INTRODUCTION

Despite living in resource-rich suburbs, many children in the neighborhoods and municipalities comprising ISD #833 are hungry. While this report illustrates and amplifies parent experiences, it focuses concern on the well-being of children. This report is written to build understanding of who experiences child hunger in the communities that make up ISD #833 and the barriers that families face in securing food for their families.

This research compiles information from 53 community-based interviews with district families who have sought out food resources during times of amplified need. These end-user interviews uncovered a number of potential solutions to barriers in accessing local food resources.

The report contains a recommendations section compiled by insights and suggestions gathered from interview participants. The report is one of hope; that, by providing those within ISD #833’s boundaries an understanding of the landscape of the issue, citizens will decide to end child hunger. Not doing so would be costly to our kids, our schools, and our community.
THE LANDSCAPE OF CHILD HUNGER IN SOUTH WASHINGTON COUNTY

The impact of Child Hunger

The impact of Child Hunger is detrimental not only to families, but to the broader community as well. The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), a fifty-year-old non-profit supporting enduring partnerships with organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and AARP, released a research brief based on forty-seven studies, demonstrating the negative effects of child hunger. According to the study, food insecurity impairs children’s ability to develop interpersonal relationships, maintain self-control, and welcome learning opportunities. Children who experience hunger are seven times more likely to engage in physical altercations. Alternatively, children who get enough to eat perform better academically, have less behavior issues, less school nurse visits, and better school attendance. Food directly relates to a child’s ability to succeed at school, contributing to better school outcomes, improved classroom environments for teachers, and equipping children for a more successful future. In short, kids do better, schools do better, and as a result, communities do better when children are fed.

The Suburban Dilemma

Child hunger finds an unlikely home in the suburbs. In a recent article, National Geographic overviewed the pressing need for suburban hunger intervention, indicating: “hunger has grown faster in America’s suburbs than in its cities over the past decade, creating a class of ‘SUV poor.’” Unfortunately, rising need in the suburbs is not necessarily counteracted by increased service providers. In his book, Places in Need: The Changing Geography of Hunger, Scott Allard overviews the lack of resources and investment in poverty relief in U.S. suburbs, explaining that “federal and state investments in anti-poverty programs have largely been funneled into urban centers and urban counties. And we’ve built extensive non-profit human service capacity in our cities... One reason why we lack nonprofit human service capacity [in suburbs] relates to the perception gap that we have about poverty being urban.” As reflected in this report, the assumption that hunger exists predominantly in the urban core not only leads to a resource gap in suburbs, but also creates an additional sense of isolation and stigma for individuals searching for food resources. Despite the particular challenges in addressing hunger in the suburbs, this report will underscore the significant potential for impact that making meals more accessible would have for suburban children and families.

Partnership with South Washington School District

Minnesota’s Second Harvest Heartland, in conjunction with Share Our Strength, author of the national “No Kid Hungry” campaign, initiated a pilot of a collective impact approach to address hunger within suburban school districts in Minnesota. The group Heartland identified suburban school districts with willing leadership for such a project, and South Washington County emerged as a district with both driven community leadership and potential for increasing available meals for children and families.

1. Food insecurity is a term defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) indicating that the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food, is limited or uncertain for a household. Many children in ISD #833 are food insecure.
833 is a suburban district located southeast of St. Paul. The district includes all or parts of the communities of Cottage Grove, Newport, St. Paul Park, Woodbury, and the Afton, Denmark, and Grey Cloud Island Townships. Spanning an area of 84 square miles, the population of the district is approximately 98,100 people, including the 18,000 students who attend district schools.

The potential for impact on child hunger in South Washington school district is significant. Currently, about 3,500 of the 18,000 (1 in 5) children attending schools in ISD #833 are qualified to receive food assistance through Free and Reduced (F/R) meals in schools. Many other children come from families just above the qualifying threshold for receiving F/R meals (185% of the federal poverty line\(^3\)). Both students whose families qualify for F/R meals and those whose families lie just above the F/R income threshold can experience episodes of food insecurity.

