

CHILD HUNGER SUMMIT :: Outcomes & Priorities

In our region, one in five children struggle with food insecurity, a startling statistic. Since hunger can have an immediate and lasting effect on children during the most crucial stages in their development, we have a small window of opportunity to help these children at risk. If we fail to seize the chance to offer children adequate food and nutrition, we risk setting them up for life-long learning and achievement difficulties.

Often when we speak of child hunger, it's viewed as meeting the child's need for food in that moment. The issue of hunger is reduced to a feeling. We must think differently -- to focus on the idea of food stability -- of giving a child the peace of mind to know that when it is time for their next meal, food is there.

Research tells us a lack of proper nutrition irrevocably affects a child's ability to grow and thrive. A child without proper nutrition will be sick more frequently with overall poorer physical health. It will impair their cognitive ability and affect academic achievement. Additionally, when faced with an empty refrigerator, a child faces a litany of mental health issues -- fear, shame, anxiety and stress. Although they may not be able to name it, a feeling for being forgotten.

For children who open up the refrigerator and find a cavernous space, the implication is larger than a void and more powerful than the moment of struggle. No matter the reason, hunger invokes a scarcity mindset, it changes a child's view of the world -- little by little -- day by day -- eroding their trust, hope and sense of potential.

According to the September 2013 Children's Health Watch report, [*Feeding Our Human Capital: Food Insecurity and Tomorrow's Workforce*](#), the effects of hunger reach far into adulthood. The report states, "food insecurity is expensive for both businesses and taxpayers and threatens the future of our economic prosperity. Loss of human capital due to childhood food insecurity is translated into higher public costs, as decreased profits for private companies lead to reduced government tax revenue, and greater reliance on public assistance programs leads to higher government expenditures." Childhood food insecurity increases the likelihood of negative health consequences including increased risk for chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and hypertension as an adult.

Second Harvest works with over 100 partner charities and 9 school districts throughout the region to ensure children have enough to eat year-round. Through our [Child Hunger Initiative](#), Second Harvest aims to more holistically feed children and create food security for the entire family. By working with schools to provide food to families in a variety of ways, we increase the amount of food and meals families and their children will receive, addressing child hunger. Initial results of the Second Harvest School Party's show families being served who have not accessed service previously.

Yet, despite our work, hunger still affects tens of thousands of children and their families as a whole in our region.

In early 2018, we gathered a diverse group of nonprofit, government, philanthropy and business sector leaders to discuss how to bring the community together to address child hunger. Over the next 18 months, we held conversations delving into the complexity of childhood hunger. Our

CHILD HUNGER SUMMIT :: Outcomes & Priorities

discovery of the widespread lack of understanding of childhood hunger's implications informed the resulting summit.

Our region's first [Child Hunger Summit](#) was held on September 19, 2019. Nearly 300 people attended from all over Ohio and even neighboring states, sharing diverse ideas and demographics. The summit's goal was to drive awareness of child hunger, develop strategies to address the need and empower participants to act. Speakers came from around the state and country, including Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine.

During the Child Hunger Summit, groups met for two sessions to identify three potentially addressable ideas around education, healthcare and innovative programs. As a follow-up, Second Harvest and the Child Hunger Summit Committee identified top-level goals based on three outcomes from each session.

As an organization, Second Harvest is prioritizing a goal from each area. However, all of the priorities identified during the summit can and should be taken up by organizations throughout the community from education, healthcare, government and business. There is a place for everyone in evolving our community into a place where we reach out to children and their families and plant the seeds of food stability, because the future of our children belongs to all of us.

Education

The Education session brought together educators to examine the impact of child food insecurity on our children's ability to grow, thrive and learn.

Key Second Harvest Priority:

◆ [Wrap-Around Services: Improving connections and awareness to wrap-around services](#)

Background: Children and families are not just struggling with food insecurity, but many other issues as well. Initially, the group suggested creating specific services, but upon more conversation they agreed that the majority of services exist. The idea is to connect services to each other and make them more accessible to children and families. Initial first steps will include reaching out to educators to identify the needed services.

Early Success: The school social workers from the Education Service Center (ESC) of Lorain County met with Second Harvest staff to learn more about our work and consider ways to address the needs of their students. ESC and Second Harvest are now working together to pilot a food pantry at the Education Service Center for social workers to be able to pack food boxes to take to their student families struggling with hunger.

