

## **“Food Insecurity in Shaker Heights”**

Forum Co-Sponsored by the Greater Cleveland Food Bank and the  
Shaker Heights Chapter of League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland  
on Thursday June 13, 2019  
A summary by Ryan Brady

Panelists: Loren Anthes (Center for Medicaid Policy of the Center for Community Solutions), Kimberly LoVano (Director of Advocacy & Public Education of Greater Cleveland Food Bank), Amy Bouthilet (Shaker Little Free Pantry), Mary LaVigne-Butler (Vice President of External Affairs of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank and Co-Chair of the Shaker Chapter of the League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland), Nancy Moore & Tres Roeder (City Council), Stacey Hren (Onaway Schools, piloted two community markets)

### **What is food insecurity?**

Food insecurity is when people do not, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active, healthy life.

### **How does food insecurity affect our community?**

1/6th or 17.6 percent of Ohio adults are food insecure. 18.5 percent (5,078) of people in Shaker live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, making them eligible to receive assistance from Ohio Food Banks. In children, food insecurity affects key developmental milestones, increases behavioral problems, and decreases academic performance. Food insecurity also increases the risk of chronic disease, depression, nursing home admissions, and diabetes-related hospitalizations.

### **What programs are there to alleviate food insecurity?**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP, better known as Food Stamps, is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. SNAP serves 1.4 million Ohioans and 8.7% of Shaker Heights. It has been relatively successful, reducing poverty by 17% in 2015, and inputting \$170 million economically per month. Still, the average benefit of SNAP does not cover an average grocery bill. There is much room to expand the program, as only 40% of eligible seniors are using SNAP.

The Older American Act: 1 in 6 older adults are food insecure (17.6%). This program home delivers meals and organizes group meals. The cost of one month of home-delivered meals is the same as the cost of one day in a nursing home, and one year of home-delivered meals costs less than 70% of one day in a hospital. Challenges of the program are the waiting lists and the lack of staffing and volunteers.

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank (GCFB): The GCFB works to ensure that everyone has the food that they need, every day. It serves Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, Ashtabula, Ashland, and Richland counties, and partners with other programs in order to do so. For example, the Greater Cleveland Food Bank utilizes food donated to them by retailers, manufacturers, food drives, and government and state programs. In Shaker Heights alone, the Food Bank partners with nine other programs.

The Little Free Pantries: The Little Free Pantries were brought to Shaker to address the lack of support of those who suffer from food insecurity. The pantries stock nonperishable food and self-

care items and are open 24/7. They rely mainly on the principle of neighbors helping neighbors, and encourage people to take what they need and leave what they can. The pantries are also completely anonymous. Most items in the pantry do not last for over 24 hours, and since the demand is so high, it has been difficult for the program to just rely on neighbors. Therefore the program partners with Shaker Schools and other organizations like Cub Scouts. In May 2018, a Little Free Pantry opened behind Heights Community Church, and there may be a new pantry launched at Van Aken soon.

Heights Christian Church Community Meals: The Heights Christian Church hosts free Community Meals every third Saturday of every month from 12 p.m. until 2 p.m. Everyone is welcome at the Community Meals. The goal is to build community, and volunteers can help with set up, serving, and clean up. There are often featured chefs.

### **What is impeding access to food?**

Currently, the federal government is attempting to change how people qualify for programs aimed to alleviate food insecurity, like SNAP. Currently, citizens can only receive benefits from SNAP if they are working or in a work training program, however, states can request waivers to eliminate this requirement if there is high unemployment in certain areas. These waivers can be requested for areas with an unemployment rate over 10 percent, or if the state shows that an area has an unemployment rate at least 20 percent above the national level (for reference, 20 percent above the national level would be around 4.3 percent unemployment). The new regulations would establish that areas can only be waived from the work requirement if they have an average unemployment rate of at least 7 percent, which the administration estimates would take away food assistance from the 755,000 individuals who cannot show they work at or above 20 hours each week.

The administration is also seeking to change the way that the Federal Poverty Level is calculated. The changes would result in the poverty level rising at a slower rate compared to inflation, meaning that over time, people must be poorer and poorer to be considered to be “in poverty.” Since many welfare and food assistance programs rely on the Federal Poverty Level to determine who qualifies for their benefits, with this change, fewer people will qualify for food assistance over time.

A third difficulty in securing food assistance is federal regulation. The GCFB explains that they are unable to address the need of serving children after school or during the summer because, in order to create a program to do so, federal legislation requires that 50% of children in a school district must be at or below 185% of the poverty line. The school district of Lomond is at 46%, just missing the cut off for sites to open.