

My Experience with Hunger

by Juanita Rogers, Miss Maricopa County 2016

I was born and raised in Phoenix and grew up in a single-parent household. As far back as I can remember, my mom always worked two – sometimes three – jobs in order to provide for me and my older sister. Despite her having an income, I now realize that my family was not only working class but also food insecure. This meant that we did not always have consistent access to adequate food, which was often due to finances. If there was a bill that was due at or around the same time, or even an unexpected expense, that could cause **A DIFFICULT CHOICE BETWEEN PAYING THE BILL OR PURCHASING GROCERIES**. Although my family and I ate every day, the money used to purchase groceries needed to stretch. At times, this led to empty-calorie foods that were low in nutritional value being the only option we had. With hunger affecting nearly 1 in 4 Arizona children and 1 in 5 Arizona adults and poverty impacting 1 in 7 Arizona seniors, it is time for all of us to be educated on this important social issue.

My experiences encouraged me to obtain an education and a career in health promotion. My passion for ensuring the health of children led me to majoring in public health at the University of Arizona, where I was a first-generation college graduate. Now, while working toward my master of public health through Grand Canyon University, I am leveraging my title as Miss Maricopa County to promote awareness and positive change for hungry and food-insecure children throughout the state. **THIS IS NOT THE TYPE OF ISSUE THAT HAS A QUICK FIX, BUT AS A COMMUNITY OF LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS, WE CAN FIND A SOLUTION TO HELP OUR STATE'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH.**

GUEST COLUMN



Juanita Rogers, now and then.

OUR MEMBERS



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save the date!

The **AAFB annual conference** will be held on May 20, 2016, at St. Patrick Catholic Community. Look for more details on our website at www.azfoodbanks.org.

Transportation

The Arizona Statewide Gleaning Program (ASGP)

Lately we've decided to start talking about the ASGP in terms that are a bit more accurate, not to mention easier to understand. AAFB doesn't do actual "gleaning" (combing fields after a harvest for food left behind) right now, but this program is very active. In fact, within the next year the 1 billionth pound of food will be distributed to our member food banks! Our two 18-wheel semis are on the road every day, picking up bulk purchases, redistributing food between food banks, and ensuring that healthy fruits and vegetables are available to people in need across the state. So far this (fiscal) year, **WE'VE DISTRIBUTED MORE THAN 12 MILLION POUNDS OF FOOD.**

To give you an example, recently food bank warehouses in our state had a need for carrots. So we partnered with all the food banks in Arizona to see who needed carrots and how many they could use. We ended up buying two truckloads of carrots! That's 85,000 pounds that were distributed to four regional food banks and from there to soup kitchens, food pantries, and other agencies that serve people in need across the state.

And did you know that Yuma produces the most lettuce in the country? They get a lot of donations of leafy greens from generous local farmers, and when they have more than they can distribute by the "best-by date," they offer them to the other regional food banks in Arizona. We coordinate transportation and ensure the donations are balanced in order to feed as many Arizonans as possible. And if we have enough in Arizona, we partner with food banks in other states to make sure these healthy leafy greens don't go to waste.

Big thanks to our generous food donors, food bank members, financial donors, and volunteers for help with this critical program.

#IMAGINEASOLUTION WITH US

"Collect slightly bruised fruit and vegs from super markets – I've seen them throw tons away!"

MICHAEL G.

Have you ever thought about how food insecurity impacts health? Or that it's not just having a job – it's the quality of the job that you can find that can determine whether you have enough to pay bills and buy food for your family? These are just two of the topics that we explore through our "Imagine a Solution" campaign, which continues through early summer.

Our series of short videos dives into these topics and more. Just visit our website at WWW.AZFOODBANKS.ORG to view them. And, of course, we want your ideas. Share them on our Facebook page or on Twitter – or even send us a note in the mail! Together we can #IMAGINEASOLUTION and end hunger in Arizona.

