

THE FACE OF HUNGER

When we talk to people who seek services from FOOD for Lane County or our partner agencies, this is what we hear. They do their best. They do without. They worry about getting through the month. They pay their bills first. Whatever is left they spend on food. They clip coupons and shop clearance bins and turn the heat down. They cobble together income from Social Security, SNAP benefits, energy assistance and the food they get from pantries supplied by FOOD for Lane County. Older adults living on fixed incomes face difficult choices between keeping the heat on and paying for prescriptions.

Of people who use food pantries, the average household size is 2.4 people. 19% report some kind of education beyond a high school diploma. 11% of people who benefit from food boxes are 65 or older. 18% of households have one or more member who is a veteran. 35% are single. 79% are white. 33% are households with children. 17% own their own home. 60% live in extreme poverty. 77% of survey respondents prepare meals at home every day.

Pantry shoppers are able to shop for a 3- to 5-day supply of food for their household. Pantry shoppers can taste meals prepared from pantry items and get recipes and cooking tips from OSU Extension volunteers. Shoppers can enroll in cooking and shopping classes to learn good nutrition and how to shop on a limited budget. Sometimes they are offered gardening classes, or they might receive a tomato start to plant at home.

FOOD for Lane County's core mission is providing emergency food. We also offer educational programs that teach people how to cook, how to grow their own food, how to shop on a limited budget and how to make healthy food choices. We are also involved in advocacy work to ensure that our elected officials understand hunger in our cities, county and state.



ALBERTINA

"The money goes so quickly. Sometimes it just isn't enough."

Albertina and her husband immigrated to the United States from Guatemala. The trip was long, hard and expensive. Some days they went without food. There were days they slept on the road. "Thank God we are here now, because we are free. My husband works every day in the mountains cutting brush. He makes little bundles, and for every 100 bundles he gets \$50. From the \$50 he is earning, \$10 comes out to pay for his ride. We try to make it work. I have two children in Guatemala and I need to send them money. I have to pay my rent and electricity. The money goes so quickly. Sometimes it just isn't enough, so the food box helps us a lot. Thank you so much for that box, truly. Because in our country they don't treat us like this, giving us a box of food. That you will never see, not even the mention of it."



ALEX

"I get to come out here and grow vegetables for people who really need them."

Alex was 16 and a member of FOOD for Lane County's Youth Farm Crew when we talked to her. Youth Farmers receive job skills and training in gardening, leadership, financial management and nutrition while growing food for FOOD for Lane County, a 65-member CSA program and two produce stands. Many of the Youth Farmers know what it's like to go home and not have food on the shelves. Many of them are dealing with adult issues at a very young age. Most of them have fewer opportunities, fewer advantages and less support than other kids their age. At the farm, they have the opportunity to give back and be part of the hunger solution, and they're empowered by that opportunity. "I love farming. I love watching the vegetables grow. You plant them and then three weeks later you see this beautiful tomato or broccoli and it's like, 'Look at that! I grew that!' I get to come out here and grow vegetables for people who really need them and don't have access to good food. I think agriculture is a really interesting field. After I get out of high school, I would like to study it."



HUNGER IN LANE COUNTY

Real stories about real people facing hunger.



EMPLOYMENT

When asked what would help improve their situation, 32% of respondents say employment, followed by affordable housing (30%) and higher wages (30%). 60% have someone in their household who has been unemployed during the past two years, down from 66% in 2012.



57% of recipients are working, retired, or have a disability that prevents them from working



INSURANCE

Hospital and doctor's bills continue to be a high source of debt for families, so the fact that more adults have health insurance is good news — 71% of respondents in 2015, up from 54% in 2012. Households with children that have health insurance increased to 82% in 2015 — up from 71% in 2012.



53% of households included at least one member receiving coverage under the Oregon Health Plan

SNAP

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) continues to be the first line of defense against hunger. The percentage of households that receive SNAP remains steady at 60%, but most say that SNAP benefits do not last the whole month.

BUDGET

76% of survey respondents reported not having enough money to buy food at some point in the past six months. Food boxes help stretch limited dollars. When asked what getting a food box made possible, survey respondents reported the following:



14% said that a food box made it possible for them to pay for medication



33% were able to pay utility bills



28% were able to pay their rent or mortgage

OUR PARTNERS



TO GET ANSWERS, WE ASK QUESTIONS

Addressing hunger means understanding hunger. Every two years, FOOD for Lane County surveys food box recipients to learn why they seek help from a food pantry and what would help improve their situation. The data we gather from this Hunger Factors Survey helps us understand the problems they face so that we can better serve them and advocate for them.

