, he also trains other older adults to interact with the children and parents. He loves his job and knowing that the children are learning how to grow up healthy and strong. He says volunteering gives purpose to his day.

The thought is echoed by his fellow volunteer, Arnetha Barnes. She enjoys being a surrogate grandmother to her tiny charges. "I'm a retiree, and sitting at home didn't really appeal to me," she says. "I wanted to do something constructive that would help out the community, and we've been having a great time with the kids."

Parents give the program a big thumbs-up, as well. Nilsa Gilnes says her three-year-old son is eating many more fruits and vegetables since getting involved in Five & Fit. "The program is awesome," she notes. "He's learning about how eating healthy foods make you feel better."

Fixing Food Deserts

By late afternoon, many of us are thinking about what to make for dinner. By early evening, we're in the checkout line with a cart full of groceries, including fresh and colorful vegetables for the salad bowl. Others of us might not have time to catch three buses to get to a grocery store and instead stop at the corner store for a frozen dinner. Or, we might live in a rural area that requires us to spend the little money we have on gas to drive to the grocery store in the next town. It's easier to stop at the fast food restaurant to pick up filling, but unhealthy burgers and fries. In America, the land of plenty, many places – whether densely populated urban neighborhoods or clusters of homes in rural small towns – are essentially nutrition deserts.

Some communities are tackling the problem in interesting new ways. For example, the city of Minneapolis requires corner stores to sell five varieties of prominently displayed fresh produce. Stores certified by WIC must have seven varieties and 30 pounds of fresh produce in stock. The city provides stores with displays, signage and stipends.

The city of Chester, Pennsylvania has been without a grocery store for 11 years. Located just outside Philadelphia, Chester will soon open the first nonprofit grocery store in the country. With the support of Philabundance, a local hunger-relief organization, the 13,000-square-foot store will provide nutritious staples – fresh produce, meats, dairy and seafood – at low prices. The project has received bipartisan support from Congress and the private sector, including Sunoco and other funders. Qualifying shoppers who sign up for a free annual membership will receive a percentage of their purchases as “Fare and Square Bucks” which can be applied to future purchases.

In Seattle, a group of Bainbridge Graduate Institute students are opening “StockBox Neighborhood Groceries” in low-income neighborhoods. These stores are social enterprise projects that offer a nutrition oasis in urban food deserts. Made of 12' x 24' shipping containers, these efficiently constructed stores provide affordable, nutritious food in previously inaccessible places

Other areas of the country are experimenting with community gardens to supply fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Such gardens are increasingly being developed on schoolyards, seniors living complexes and deserted inner city lots. The gardens bring together community members of all ages to plant, harvest, sell or consume the food they grow. The harvest provides food to the community while building social relationships and helping individuals acquire entrepreneurial skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Support and Promote Approaches Encouraging Healthy and Nutritious Diets

- Ensure SNAP benefits are adequate for families to purchase healthy food.
- Ensure schools comply with new nutrition standards.
- Encourage USDA to move forward on rules designed to make food in child care meals and snacks

funded by the federal government healthier as well as rules limiting what food schools can sell or offer outside of the federally funded meals programs.

- Expand support for The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program that provide nutritious options for low-income people of all ages.
- Support efforts to provide produce and other healthy food options in “food deserts” by making fresh fruits, vegetables and nutritious foods available in corner stores.
- Champion nonprofit grocery stores, farmers markets, local vegetable carts and “stock box neighborhood groceries.”
- Increase federal reimbursement rates to providers to accurately reflect the total costs of providing nutritious meals.
- Promote community gardens through collecting and sharing best practices and offering local tax incentives.

Program Profile: The Great Friendship Link & The Backyard Produce Project

Program Name: The Great Friendship Link & The Backyard Produce Project

Type of Program: intergenerational gardening

Location: Poway, California

Participants: older adults in assisted living, pre-school through pre-teen children and youths

Number served: hundreds of low-income individuals and families

CEO Sam Stelletello had a clear vision of what he wanted to offer residents of Sunshine Care, the alternative assisted living community that he owns and operates. He chose the site carefully: 32 acres in the magnificent mountains of Poway in San Diego County, California. And, he made sure the residences provided a home-like atmosphere where residents could enjoy songbirds, wildflowers, and other natural elements right outside their door. But Sam wasn't content; he wanted to offer something more.

“For some time, Sam had wanted to find a useful purpose for the undeveloped land on the campus. Zoning laws wouldn't allow for any more building and Sam hated to think the land would go to waste,” explains Michelle Andreasen, Executive Director at Sunshine Care. “So after pondering the idea for a while, Sam decided to put in some gardens and a greenhouse. He was concerned about nutrition and wanted to make sure the residents always had access to fresh vegetables and fruits. And he figured that most of the residents had grown up on farms and would enjoy gardening again.”