CHILD HUNGER SUMMIT :: Outcomes & Priorities

Other Identified Education Priorities:

◆ Nutrition Class: Prioritizing and reintroducing nutrition education during the school day

Background: This was conceptualized as an in-school class. The group discussed this as an old idea, home economics class, that needs return. There was the possibility of marrying this idea with the school family food night that would be held after school hours.

◆ School Family Food Night: Integrating food into existing School Family Nights and/or after-school functions

Background: This is an event for entire families, including child-care for younger children. The concept is for entire families to come together and learn about nutrition and how to make healthy meals.

Healthcare

The Healthcare session allowed health care providers and local health organizations to discuss the impact of food insecurity on the health of children in our community.

Key Second Harvest Focus Area:

◆ Creating travelling WIC and SNAP clinics for outreach and education along with completing applications for low-income populations.

Background: WIC and SNAP are the two top-line defenses we have to address food insecurity in our region among children. Recent changes made to these programs has deterred some from applying for assistance. In addition to changes in the system, families may lack transportation, access to the computer/internet or have little understanding of completing the process and what benefits they are eligible to receive. Establishing a traveling WIC/SNAP clinic is one way to help bridge the gap.

Early Success: Through the state's SNAP outreach plan, Second Harvest is to apply for matching funds for outreach, education and applying for SNAP benefits. Based on a plan created by the [University of Rhode Island](#), Second Harvest and Lorain County Community College are exploring the concept of partnering to address outreach and enrollment for SNAP in our community.

Other Identified Healthcare Priorities:

◆ Creating Produce & Heathy Food Prescription Program

CHILD HUNGER SUMMIT :: Outcomes & Priorities

Background: Food has a direct correlation to health. The group wanted to focus on being able to provide healthy food & adequate meal portions for community members who visit health organizations that will help create a healthier community over time.^{1 2}

◆ Partnerships between healthcare systems and community organizations

Background: This idea is to offer a healthy grocery solution in the community on a more permanent basis, providing nutritious food for all. Health care organizations can work directly with the “grocery store” to ensure they are meeting the health needs of the community and establishing a healthier county over time.

Innovative Programs

The Innovate Programs sessions gave attention to the programs around the state and country changing how we address the needs of children. The session focused on the barriers in our community and considered what types of new programming could be effective in helping children in our region.

Key Second Harvest Focus Area:

◆ Establish county-wide Food Advisory Council to address hunger & community resources.

Background: The focus is to increase healthy food access and consumption through policy, systems and environmental changes.

Early Success: Lorain County Public Health included in their grant application to the Ohio Department for Health for 2020 Creating Healthy Communities the concept of co-creating a Food Advisory Council in Lorain County. The grant was approved and plan will move forward in 2020 to establish a county-wide Food Advisory Council by convening a diverse group of stakeholders committed to food access policy and planning in partnership with Second Harvest.

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/heres-how-healthy-food-prescriptions-could-save-lives-and-money#Food-prescriptions-target-food-insecurity>

² <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/prescribing-healthy-foods-could-bring-cost-effective-benefits>

CHILD HUNGER SUMMIT :: Outcomes & Priorities

Other Identified Innovative Priorities:

◆ Policy Changes to address benefits (SNAP + Medicaid Eligibility).

Background: The discussion focused on the benefit cliff. A benefits cliff is what happens when public benefit programs taper off or phase out quickly when household earnings increase. The abrupt reduction or loss of benefits can be very disruptive for families because even though household earnings increased, they usually have not increased enough for self-sufficiency. The group focused on ways to prevent them from happening — the dialogue included advocacy on policy changes that could deal with eligibility and even step-downs on benefits rather than hard line cutoffs. There were a lot of tactical approaches to getting those policy changes offered in terms of how to get the message together and build voices in support of it.

◆ Community Education on Child Hunger

Background: Highlighting the issue of child hunger in general is a priority as many people are unaware of the pervasiveness of the problem and also — equally important — its impact and effect on young people, their future, and the health of the community. Education on programs and eligibility also is part of this, but more of the focus was on raising general awareness of this as an issue of concern.