In April 2015, we surveyed food recipients at 30 emergency food pantries in Lane County. 1,148 households completed the survey — 13% of households served that month. Some of the data — along with real stories from real people experiencing hunger — are presented here.

43% OF LANE COUNTY HOUSEHOLDS STRUGGLE TO MEET BASIC NEEDS

A United Way of Lane County report released in January 2016 reported that one in five Lane County households are at or below the federal poverty line and another 23% above that line still don't earn enough to meet the basic costs of living. In all, 43% of Lane County households struggle to meet basic costs. Contributing factors include a large number of low-wage jobs, a high cost of living, difficulty finding jobs near housing and a lack of sufficient public and private assistance to meet needs.



50% of those eligible for food assistance are accessing food boxes.

The Federal Poverty Level for a household of four is \$25,250, but according to the United Way report a family of four living in Lane County would need an annual income of \$54,516 and a single adult \$18,300 to get by on a "survival budget."



66% say they worry about when and where they will get their next meal.

PANTRIES HELP

More people are working, but that doesn't mean fewer people are hungry. Since 2009, the number of people seeking help from a food pantry has remained steady — but more people are seeking help more often. Pantries help, and they're making a difference in the lives of the people they serve.



73% of people say that when they add the food they get from the pantry to their other food supplies, they are able to meet their food needs for the month.



LARRY

"I'm pretty strapped by the third week of every month."

Larry was doing okay. Working, paying his bills, getting by. Then one night everything changed. A motorcycle accident broke most of his ribs, punctured both lungs and separated his collarbone. He was unconscious for three days and spent a week in the hospital. He tried to go back to work after the accident, but his injuries made it difficult. So, at the age of 62 he retired. Now Larry lives in an apartment complex for limited-income seniors. He receives a small check from Social Security, \$189 in food stamps and a once monthly food box through FOOD for Lane County's Senior Grocery Program (formerly Brown Bag). "I'm pretty strapped by the third week of every month. When my food stamps start to run low and choices are thin, Brown Bag comes along in the nick of time. And it's healthy food. Fresh produce, juices, cheese, some really good canned meat, cereals, things that are nutritious." Larry also helps run the Senior Grocery Program where he lives — unloading the FOOD for Lane County truck when it arrives, organizing the food on tables and putting food into cloth grocery bags that residents then take to their individual apartments.



VICKI

"It was about 'how do I survive?' You get the gear. You get the sleeping bag. You figure out where the food is."

Most of the people we serve are housed, but those who are not face some of the greatest challenges. Food and shelter are essentials for life. The face of homelessness is changing. The fastest growing segments of the homeless population are women and families with children. Life on the streets can be perilous for homeless men and women. Surviving on the street takes more work than we realize. Homeless men and women are often sleep-deprived, cold, wet and sick. Their minds, hearts and bodies are exhausted. With no transportation and little or no money, they can spend all day getting to food and maybe an appointment before they need to search for a safe place to sleep. Vicki is grateful for the meals she receives at FOOD for Lane County's Dining Room. She knows what it's

like to be homeless. "It's a profound experience being on the street. I've been there. It was about 'how do I survive?' You get the gear. You get the sleeping bag. You figure out where the food is."

HEALTH

Better nutrition can combat serious health issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure, but eating healthy can be expensive. 54% of survey respondents say that cost is the biggest reason they don't eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. 36% have watered down food or drink to make them last longer.

At FOOD for Lane County we work to give people the tools they need to make healthy food choices. Our free Cooking Matters classes teach adults how to cook and shop healthier on a limited budget. 94% of Produce Plus participants say they eat more fruits and vegetables and 85% have more food at each meal as a result of participating in this program. 42% of seniors participating in our Senior Grocery Program say they eat more fruits, vegetables, lean protein and calcium. Our gardens grow fresh food for distribution through our county-wide network of partner agencies while providing opportunities for youth and adults to gain skills in gardening, nutrition, and community building.

