



OLDER ADULTS AND HUNGER

Hunger among older adults is often overlooked when talking about hunger and poverty, and it is on the rise. Like Jim Freeman, many older adults rely on Social Security as their main or only source of income, which is not always enough to get by. As of 2011, nearly 9 million adults over 50 in the United States are food insecure, meaning they have less reliable access to enough nutritious food. This is nearly twice as many older adults who are hungry as there were 10 years earlier.¹ While those who are 50 may not seem like they fall into the category of “older adult,” a study done by AARP identified that adults between 50-59 years of age are at a higher risk of hunger compared to other adults because they do not have access to the safety nets available to other age groups, such as Social Security and family assistance programs.²

Hunger in the 50+ age group is unique for other reasons as well. Whereas Americans age 62 and over benefit from an age specific safety net, participation in programs like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) is substantially lower for the 50-59 age group.³ People 50 and over are less likely to apply for food stamps than their younger counterparts with similar incomes.⁴ Another unique challenge in this age group is unemployment. Sometimes people are forced to retire early due to health problems, yet they don't qualify for disability insurance. Similarly, many older adults, like people from all age groups, lost their jobs in the recent economic downturn. However, older adults who lose their jobs are out of work, on average, for longer than their younger counterparts. This is seen in the fact that there was a 40 percent increase in food insecurity among people aged 50-59 between 2007 and 2009.⁵

Why focus on hunger among older adults? One answer is that hunger has a particularly severe effect on the health of older adults. Many older adults already face limitations in their daily activities. When people over 50 are food insecure, they are more than twice as likely as other older adults to have these limitations. In fact, research from AARP suggests that the health of older adults who are food insecure is closer to the health of food secure adults who are 14 years older than they are than it is to food secure adults who are their same age.

When reform proposals focus on job requirements for SNAP recipients, we often ignore the reality that over half of all SNAP recipients are children or older adults, with about 8 percent being adults over 60. Hunger among older adults challenges our stereotypes of people who depend on government assistance to feed themselves.⁶ These are people who likely worked hard for most of their adult lives and paid into “the system,” yet still don't have enough to get by in their later years.

ELCA DOMESTIC HUNGER GRANTS

ELCA Domestic Hunger Grants are small grants ranging from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars that are provided by ELCA World Hunger. This program supports organizations in the United States that address hunger and poverty in their communities. Each year, close to \$900,000 is awarded to over 350 organizations in the areas of advocacy, relief, sustainable development and community organizing. Mobile Meals in Spartanburg County is one of these organizations. Other examples are weekend backpack food programs for children, food pantries and advocacy days. More information and the application can be found at www.ELCA.org/en/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger/Get-Involved/Domestic-Hunger-Grants.

1 <http://blog.aarp.org/2012/08/30/whos-hungry-many-have-trouble-affording-food/>

2 http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/pdf_2011/AARPFoundation_HungerReport_2011.pdf

3 http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/pdf_2011/AARPFoundation_HungerReport_2011.pdf

4 http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/pdf_2011/AARPFoundation_HungerReport_2011.pdf

5 <http://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/our-work/hunger/learn-about-hunger/>

6 <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2010CharacteristicsSummary.pdf>