

First of all, I must say that I don't care for the term "food insecurity." It's really about chronic poverty. Whether you are a working-poor person without children, a working-poor person with children, or a person without a job--it's all about poverty; so really, addressing poverty IS what needs to be talked about.

Food insecurity is poverty. Addressing poverty is the way to ensure people have enough food to feed themselves.

My experience with poverty is from childhood to today. As a child, I remember food lines and blocks of cheese and canned chicken. As an adult, I've been in a shelter with my children. I have raised three children.

I have had jobs of all sorts. Office clerical, theater, data entry, temp jobs, consultant jobs. I also have not worked; whether home with children or due to mental health. Sometimes with federal food stamp assistance and sometimes with only my paychecks. I presently have EBT card WITHOUT A PICTURE OF ME ON IT.

When my children were younger, we had times when we lived on the hill and we'd have to walk down to the church and eat in their soup kitchen; it was a gentle quaint atmosphere. The ladies always sat us with much older people; my son laughed at the size of the spoons. I made the best of it. How I found THIS SOUP KITCHEN was because we had no food. DURING THAT TIME I was miserable and scared; we shared a potato and a piece of meat--a pork chop between three.

I WAS FEELING DESPERATE. I told my daughter's school; they told me about the soup kitchen. I then eventually learned about the city of Portland's GA and **that**

***was a life saver. A REAL TO GOODNESS LIFE SAVER.*** I WAS granted little paper food stamp money. It was exactly what we needed. I could go to the grocery store and fill the fridge and cook meals and eat them at home and feel like I was doing right by my children.

Growing up in extreme poverty and wishing to NOT do the same with my children was too bad; because they did grow up in chronic poverty. I was an active mom; libraries, and playgrounds, and any school programs. Everywhere I went; library and doctors' office I saw "five-a-day fruits and vegetables." Everything my pediatrician said was the right, healthy way to raise my children I did. I strived to feed their brains, their little bodies because maybe if their brains WERE FED WELL and THEIR bellies were fed WELL; AND I PUSHED, COACHED, CHEERED THEM ON TO SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE, CAREERS they would not suffer the indignities of being so poor and having to beg for food.

It's horrid and degrading: begging. And it's like failing them when I couldn't fill them with their favorites....green apples, pears...but I tried hard.

ENERGY INTO COLLECTING DATA AND BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE TO DISTRIBUTE FOOD BOXES AND RUN SOUP KITCHENS, CREATING WAYS TO GET KIDS TO WANT TO COME TO EAT SOMEONE'S MEAL IN A PARK OR CLOSE BY, IS A LOT OF WORK PLANNING ORGANIZING; YET DOING SO DOES NOT ASSIST ANYONE OUT OF POVERTY AND OR INCREASE THEIR ACCESSIBILITY TO BE PART OF MAIN STREAM COMMUNITY. IT KEEPS US IN LINE WAITING FOR THE BOX. IT TAKES THE FOCUS OFF THE REAL ISSUE; POVERTY.

THOUGH all the good intentions of creating food programs are about helping people access nutritional food, I must say as a mother who raised three children and during those times often did not have an appropriate amount of food to put on the table for my children but I dang gone did try really hard while working and not working. THOSE GOOD INTENTIONS, OF FOOD BOXES AND SOUP KITCHENS ARE STILL NEEDED; BUT IF PEOPLE HAD ACCESS TO GOING TO THE GROCERY STORE THEMSELVES, THOSE LINES WOULD DWINDLE.

ALSO when I hear about Summer Meals Programs for me personally it's insulting, hurtful. It's saying, "Your kids are hungry. Mothers, send them over here and we'll feed them." I believe that if someone really, really wants to help raise up a good community—a healthy, inclusive community with healthy children—when those children's mothers don't have access to enough money to purchase food--then put energy into helping that mother access that money and/or EBT card so that moms **like me** can go to the grocery store and pick out our own food and feed their children at **their own table**. Not teach them how to depend on their meal outside of the home.

Because we're NOT talking ABOUT hunger; we are talking about **chronic poverty**. Let's look at that child living in poverty, being invited to go outside of his home away from his table to eat the summer meal. It's almost prepping him, learning to depend on meals away from the home. Many children living in CHRONIC poverty will grow up and continue to live in poverty. The majority of teens presently who grow up in will not have careers a job that pays, at the least, a livable wage will continue to live in poverty as adults. And having grown up with the language of food insecurity while living at home with a family who

depended on food boxes and may have sent kids sent away from the table to go to a summer program, now has been conditioned that the situation isn't about poverty or how to increase income. The situation is go get a food box. These teens whose mom had to go to the food pantry and so now they of are too, after all they've been conditioned to do. So this is what you doing ABOUT HUNGER; TAKING THE FOCUS OFF poverty.

All three of my children were in an after school program that I bartered for in order for them to be able to participate—karate, dancing, and theatre. During high school, my son became very athletic; he was a wrestler. He competed. The diet requirements of exerting that much energy from 6 in the morning till 6 7 8 at night was incredible and it was really hard. I remember crying because I had to go find ways to make sure he had all the food he needed. I remember begging. I remember having to disclose how hard my life was to get people to help and assist to make sure he was able to have the food he needed daily, besides what I could feed him at home or put in a bag and send him to school with; which was always very little. I CONFIDED IN HIS COACH AT SCHOOL, MR. TIBBITS.

WE MUST FACE THE REALITY OF POVERTY; WE MUST HELP BY ENDING POVERTY.  
The answer isn't, "go to a food pantry and get some food."

The answer was being able to go to the store and buy all the food that was necessary to send my son MY CHILDREN off with enough food for that day.

When I hear children are hungry or food insecure; ***it is an insult to me.***

Because this is what I'm hearing; “moms not doing their best”. This is what I'm hearing “you can live in poverty, you can stay in poverty forever, you can die in poverty--but we'll give you food on the way”.

That's just not OK. If our community, city, state, county, and nation really truly want to foster an inclusive community with healthy adults and children then all of us need to be able to go buy our own food and FEED ourselves and our families AT OUR own table.

Separating us, US POOR PEOPLE, keeping us out of mainstream by putting us in lines at food pantries and soup kitchen is not the answer... it separates us, it makes us different, it makes our children different. We are not a part of the larger group--that's insulting, that's difficult.

How do you care about hunger without calling it what it is? How do you put all this energy into gathering data about poverty, and result in food insecurity?

I was born in poverty and have tried forever to create a life of wholesome community interactions, and neighborly loving ways. I work. I play a little bit. But I am poor. I will die poor in poverty; but people will be sure I have food on the way.