Food pantries provide staples and fresh produce, which makes it possible for people to prepare balanced, nutritious meals. 22% of survey respondents say that because of the food they get from a pantry they have more energy for work and family.



"My whole attitude has changed. My outlook is better. I feel more confident in my abilities to shop for, prepare and cook nutritious, healthy meals. I understand why good eating habits are important in contributing to my overall health. Thank you for the opportunity to participate." -Cooking Matters graduate

YOU CAN HELP

Numbers can't tell the whole story, but they do help illustrate the scope of hunger in Lane County. At FOOD for Lane County we know that everyone comes to this problem of hunger in a different way. We have developed unique programs exactly for that reason — to meet people where they are, whether they are homebound, unhoused, working, retired, disabled, families with children or single adults. If you would like to learn more or find out how you can help, contact us today.



FOOD FOR LANE COUNTY

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VISION

To eliminate hunger in Lane County

MISSION

To alleviate hunger by creating access to food We accomplish our mission by soliciting, collecting, rescuing, growing, preparing and packaging food for distribution through a county-wide network of social service agencies and programs, and through public awareness, education and community advocacy.

FOOD for Lane County is an equal opportunity provider.

Hunger in Lane County © 2016

ROB

"I didn't feel like I mattered to society anymore."

Rob suffered a traumatic brain injury while serving with his Oregon Army National Guard infantry unit in Iraq. Upon his return to the United States, he was also diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The diagnoses qualified him for full disability but left him feeling useless. "I kind of shut myself away. I didn't feel like I mattered to society anymore." Rob found purpose again when he started volunteering at his local food pantry, where his family also gets a food box. "I just kind of fell in love with it. Being at the pantry I felt like I could be around people and function properly. Big word there — function. It boosted my self-esteem. Many of the people we serve have some form of disability. I see other vets there. I can relate to them. I see that I'm not alone. It's all worth it when that one person comes through who's really hurting and they give you a hug saying 'you helped me so much.' The look of relief and hope I see on people's faces when they get to feed their families for at least another week — sometimes it brings me to tears."



LETXY

"Some people have never been in a pantry before. It takes everything they have to walk through that door."

Like many food box recipients, Letxy also volunteers at her local food pantry, because she wants to give back. Letxy knows it can be hard to ask for help. "Some people have never been to a pantry before. Sometimes it takes everything they have to walk through that door. My life is no different. I'm just like them. We're all human." She completed a six-week Cooking Matters class offered by FOOD for Lane County. Cooking Matters classes are one way FOOD for Lane County is helping people help themselves. Letxy and her fellow students learned how to cook with spices, how to make hummus, how to read nutrition labels, how to make healthy food choices and

how to make the most of their dollars at the grocery store. "Now when I get apples from the pantry, I make apple butter and apple rings. I use rosemary and oregano more than ever before. I always use fresh garlic. I steam my vegetables now. I used to microwave them. I learned to massage kale. My family loves my chicken fried steak. It's cheap. I bake a lot in the winter to heat the house up. It's cheaper than turning the heat on."

GENEVIEVE

"My daughter gave me a reason to succeed. I did this for her."

Genevieve enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program at Lane Community College to pursue her dream of becoming a chef and to make a better life for herself and her daughter. "My daughter gave me a reason to succeed. I did this for her." Genevieve lives on a tight budget, especially when it comes to food. As a student, she puzzled together whatever resources she could get by — scholarships, financial aid, food stamps and a food box from her local pantry. "I'm so incredibly thankful for the food pantry. It helped put food on the table when the food stamps ran out. When you're a student, to have a resource like that is really helpful. To keep food on the table, to keep your energy up, to say healthy, to stay focused — it's so important. I'm so thankful the resources were there when I needed them, but I really want to be able to support ourselves and be self-sufficient."



THE IMPACT OF HUNGER ON CHILDREN

"I hope my kids can be successful and happy. I hope they don't have to struggle like I did. I will go without a meal before my kids go without. I'll make sure they have something to eat because that's what you do as a mom."

-Jennifer, Cottage Grove

Too many Lane County families struggle to pay for basic needs. Parents worry that their kids are getting enough to eat. More than one in four children in Lane County live in food-insecure households. Hunger has lasting consequences for children. Children who are hungry have a harder time concentrating, are unable to perform at their best and are sick more often. Children need good nutrition to grow, to thrive, to stay healthy and to do well in school.