A particular challenge within ISD #833 is the divide between the northern and southern communities that comprise the district. Through community meetings and interviews, several community members spoke to the generalization that the northern half of the community (predominantly Woodbury) is known for its affluence, whereas the southern half of the district contains pockets of poverty and hunger. The map labeled Fig. 1 overviews the F/R-eligible students in the district, which vary widely (as low as 7% at Liberty Ridge Elementary to as high as 61% at Newport Elementary); rates are generally higher in the southern half of the community. An added challenge in the district is to identify and support these “bubble” kids, those whose families earn slightly too much to qualify for

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3. USDA Food and Nutrition Service
free and reduced meals, but who still need food support. Interview participants includ-
ed bubble families from both the northern and southern half of the district.

**Existing Food Resources Within ISD #833**

There are several resources within suburban settings, and more specifically within ISD #833, that can be mobilized to counter-
act child hunger in the district. Community-wide food support, such as food shelves, can act as a critical resource to provide area families with the healthy food they need to support themselves and their families. The two main organizations servicing the dis-
trict are Christian Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf (servicing the northern half of the district) and Friends in Need Food Shelf (servicing the southern half of the district). This report will overview other local food re-
sources identified by end-users navigating the district’s networks. A challenge for the communities comprising the school district is to link community-based resources with federal meal programs to effectively elimi-

Outside of the school setting, families can access federal food support through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Eligible families receive monthly SNAP benefits according to income and household size on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which works like a debit card for food at most businesses that sell groceries. This program helps to bridge the gap between school meals, especially during summers, weekends and holidays. SNAP benefits are administered through the county and must be renewed every six months for most families. In Minnesota, roughly 20% of SNAP-eligible families do not participate in the program, primarily because of a cumbersome application process or lack of awareness of income guidelines.

**RESEARCH QUESTION AND BACKGROUND**

An essential component of a collective im-

4. Depending on area eligibility and/or quantity of free/reduced-qualifying students.
consisting of citizen champions determined to help connect, coordinate and lead the community in an effort to eliminate local child hunger. To best understand the impact of child hunger on families, and the barriers in connecting families with needed food resources, Linderman partnered with Second Harvest to conduct constituent end-user research with parents and students from the district. These interviews serve to complement the work of the Adaptive Planning Committee, ensuring that the voices of all levels of the community are considered in approaches to end child hunger in the district. Interviews sought to answer the following research question:

Who in ISD #833 is looking to put more food on the table for their children and what must be navigated to achieve this?

Fifty-three interviews of district parents and children were conducted from April to August 2018, ranging from forty to seventy minutes. Interviews focused on end-user experiences accessing free/minimal cost food resources. Researchers used a qualitative approach drawn from Sense-Making Methodology (SMM), which walks participants through the steps taken to secure food resources. SMM allowed participants to recall specific factors that contribute to the decision to access particular food resources. These insights help in understanding the barriers to securing food during times of heightened need.

Approximately half of interview participants live on the northern side of the district and half on the southern side. Most use one of the two food shelves serving the community. About 15% have not visited a food shelf and use other programs such as SNAP and F/R meals through their local schools. Most interviewees work full-time. Of the 53 participants, nearly 70% live in a household with at least one working adult. Of the 15 households without a working adult, 13 are households with single parents, 7 of which receive disability benefits. In total, 10 respondents are disabled and receive Social Security Disability Income.

**FINDINGS**

The Experience of Navigating Food Resources in ISD #833

As interview participants outline the experience of searching for and accessing local food resources, common themes of resilience emerge. In securing food resources during periods of elevated food needs, participants are entrepreneurs within a fragmented suburban hunger resource network. Interview participants have a range of educational achievement, job experience and socioeconomic backgrounds. Interviews suggest that there is no singular face to hunger in ISD #833. An anonymous, end-user interview transcript excerpt is included in the appendix of this report for reference.