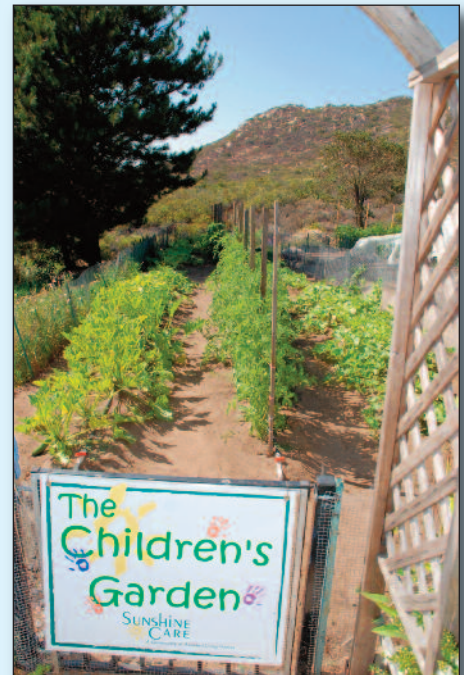


Photo Courtesy of Sunshine Care Assisted Living Homes

Today, Sunshine Care boasts five different gardens and a greenhouse, as well as a multitude of opportunities for residents to garden with children and youth from nearby neighborhoods. One of those gardens is a designated children's garden where Sunshine Care residents and children, from pre-schoolers to pre-teens, work together.

Lisa Lipsey, Director of Community Relations and Intergenerational Programs at Sunshine Care, got the idea for intergenerational gardening when she invited a friend's young daughter to help plant seeds in the green house. Sam had long expressed an interest in having an intergenerational program and gardening seemed to Lisa to present a terrific opportunity to meld both interests.



Photo Courtesy of Sunshine Care Assisted Living Homes

The first children to take part in the gardening program were from military families and often lived far away from their grandparents. They quickly bonded with the residents who served as surrogate grandparents. Now, children from a nearby Montessori school, home schoolers and others with flexible schedules come regularly to garden. As the residents and children gardened together, the youngsters lost their shyness and became more comfortable talking with older people, even those with disabilities. Wariness turned into respect.

Farmer Roy Wilburn, a horticulturist employed by Sunshine Care, often makes presentations to the children and integrates other lessons into the gardening experience. He helps children choose plants that grow quickly, like carrots and radishes, so the kids can see progress. He also helps them set a planting schedule that allows Sunshine Care's kitchens to better plan their menus.



Photo Courtesy of Sunshine Care Assisted Living Homes

All the gardening is organic and residents enjoy eating the just-picked vegetables, as well as fruit from the campus orchards. Even more, the residents love sharing meals several times a month with the children. The bonding that takes place between residents and the children is the biggest benefit of all: it has transformed strangers into family.

Helping Others: The Backyard Produce Project

The five gardens and two fruit orchards at Sunshine Care produce over 12,000 lbs of fresh produce annually for the residents. But there are also four additional Community Food Bank Gardens at Sunshine Care! Sunshine Care formed

a collaborative with the Palomar Health Foundation, Friends and Family Community Connection, a community of senior volunteers, local Girl and Boy Scouts, the San Diego Christian Home School Network, and the Poway Unified School District Transition Program, which serves disabled adults who are leaving school. The collaborative, known as the Backyard Produce Project, grows organic produce and donates the food to local families in need.

“Produce is difficult to procure in low-income areas, so people often go without fresh vegetables,” says Lisa. “Our main goal is to provide nutritious food that people want to eat. We put a lot of planning and thought into what we plant and grow foods that people are familiar with and know how to prepare.”

Like the Children’s Garden, the Backyard Produce Project is intergenerational. For instance, preschoolers helped clear the weedy terrain for planting and local Girl and Boy Scouts built fences surrounding the gardens. Sunshine Care residents, local senior and youth groups and their parents all help plant, harvest, and distribute the vegetables. Residents get to decide whether or not they want to take part in the gardening programs. “We’ve found that once our residents see everyone in action, they want to get involved,” says Lisa. “We see a whole different energy when kids come to the campus. Their presence definitely has an impact on our residents’ joy and quality of life.”

A Tale of Two Residents

Abe Gets a Turkey

Getting his first turkey was no easy feat for 86-year-old Abe. To achieve his elusive goal, it had taken months of practice, patience, and taking lessons from two youngsters—Joshua and Jessica—that he’d met through the garden program. But getting that turkey was worth every moment of preparation. After all, how many octogenarians do you know can say they got three strikes in a row (known as a turkey) while bowling on a Wii?

Pat Finds a Friend

Before moving into Sunshine Care, Pat’s memory loss had left her feeling secluded. She was, according to her daughter Donna, losing weight and simply “fading away.”

