Hunger Is Hunger for Students No Matter What Age

No matter the age, hunger and its consequences on students is alarming. Dr. Chris Whaley, President of Roane State Community College, said, “I used to think in terms of hunger being associated mainly with K-12. I thought that somehow when students graduate from the 12th grade and come to Roane State Community College, that magically and mysteriously, hunger isn’t an issue anymore.”

The reality is that, “More than 40% of [college] students deal with some level of food insecurity. That may not mean they have nothing to eat, but it means they have too little to eat. They may be skipping meals. They may have one meal a day instead of three meals a day,” Dr. Whaley said. The effects of COVID-19 have posed an even greater threat to the students who were working one or multiple jobs and are now unemployed.

Hunger is threatening the future plans of many college students. “Even if you paid every outstanding bill they might owe to the college their attending — if they are hungry, if they can’t concentrate, they’re not going to succeed,” Dr. Whaley explains.

When the reality of college student hunger was recognized, leaders at Roane State Community College started food pantries on their campuses — three so far, including the newest at Oak Ridge branch on January 16, 2020. They couldn’t have done it without your sacrifice. According to Dr. Whaley, you’re helping “around 5,800 students spread over our nine campuses, with about 2,200 here at Oak Ridge.”

“Of the many student success initiatives that we have put into place, there is none more important than trying to address food insecurity,” Dr. Whaley said. “Second Harvest is critical to our food pantries. There’s not a stronger word I can think of to describe how important they are. This is our need but not our expertise, so we lean on the experts, like Second Harvest, to do it right.”

Oak Ridge has a slogan at their food pantry — “Brain Food! Study. Snack. Succeed.” Followed by “Cost? None. Worry about your tests, not your meals.” As a result of your generosity, more college students are succeeding because they’re getting the nourishment they need. Thank you for changing lives today and into the future.
Words of Hope

I was very happy to say goodbye to 2020, only for what COVID-19 has done to our country and our world. When has this world ever had one concern that we all had to deal with and care about each other? The politics and racial divide showed the worst side of people. All the while, we saw many more people caring for each other by providing food, housing, clothing and more so their neighbors could get through the pandemic.

Unfortunately, there was a compassionate component of people helping neighbors that was lost by the media. People were donating to Second Harvest who hadn’t given in 10 years. It had nothing to do with race, religion or politics. They just wanted to see their neighbors fed — pure and simple.

Our country came to a halt in mid-March. As first responders, we couldn’t close, so our team kept coming in no matter what to make sure people were getting the food they needed — and the need was profound.

We provided meals for an additional 40,000 people in March and again in April. There were people who never thought they would need a food pantry who were in line for food. Overall, the demand doubled from 250,000 pounds of food distributed per week to 500,000 pounds per week. In fact, the need for food is still much higher than “normal” and hasn’t gone down since mid-March.

Remarkably, what I thought was impossible became possible because of the sheer determination of local pantries and Mobile Pantries going to rural counties. It was outstanding that we could put food on trucks and distribute it like we did — and at double the amount. People could not stand in line or shop from a pantry, so we required more volunteers and operations to load up cars instead. Because of your help, we did it.

As chaotic as it was, humanity is how I would define 2020. I saw the beauty of what we learned about each other — people working together, looking beyond the negativity of the news, caring for their neighbors and East Tennesseans in other counties, because there was a desperate need. Because of your generosity, people’s lives were changed, giving each person hope and food when they needed it most. Thank you for standing with us. Thank you for making a huge difference.

Sincerely,

Elaine
Elaine Streno
Executive Director

Sometimes Builders Need Support Too

Billy is good with his hands. “I do new homes to remodels, from painting, patching a hole-in-the-wall, to decks, and docks. You name it; I build it,” he said.

Weather can suddenly change things for Billy. “Winter and rain slow things down. Lately, this weather has killed us. It has stopped me from working on the house I’m building, and that’s all I’ve got right now,” Billy explains.

With three to feed in his household, including a two-year-old boy, Billy has to do whatever he can to feed his family. Struggling to live on little or no income led him to get help at Sunset Gap Community Center, one of our pantry partners.