Anyone Can Experience Hunger

As interview participants detail the process...
of securing food resources, many disclose personal attributes that challenge typical notions of who experiences hunger. One interview participant reveals that she earned over $100,000 at her job before she was forced to resign for mental health issues, triggering a period of heightened food need. Another participant details, “I have a college degree and graduated third in my class.” One participant is the head of a school’s PTO, and no one knows she experiences food insecurity. No singular theme emerges as to who experiences hunger in the community, and it is clear that anyone in the community can face moments of needing food resources. Participants from across the district recount moments when fellow community members had no inclination of the participants’ food needs. For example, one participant’s daughter was part of a band fundraiser that sold pizza slices, and no one considered that the pizza slices could be too expensive for all families to afford. One interviewee summarizes how any district family could be experiencing hunger: “We are not ‘those people.’ We are neighbors and friends and family and coworkers.”

**Episodes of Heightened Need**

Interview participants discuss triggers for periods of heightened poverty and food needs, many of which could not have been anticipated. Most participants suffered from hunger during episodes of heightened poverty. These episodes may only last for two or three years, but they are intense enough to elicit the need to seek free or discounted food resources. For example, one participant discusses the impact of an unexpected family medical need: “My son, who is now 12, had three three brain surgeries four years ago . . . I lost my job [caring for him]. At the time we were making $150,000 . . . I had plenty of savings, but now we went through all that and here I am.” The primary triggers named by participants as leading to episodes of heightened need include a birth/new dependent, disability, job loss, and health crisis of self/loved one.

Participants also identify times within episodes of heightened poverty when food resources are most acutely needed. Participants mention a variety of times, including towards the end of the month when resources like SNAP run out but bills are due, or seasonally when holiday gifts weigh on the budget and seasonal work is low. Predominantly, participants struggle most to secure food for the family during times when their children are out of school: holidays, weekends and, most noticeably, in the summer. Over 30% of interview participants explicitly mention summertime as a struggle, with one participant summarizing, “summers are hardest. The kids are home and they eat ten times a day! When the kids are in school, all you have to be concerned about is dinner.”

The times throughout the year of most food need indicate the essential, and valuable, role that schools play in securing food for
families, a theme that will be reviewed later in this report.

**Most Commonly-Used Food Resources**

Fig. 4 shows the most common resources interview participants use in the process of feeding their families. The resource most often used is the food shelf. (Note that our recruitment base was primarily from food shelf outreach.) F/R meals and SNAP are also significant resources. Several participants resort to cheap, unhealthy food or credit card debt instead of reaching out to community resources for support. Other parent interviewees resorted to eating cheaper food so their children could eat a healthy meal. Note that the least-used resources are those provided through interpersonal connections (i.e. a family member or neighbor). This could either attest to the effectiveness of resources like SNAP and the food shelf, or it could reflect the stigma that many individuals reference throughout the interviews.

When asked which resources individuals use in the search for food, several non-food resources are mentioned as alleviating budget constraints to purchase food items. These resources range from preschool scholarship programs to the Cottage Grove Recycling Center.

Clearly, food needs do not exist in a silo for interview participants. Many factors can influence the household budget, and several interview participants mention making sacrifices in order to feed their family. One participant explained, “we wanted to make sure we prioritize getting the kids food. Even if our mortgage payments are a month behind, our kids’ necessities come first.” For participants, food needs are nested in overall systemic challenges, meriting a collective approach from multiple sectors of the community to address these food concerns. As one interview participant summarized, “I guarantee, if somebody needs food assistance, they probably need some assistance with other areas beyond that. From my experience, we haven’t needed just food assistance— although, oh my gosh, it helps tremendously.”

**Impact of Food Resource Access**

Based on participant data, access to food resources is essential for families experiencing hunger. Participants specify the impact of the three most commonly-used food resources amongst the sample of interviewees: Food Shelves, SNAP and F/R school meals.