Donna felt the best solution would be to move Pat into Sunshine Care. Pat, herself, wasn’t convinced. Each night, she would repack her room and ask to go home. Then, several weeks after her move, she met eight-year-old Jessica. The two bonded instantly. Over the next few months, Pat and Jessica spent time together, gardening, sharing meals, going on outings, or just talking quietly. Now, Pat rarely mentions going home—and her appetite has returned. And even though she can’t remember most folks’ names, she has no problem recalling Jessica. In fact, every chance she gets, Pat shares a photo of the two of them feeding a giraffe. Somehow, a young girl’s affection has broken through the wall of memory loss.

Benefits for Business: Engaging the Private Sector

Engaging the business community in supporting food assistance efforts brings strong partners to the table to fight hunger and malnutrition. Such efforts help businesses improve community relations, motivate staff and engage customers who increasingly expect brands to demonstrate social responsibility. Policy-makers should offer incentives such as allowing business taxpayers to deduct the fair market value of food they donate and transportation costs to deliver that food. Business leaders can also take a range of actions to promote nutrition among their employees and communities.

HOW THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN HELP

- Educate company leadership and employees about how supporting food assistance programs helps business by improving community relations, burnishing company images and providing tax benefits.
- Encourage employee volunteerism by holding company-wide volunteer days or offering time off for volunteering for activities that support food assistance programs.
- Encourage employee contributions to food assistance programs by offering to match such contributions.
- Establish a wellness program that promotes healthy eating and lifestyles among employees.
- Establish a worksite farmers market where employees can conveniently purchase healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles by covering an additional percentage of the cost of health insurance premiums for employees who meet biometric markers, such as a healthy body mass index (BMI), stable blood pressure and blood sugar readings.
- Offer reimbursements to employees for personal investments in their own health, such as consulting with a registered dietitian or employing a personal trainer.

"Investment in the eradication of hunger today is a good business decision. If we fail to make this investment, it is doubtful that we can sustain healthy economic growth. Without this investment, our nation may disintegrate into a country sharply divided between those who have enough to eat and those who do not."

- Alan G. Hassenfeld, Chair & CEO of Hasbro, Inc.

Eating Better Together: Coordinating Services to Serve Family Members of All Ages and Promote Engagement

Our network of federal, state and local food programs meet critical nutrition needs, yet the system is fragmented. Policymakers did not create the patchwork of programs with today's diverse family structures in mind. Multigenerational families and families in which grandparents are raising their grandchildren often have difficulty navigating the maze of programs with widely varying eligibility requirements. Advocates for specific age groups have effectively championed benefits for their constituents. However, age-restricted programs ignore the fact that children and seniors live in families, not in isolation. We need to promote intergenerational strategies that meet the needs of all family members and strengthen communities by engaging citizens in helping their neighbors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Promote Coordination of Food Programs to Better Serve Families

- Promote coordination across federal nutrition programs to better serve family members of all ages.
- Encourage states to develop comprehensive intergenerational strategies to:
 - Help older adults and children and youth gain access to and participate in nutrition programs.
 - Improve delivery and coordination of nutrition and other assistance programs to better meet the needs of family members of all ages.
- Modify age-restricted federal food programs to incorporate comprehensive, integrated, intergenerational approaches.
- Include incentives for using intergenerational approaches in federal legislation, such as those in the Older Americans Act, that encourage joint meal programs with schools.
- Promote co-location of children and older adult food programs so the different generations can interact and bond with each other.
- Remove barriers to the creation of intergenerational shared sites.
- Change the perception of school cafeterias from “filling stations” to intergenerational learning laboratories.
- Replace the traditional “senior center models” with ones that provide nutritious food while engaging older adults in service and other intergenerational opportunities.
- Engage students in volunteer opportunities where they can serve and learn from older adults in food and nutrition settings.
- Position older adults as educators and advocates for children's nutritional health, and students as educators and advocates for senior nutritional health.
- Involve National Service programs, such as Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve, in focusing on intergenerational nutrition needs in under-served communities.

Program Profile: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Program Name: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (A program of the Athens Community Council on Aging)

Type of Program: case management program to support grandparents who are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren.

Location: Athens, Georgia

Participants: grandparents and grandchildren, college students

Number served: 30 grandparent-headed families in six Northeast Georgia counties

When a 2010 survey revealed that 78 percent of clients did not always have enough money to buy the food they needed, the folks running the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) program in Athens, Georgia were stunned. But the statistic that left them reeling was this: one in five grandchildren surveyed said they only ate two meals a day.

The sobering statistics presented a clear and compelling call to action for the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA), which administers GRG. And the Council's chief operating officer, Eve Anthony, along with project coordinator, Paige Tidwell, answered the call.

