



Let's Talk About Food, or Lack of It

Lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active healthy life is defined as food insecurity by the United States Department of Agriculture. Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC) has been working with members of the community to learn what experiences of food insecurity are like locally. Now, we are moving into the next phase of the project, sharing those stories to raise awareness about food insecurity. By sharing stories of those with lived experience of food insecurity in Cortland County, we aim to humanize the problem of our fellow community members.

Food insecurity can be not knowing where your next meal will come from, not having consistent access to enough food, visiting a food pantry, or qualifying for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or WIC (Women Infants Children). People may experience food insecurity due to poverty, domestic violence, loss of a job, or other changes in circumstances. We invite people to share their stories to help show the faces, places, and stories that exist here in our community.

The idea for this program rose from the Hunger Coalition, a subcommittee of the Cortland Food Project, which looks at programs, policies, conversations, and decisions related to food insecurity. The Cortland Food Project is a coalition of stakeholders and interested individuals working to make sure that input from those with firsthand experience have space for their voice to be heard.

Phase 1, our starting point:

Beginning in mid-2021, the Hunger Coalition started this work by connecting with 30 members of the Cortland community to see if and how they would be interested in sharing their experiences of food insecurity. We solicited these connections on social media, through flyers and by word of mouth. Participants completed a survey and were given the option of sharing their experiences with food insecurity through a story bank, where we collect audio, photos, writing, and videos, or through a speaker's bureau, where folks can share their stories in a public forum. Most respondents liked the idea of drafting their stories through a story bank. Learning how people are comfortable sharing their lived experiences allows us to now move into phase 2.

Phase 2, where we are headed:

We are now moving into phase 2 of the project which is developing the story bank. Through interviews with a SVHC staff member participants will be asked to share their lived experiences with food insecurity, what their experience with food insecurity was, how it felt/feels, what they would like others to know about food insecurity, duration of experience, if/how they accessed assistance (WIC, SNAP,

food pantries) during a time of need, and what if anything, they did to transition out of being food insecure. Interviews will be confidential, with only approved information shared with the public and pseudonyms used as desired.

Are you interested in helping spread awareness about food insecurity in Cortland County? Join us to discuss food insecurity in Cortland, what SVHC is doing to address this in our community and how you can share your experience of food insecurity with our storytelling project. This discussion will be held online via zoom. We invite community members to join us at 7PM on Wednesday February 22nd. Register here: tinyurl.com/CCFoodInsecurity

Do you want to share your story? Contact Olivia at olivia@sevenvalleyshealth.org or by phone (607) 756-4198 Ext. 229 to learn how to get involved. Our goal is to hear from a wide variety of Cortland County residents, across various age groups, race/ethnicities, genders, and mixed communities. Participants will be compensated for their time with gift cards to local grocery stores. Food insecurity is here, and it impacts many lives.