With regards to the impact of F/R meals on the household budget, one participant explains, “[School meals] are such an incred-
uble program to have where I don’t have to worry about a meal for one of my kids. You don’t understand how big of a difference that makes.” Interview participants also mention the strong impact of when F/R meals are not available. One participant’s child is not eligible for school meals: “Two weeks before school was starting we found out the school wasn’t going to have lunches. . . That was really the thing that set it over to where my budgeting kind of went downhill.” Other families explain that, without the school meals, “it’s a lot of money that adds up” to pay for homemade breakfast and lunch.

Participants also overview the positive effects of SNAP and the food shelf. Referencing SNAP, one participant mentions, “I like the SNAP benefits because I can buy what I want and what my kids will eat. There is no issue, I don’t need to pick through certain things. I’ll load everything to the EBT card, just go to the store and buy what I need.” SNAP benefits allow participants complete client choice and provide a discrete method for using a food resource. Considering the food shelf, a participant remarks, “once the food shelf was introduced to us, I was so happy, because it was going to be able to cushion the threat of not being able to pay for the house.” Ability to access the emergency food relief of the food shelf helps several participants. Interviewees explain that resources like SNAP and the food shelf work best when complementing one another, with one participant outlining, “I get SNAP and then a couple weeks later I can go to [the food shelf]. Everything balances out.” Multiple touchpoints for accessing food resources seems to be the most useful for interview participants.

Resources like F/R school meals, SNAP and the food shelf are imperative for families experiencing hunger in the district, especially when combined together. Participants express the harsh impact of losing access to one food resource, indicating the great importance of increasing community-wide access to all possible options for food support.

BARRIERS TO FOOD RESOURCE ACCESS

Whereas interview participants do eventually find and access a diverse range of resources, both food-specific and otherwise, the path to accessing those resources is far from easy. Participants navigate a wide variety of barriers to accessing essential resources during times of episodic heightened need. As previously overviewed, episodic food need does not exist on its own, as it is often triggered by other challenges, such as an unexpected medical bill or job loss. Participants not only need to navigate the underlying factors contributing to food insecurity, but they also face obstacles such as stigma and lack of resource accessibility and coordination.

Prevalent Barriers to Food Resource Access

Fig. 5 depicts the most common barriers participants encounter when seeking food resources, such as a lack of resource accessibility for limited English speakers. Many barriers are embedded into systemic issues particular to suburbs, outlined previously in this report. In the large geographic area of a suburb, some participants note that resources are dilute, falling short of meeting the needs of suburban residents; “I wish that we could increase the level of access to food pantries. Lots of people need food, but Cottage Grove is very big and folks can’t make it out to St Paul Park. It wouldn’t even need
to be a big food pantry.” Some participants who moved from the urban core shared that they noticed the lack of available free and discounted food options in the suburbs, one explaining, “It was hard to find resources [in Cottage Grove], because there’s not a lot here compared to Ramsey or St Paul. You can go to different food shelves in Ramsey/St Paul, whereas here there is only one.” One participant referred to local churches, reflecting on the amount of wealth in the suburbs, yet how little of that plenty is directed towards those in need; “I always pass by all these churches and look at their signs, but I’ve never seen an invitation for a free meal. They collect so much money and its tax free, so I feel like these churches should really get involved with their neighborhood on another level to see past the people with money to look for the people without it.” Participants suggest that suburban wealth could be invested in more widely distributing free and affordable food access points for all residents.

As participants indicate, the scarcity of resources throughout the expanse of a suburb couples with significant transportation barriers. As one participant put it, “if you don’t have a vehicle to get around with, you’re really stuck,” another saying that “[in Cottage Grove], if you don’t have transportation, you have nothing.” Even with a vehicle, participants indicate a constant balancing act between food and transportation costs. “If I’m going to a food pantry because I don’t have food, nine times out of ten I don’t have a full tank of gas either. I now live farther away from the new [food pantry] so there are times when I need to go but I don’t have enough gas.” One woman accessed a produce distribution in Stillwater once and never went again, reflecting that “the transportation [costs] made it almost easier to just buy the food.”