Childhood Hunger

CEP – Three Little Letters That Mean Big Changes for Hungry Kids

Thanks to funding from the Food Research Action Center (FRAC), the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, and Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry® campaign, we've been working on issues that affect childhood hunger.

ENCOURAGING SCHOOLS TO ADOPT THE COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP) IS ONE OF THE KEY AREAS OF FOCUS.

Free school meals (in some form) have been around since the early 1900s and have developed over time into the current federal program. The latest shift was in 2014, when all states became eligible to participate in CEP. Before CEP, low-income schools would have to work with families to collect household income information on a per-student basis, which led to the need to track those students in the cafeteria to ensure they got their meals (and the school got at least partially reimbursed). With CEP, eligible schools offer **FREE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH TO ALL STUDENTS.**

CEP eases the administrative burden on schools, reduces the stigma associated with free meals, and most important, helps ensure that kids are fed. Look for us out and about as we encourage schools to adopt CEP so that more kids are nourished and ready to learn.



Healthy meals at school help kids succeed.

School Breakfast – More Isn't Enough Yet

The annual national *School Breakfast Scorecard* was released in February by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). And while the study found the number of low-income kids getting school breakfast in Arizona increased by 3%, the state still ranks at 28th in the nation in getting kids breakfast at school.

The *School Breakfast Scorecard* is useful to find gaps in school meal programs in Arizona. For example, in school year 2014-2015, **OUT OF EVERY 100 CHILDREN WHO RECEIVED FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCHES, ONLY 52 ALSO ATE BREAKFAST.** This compares to a national rate of 54 of every 100 children. Low participation means missed meals for hungry children and missed federal nutrition dollars for schools.

Kids for the most part eat in one of two places – home and school. Together we need to ensure that as many kids as possible are eating breakfast and lunch at school, so that we're setting them up not only to learn but also to succeed.



volunteer opportunity

Join us for a day of bagging beans at the Mesa Cannery. We'll need at least 100 volunteers to help repackage bulk pinto beans into family-sized, one-pound bags. Interested? Contact April at **602-528-3434** or via email at **April@azfoodbanks.org**.

Advocacy

Working to Secure the Safety Net

It's easy to overlook the role that government plays in hunger relief. It provides a social safety net that nonprofits like ours simply can't. Food banks know that the single most important tool we have to combat hunger is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps). And SNAP is constantly at risk.

Did you know that in Arizona, when you apply for SNAP, you have to be finger imaged? This "fraud prevention" step doesn't work to prevent fraud but *does* prevent people from getting help. Seniors, working parents, and people in rural communities all have to take time out of their days to comply with this unnecessary requirement. Fortunately, the state budget proposed by Governor Ducey would eliminate finger imaging. We're hopeful that this practice will end in Arizona – the last state in the nation to have this requirement.

Even though many areas have recovered from the depths of the recession, Arizona still ranks seventh highest in the country for unemployment. We're also advocating on behalf of Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). At the beginning of the year, a work requirement that had been waived for ABAWDs in Maricopa County was reinstated. This means that as many as 21,000 individuals will be pushed into the workforce or risk losing the dollars that put food on the table.

WANT TO HELP?

Visit our website at www.azfoodbanks.org and subscribe to our email list. We'll send you legislative action opportunities so that our elected officials and policymakers will hear your voice!

ABOUT AAFB *Established in 1984, AAFB is a private, nonprofit organization serving five member food banks and a network of nearly 1,200 food pantries and agencies. AAFB partners with Feeding America and other hunger relief organizations nationwide to end food insecurity in our state and country. For more than 30 years, AAFB's programs, including transportation, the hunger hotline, and getting children meals in school, have helped alleviate hunger in Arizona. Our advocacy efforts target reducing the need for emergency food from the charitable system. For more information about our organization and work, visit our website at www.azfoodbanks.org.*

Association of Arizona Food Banks

2100 N Central Ave Ste 230
Phoenix, Arizona 85004-1400
(602) 528-3434 : Local
(800) 445-1914 : Toll-Free
(602) 528-3838 : Fax