“We enjoy the stuff that we get from here. Sometimes, we need extra food, and that baby likes to eat a lot, so, we come out here and get what we need and use it,” Billy said.

Because of friends like you, families like Billy’s get food they wouldn’t have otherwise. “We’re really thankful that they’re providing food for us. We get a really nice amount that lasts longer than just a day or so. It’s worth coming all the way out here. It really does bridge the gap for us when I can’t work,” Billy confesses.

Thank you for caring enough to help families when they need it most.

“"We’re really thankful that they’re providing food for us."

-BILLY
Injured and No Income

Deven got a deep gash in his arm when he fell on a piece of metal at work. Later, it got infected, and “I had to go to the hospital, and I didn’t like that,” he said.

As a laborer, Deven doesn’t have disability insurance to help him financially while not working. He said, “I’m just waiting to get healed up, so I can go back to work.” Until then, he waits patiently as the bills stack up and what food he has dwindles away. “It’s pretty tough when you’re not bringing in an income,” he said.

The onset of COVID-19 is making it even more difficult for Deven to find work that he can do with his disability. Paying bills and keeping enough food on the table is a real struggle for folks like Deven who are injured, got sick or were laid off due to COVID-19.

“Things are very tight right now,” Deven admits. “I don’t have much in my cupboard, but I try to keep at least something in there, like rice.” Then he found out about one of our agency partners, Providence House Food Pantry at Highland View Church of Christ. Because of your faithful support, Deven’s life has changed significantly.

“I don’t have much in my cupboard, but I try to keep at least something in there, like rice.”

-DEVEN

“The food pantry is really good, man,” Deven said. “Everything’s really good. They gave me a lot more than I expected. This food really helps me out for the month. At least I don’t have to worry about food and can pay my bills instead. I really appreciate it.”

Thank you to all our donors and partners who stand with us to help feed people in desperate situations, only amplified by COVID-19. To you, Deven says, “Thank you; I really appreciate it. You guys really do help out a lot of people.”

Special Thanks

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING SECOND HARVEST

Clayton Family Foundation • Rick Cox Construction • Atmos Energy Corporation
Illness Crushes Family Overnight

Courtney and her husband volunteer, helping their 65-year-old neighbor who has Cerebral Palsy and his 92-year-old great aunt. “She just can’t take care of him anymore,” Courtney said. She gets food for their neighbors and her family at Strawberry Plains Elementary School’s food pantry — one of our agency partners.

“There are five in my household: my husband, me and our three children — 16, 10 and 5,” Courtney explains. As for her neighbor, “He’s my fourth child, just a little taller.”

An illness can crush a family overnight with little or no hope of returning to life as they once knew it. “My husband, Jeff, got sick a few years back and got put on permanent disability.”

What’s unusual is Jeff is on disability without having a clear diagnosis. They just know he’s very sick. “They cannot figure out what’s wrong with him. His feet will get like almost lymphedema-ish. He only weighs about 160 pounds, but his feet and ankles look like he weighs about 500,” Courtney explains. At one time they thought Jeff would lose both feet. Thankfully, he didn't.

“Jeff was an electronic engineer. His last job title was international prototype engineer,” Courtney said. “We went from making $160,000 a year to absolutely nothing.”

To make ends meet, Courtney often misses meals or has very little to eat. “My kids never see it. My kids always eat, but I’ve sat there and watched them, eating what they didn’t finish. It has been that way, and I’m not above it,” she explains.

Thanks to you, our donors and partners, Courtney and her neighbors can get the food they desperately need at Strawberry Plains Elementary Food Pantry. “They’re doing a great job,” says Courtney. “It’s phenomenal that their only requirement is you have a child in the school.”

Your sacrifice to help families experiencing hunger, like Courtney’s, is felt more now than ever, especially during the pandemic. “It really makes a big difference,” Courtney said. Thank you for making the difference families absolutely need in East Tennessee.

We are so excited to share with you the tremendous success of DYD Day 2020! Thanks to all our generous individual and corporate donors, Second Harvest received $2,098,874.39! This means we’re able to provide 6,296,623 meals to our neighbors experiencing hunger. Thank you for supporting the food bank and joining us in our fight against hunger.