Part of a larger systemic challenge beyond suburbs is the steep cost of food, particularly healthy food. One participant pointed out that “the question of food is a struggle, because to buy healthy, good food, you have to invest more.” Participants lamented the times when they needed to sacrifice health for cheaper food items; “the quality of food of what we were able to eat went down. . . we were now eating peanut butter and jelly for dinner. That’s not the healthiest thing.” Participants indicate that facing poverty does not change a parent’s commitment to serving their children nutritious food, with one mother sharing, “I just want to feed my kids healthy, balanced meals, making sure they get enough protein in their diet...I’ve had the food pyramid on my fridge a lot of these years.” According to interviewees, there not only needs to be increased touchpoints to food resources, but it is essential that those resources provide families with healthy food options.

**Stigma**

Without question, the most prominent barrier to food access that interview participants faced is stigma. Participants face two types of stigma, one being social/external, linking to assumptions in ISD #833 of what
type of person experiences hunger, the other being internalized stigma. Social/external stigma refers to a widespread belief in ISD #833 that those in need are a certain type or class of person; i.e., “those people” or “those poor people.” One interview participant references the misconception that families are only struggling in the southern half of the district: “People don’t think Woodbury has hungry people but... There are people who are poor and low-income who need food resources that kind of get pushed on the back burner.” Similar assumptions of who experiences hunger heighten the feeling of loneliness and isolation felt by interview participants. Some suggest that the suburbs lend feelings of heightened isolation to those experiencing hunger, as no one talks about food concerns, and there is little opportunity for social interaction when so much time is spent driving from place to place. An interview participant summarizes this challenge of isolation: “There are many moms that are, at least what I see, always at home.”

Internalized stigma is the stigma felt by an individual that can put up barriers to seeking help or talking about experiences. Many participants feel this internalized stigma, particularly before accessing a food resource. One parent mentions, “because of the feelings of shame and feeling like I disappointed my daughter, I do not reach out to friends.” Another participant never went to the food shelf, explaining the impact of stigma: “I just get emotional about it. You want to go, you want to ask for help.” Internalized stigma leaves some participants feeling like bad people or bad parents.

There are some factors that can decrease or circumvent stigma when it comes to accessing food resources. A potential deterrent from stigma amongst interview participants seems to be visiting the food shelf. At the food shelf, participants comment that seeing other families from different backgrounds and noticing that there is an overall lack of judgement helps to overcome some of the internalized stigma felt beforehand. One participant summarizes that “[seeing other families at the food shelf] made me feel like other people are going through the same things I’m going through, which made me feel a lot more comfortable.” According to interview participants, F/R meals lie outside of the scope of intense stigma. Parents comment that the F/R program seems to be entirely confidential for students, and parents who feel too much stigma to go to the food shelf do not have the same stigma associated with school meals. One parent talks about the discrete nature of the school meals: “I love that the school lunch program doesn’t have special tickets. They just put money in your account so my daughter’s able to eat.” In fact, some participants even mention paying for school meals when over the income qualification, because it would be more noticeable if a student does not receive the same meals as their peers: “We pay [for school meals], because [my daughter] wants to be with friends.”

For most participants, the desire to provide for a child’s well-being overcomes the crippling effects of stigma. Parent interview participants indicate a sense of shame with the fact that stigma could compete with accessing food resources. One parent summarizes this motivation to overcome stigma, “it’s embarrassing, but as a mom you gotta do what you gotta do.” Overcoming this stigma is extremely difficult for most parent interviewees. “It took everything in me to do it,” one parent remembers about the decision to use the food shelf. Because of the internal battle needed to access a food resource, it is imperative that food
resources offer high-quality services for families in need, so families are not discouraged or forced to confront stigma once again in the process of searching for an alternative resource.