Shock Gives Way to Action

In the fall of 2010, with a generous grant from the Brookdale Foundation, GRG and the University of Georgia's Department of Food and Nutrition worked together to design a nutrition and exercise education program that helps grandparents and grandchildren understand how to make healthy food choices, create healthy menus on a budget, and exercise to stay healthy. Students measuring outcomes of this program discovered the high statistics of food insecurity within this group.



Photo courtesy of Athens Community Council on Aging

“Clearly, we needed to help our grandfamilies get better access to adequate and appropriate food,” Eve notes. “At the same time, we knew that we couldn’t tackle this issue alone, so we immediately began seeking partnerships with other groups who are passionate about fighting hunger.”

GRG first turned to the faculty of the University of Georgia's Department of Food and Nutrition to help implement a standardized measurement of food insecurity within the GRG program. This screening allows program staff to measure program results and ensure resources reach the most at-risk and food-insecure clients.

At the same time, the University's Office of Service Learning was working with students to launch a Campus Kitchen program—a student-run venue where volunteers would prepare and provide nutritious meals at no cost to grandfami-

lies, using rescued food from grocery stores, restaurants and a student-run university garden. The ACCA was very excited to be a partner and recipient of the services of this new program. In a short period of time, the Campus Kitchen program went from planning meetings to distributing small numbers of prepared meals to what it is today a program that provides approximately 600 meals and 250 additional pounds of supplemental food each month to over 150 of ACCA clients and their families.

Collaboration Is the Key

Next, GRG turned to another long-term partner, the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. “In the past, the food bank had provided us with emergency food boxes for our families, says Paige. “In 2012, we approached them about establishing a Summer Food Program for the grandkids in our program. During the school year, the children received free lunches. But over the summer, they often had to go without lunch.

“Both Wal-Mart and Kohl’s department stores provided funding for the program and the food bank supplemented it. Because of their generosity, we were able to provide our grandfamilies with 4,620 meals during the 10 weeks of summer vacation this year,” Paige notes proudly. “And recently we became a Mobile Food Pantry site. This allows us to provide more than 10,000 pounds of food to our agency clients with the most need. The food bank supplies us with fresh produce and other commodities for a minimal fee.”

A third partner, the Athens Land Trust, worked with the ACCA to construct two onsite community gardens. One is an intergenerational garden. The other is a demonstration garden. This past summer, the two gardens had their second harvest, together yielding over 400 pounds of food. Although most of the harvest was used for other agency programs, as the gardens grow, more fresh produce will be available to GRG families.

New Stats Stun: In a Good Way!

These efforts are all part of ACCA’s “Squash Senior Hunger” campaign. The campaign aims to raise awareness of food insecurity, identify those at greatest risk of hunger, and create and enhance community partnerships that address food insecurity and achieve positive results.

The effort appears to be working among GRG clients. Early in 2011, a health screening survey showed that 77 percent of GRG clients scored below average on the physical health component, and 46 percent of clients scored below average on the mental health component. By June of 2011, the same survey showed significant improvements: a climb of 15 percentage points for physical health and 19 percentage points for mental health.

Paige notes, “Along with conducting the health survey, GRG has been monitoring the food insecurity of our families. In one month, we saw food insecurity among our current clients drop by 32 percent. That’s tremendous progress! Nonetheless, we are still at the very beginning of our fight to end hunger in the GRG program.”

Conclusion



Photo by A. Eder

Children, youth, older adults and their families must be shielded from hunger. As this report shows, strong nutrition programs and emergency food assistance is essential at all times. Disasters can strike at any moment, and millions of people experience their own small, daily disasters that cause continuing anxiety about meeting basic nutrition needs.

Access to healthy, affordable food is a basic need. With it, families avoid making difficult choices between feeding their loved ones and meeting other priorities. High quality and diversity of food helps children and youth flourish both developmentally and academically. Nutritious food helps older adults maintain their health and continue to contribute to their families and communities. And, access to quality and affordable food keeps the costs of health care down and workforce competence up.

When people go hungry and undernourished, we pay the price, as individuals and a society. That doesn't have to happen. America is fortunate to have an abundance of people of different ages and abilities who are problem-solvers and sources of support for each other. They are also leaders. As the profiles in this report show, intergenerational approaches can effectively address the twin problems of hunger and inadequate nutrition. Through additional innovative intergenerational models, we can recast single-age interventions as integrated opportunities to stimulate learning and improve health.

In addition, the recommendations in this report can help strengthen the economy now and in the future. Policymakers must understand, above all, that our country cannot sacrifice nutrition programs during difficult negotiations to balance the budget. To do so, would leave America in a precarious state.

Americans have shown, time and again, that they have limitless reserves of energy and creativity to tackle tough problems. But it will take a concerted, sustained effort by everyone – individuals, nonprofits, business, and government – to ensure our friends and loved ones have access to nutritious food. Working together, we can look forward to a future free of hunger. And we are stronger when we work together.

"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

– Muhammed Ali

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