Lack of Resource Coordination

Many participants encounter difficulty with accessing food support or have never accessed support because of the lack of cross-referrals between food resource providers in ISD #833. Especially considering the degree of stigma that is associated with experiencing hunger and accessing food assistance in the community, it is essential that resources are coordinated. Participants express the emotional toll of going from resource to resource and needing to repeatedly cope with the stigma of telling the story of why their family needs food support. One interview participant discusses that it became her full-time job to search for programs for which her family could be eligible, because it was so difficult to find a list of everything in one place. When she received a flyer with resources through No Kid Hungry South Washington County, she explains, “75% of the resources I wasn’t even aware of. I may have heard about them but to have them all in one place, especially for people who aren’t internet savvy on a very basic and easy to read and understand level. We need that in this community.” This participant goes on to remark how the process of finding food resources can be especially difficult for community members with mental health issues, which underlines the necessity of easy-to-read resource lists and tools for accessing food in the community.

According to participants, coordinating resources does not need to be a difficult fix. Some participants mention a standard resource flyer that the school, county and food shelves all use. Other participants suggest that during conversations with the county for SNAP benefits, the case worker can pass information about school food pack events or produce distributions. Other families state that “it would be great to have something like SFSP [Summer Food Service Program] and SNAP information in the [fall] student packets,” informing families of summer food resources and letting families know that having SNAP directly qualifies a household for free/reduced meals.

On rare occasions when participants are, in fact, connected from one resource to another, it makes a positive impact on the family’s food access. One family explains, “it was in Crestview that we got information [about SNAP]. The social worker called us, she really motivated us to apply. When we received information from friends, we doubted it. But getting information from her made a difference. She gave us a paper of information and told us exactly which number to call and everything.” This family is now successfully connected with SNAP benefits, demonstrating the power of coordinating all levels of the community to provide food resources, as well as the importance of empowering trusted community stakeholders with information to pass on to their clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the suburbs, where the struggle to find food is more hidden, it can be easy for families to experience stigma as they push to maintain a well-balanced family life and childhood during a period of episodic heightened need. Whereas participants do mention that the desire to provide for their children’s well-being overcomes the barrier of stigma, securing food resources is still an incredibly difficult process. The community can work together to decrease the amount of stigma felt by families in accessing
needed support. Families working to main-
tain the well-being of their children should not need to repeat their story and face stigma multiple times in order to access all available resources. The community can en-
sure that resources cross-refer to one an-
other, making the process of navigating the local food system easier for families.

Below are recommendations provided by interview participants, segmented by differ-
ent potential champions for change within ISD #833. These innovative ideas show that interview participants are not simply pas-
sive agents in the food system, but rather are innovators with a front-row seat to the services provided through the community. Given that food resources are disjointed in the area, participants have become experts in navigating the food support system, and must be considered in developing potential solutions in increasing food access.

**County**
- Creating a universal list of resources pro-
vided through the county, food shelf, and school
- Sharing out information that families can email required documents to the county
- Gift cards or food distributions at the county while families wait for benefits to be approved
- Responding in a more timely manner to inquiries

**School**
- Teachers providing resources at back-to-
school nights and conferences
- Food resources included in start-of-year packets
- Universal list of resources provided through the county, food shelf, and school
- Free meals offered at schools for families
- Sharing out information that having SNAP qualifies families for F/R meals, and having F/R meals qualifies families for other benefits, such as reduced ac-
tivity fees
- Food resources mentioned in high school announcements
- Food resource outreach at adult En-
glish-learning classes
- Shuttle bus service to access free sum-
mer meals
- Working with student council/govern-
ment to spread information on summer meals
- Working with teens to post information about summer meals on Instagram

**Food Shelves**
- Multilingual recipes using available pro-
duce provided at food shelves
- Universal list of resources provided through the county, food shelf, and school
- Potlucks located at the food shelf
- Community-wide visits to the food shelf to decrease stigma
- Customers meeting with food shelf staff to discuss ways of decreasing stigma and providing or sharing recipes
- Posting information throughout the com-
munity on what to expect before going to a food shelf to decrease anxiety of not knowing what to expect the first time
- Educating families about expiration dates vs. best by dates
APPENDEX

Interview Transcript Excerpt:

Below is a sample excerpt from an end-user interview. To protect anonymity of participants, names have been changed and transcripts have been reworded when needed.

Participant: Gloria, high school parent and Woodbury Resident since 2004:

Gloria: I lost my job because I became disabled. That’s when it all started; I still struggle at this point.

Q: When you lost your job, can you take me through the steps of where you went to find food resources? Where did you go to first?

Gloria: First, I went to the county and I’m on Social Security. So, they thought that with what I got for Social Security that my daughter and I would be eligible for $16 a month on SNAP. $16 is better than nothing. I moved to an affordable rental property, where I contribute to their on-site food pantry whenever I can. I’m lucky because I have transportation where I know a lot of my neighbors don’t drive. They don’t have cars, so they are just sort of stranded and they probably find that food resource to be really helpful.

Q: Have you accessed any other local food resource?

Gloria: Just the food shelf, but I don’t go often because I don’t want to take food from someone else. But the produce at the food shelf is a total gift; the most expensive food is the healthiest food. My daughter also gets free meals through school.

Q: How did you find out about the free meals?

Gloria: Through the county. After I got signed up for SNAP then I immediately qualified for the free school meals. The county got it all set up for me.

Q: I’m going to take you back to that first moment when you are about to apply for SNAP. I’m going to change to present tense, so we can relive that moment and figure out how you were feeling and what decisions you made. As you are looking online for SNAP benefits, and about to go to the county, how are you feeling?

Gloria: This was the first time in my life that I ever had a food crisis. I’m worried, just feeling like I’m in survival mode, which made me discouraged and ashamed. When I got only $16 in benefits after all that, I felt really bad and sort of frustrated.

Q: What leads to your feelings of shame?

Gloria: It feels like I failed myself and my daughter and that I basically have to beg for help. I was used to being self-sufficient. I have never had a lot of money, but I was able to go to Cub and spend $100 on food and not worry about it. I felt like I let my daughter down.

A: You just described what leads you to feel ashamed. What then leads to the feelings of discouragement?

Gloria: It’s this feeling of I didn’t know how we were going to survive. I clicked into survival mode. I know I can plan something for tomorrow, but I don’t know what’s going to come the
day after tomorrow. Being in such a rich place and suddenly finding yourself feeling hunger made me think, “this must be what it’s like to be in a third world country.” I was afraid. Because of the feelings of shame and feeling like I disappointed my daughter, I did not reach out to friends. They still don’t know what I’m going through. I do think that if I had gotten up the courage to share with friends, they definitely would have been more than happy to share what they had. It’s sort of like a catch-22 where if I didn’t have the shame around it, I would just ask. I know people would just be really giving. My daughter is also too embarrassed to go to the food shelf.

Q: Is she embarrassed to eat free meals at school?

Gloria: What’s good is that they have an account. She doesn’t actually have special tickets she has to use. So, she’s not embarrassed at school. I don’t think she even really knows how I pay for her lunches.

Q: Thinking back to when you are about to go to the county and feel discouraged and worried, what would be the best thing that a community member could tell you in that moment?

Gloria: Not having food can make you feel isolated, because so much of our culture is about food and celebration. Having a community member invite me to a free meal would be the best thing in that moment.

Q: And is there anything we can do to share information about resources in the community to help make it easier for families to access food?

Gloria: It would be helpful to hear about resources through school. If they had more evening resources so that we could get help with dinner meals and after school snacks that would be helpful as well. More meals means we can stretch our food budget and eat healthier. Also, there is a stigma in the community, we need to talk more about how struggling families are not alone, how there are more families going through the same challenges.

The research was designed and guided by collective impact strategist, Albert Linderman, Ph.D., with intensive support from SHH’s Lena Pransky, and additional support of a small SHH team. Linderman and Pransky led more than 90% of the interviews. Four interviews were led by Vicki Mendez. Qualitative analysis supported by Madeline Schwartz.