

SENIORS IN LOUISIANA WORK TOGETHER TO FIGHT HUNGER



Similar to patches that come together to form a quilt, many factors can coincide in a senior's life that can lead to hunger. From increasing medication costs to high electricity bills in the summer, seniors in Louisiana can battle multiple issues to live a healthy and comfortable life.

Per a recent study released by Feeding America, Louisiana has recently placed highest in the number of food insecure senior citizens. Oscarlene Woods is one of those many seniors in Louisiana facing food insecurity. Currently, Oscarlene is a recipient of boxes filled with breakfast foods, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, meat and more through our Adopt-A-Senior program.

However, Oscarlene knew about our Adopt-A-Senior program long before qualifying to become a recipient. For years she drove her neighbors at Our Lady of the Lake Senior Housing to pick up their supplemental food boxes. Eventually, she was able to become a part of the program to ease her own financial strains.

"Sometimes you just don't have enough money to buy groceries," said Oscarlene. "When you're on a fixed income, no matter how much or how little, it always means a lot when you get something that can help you have a balanced meal."

Oscarlene didn't expect to be in this situation at her age. She worked in the New Orleans school system for over 25 years; but, she was suddenly dismissed after Katrina hit the Orleans Parish schools. After losing her retirement despite her years of service, she

found herself looking for a low-cost place to live while affording daily necessities like food. Today, Oscarlene has one point of advice, "I tell young people to put money away for retirement. Because if you don't, you'll end up like a lot of people here who have nobody and no money."

Nevertheless, when asked what she thought of Louisiana having the largest number of food insecure seniors, Oscarlene stated she is not surprised by the statistic. "I know a lot of people here don't have a lot, and you can't always help everybody but the one's we can, we do," Oscarlene further explained.

Oscarlene still drives her neighbors to collect boxes on the first Friday of every month but her generosity doesn't stop there. She and her neighbors combine their resources to create weekly meals to share.

The seniors in Oscarlene's community not only cook meals together but they go to the store together, go to church together and spend as much time together as they can. "We know we can depend on each other," said Oscarlene.

Like a quilt, fighting senior hunger takes multiple pieces to keep it together. Not only do the seniors in Oscarlene's community help fight hunger but so do those who donate food and funds to the food bank. Oscarlene wants those who donate to the food bank to know, "they're helping people they don't even know. We all appreciate it and it means so much to us." ■

STUDIES SHOW INDIVIDUALS IN OUR SERVICE AREA ARE MORE LIKELY TO FACE HUNGER THAN OVERALL POPULATION ACROSS AMERICA



Take a moment and think back to when you are finished grocery shopping and walk up to the register to find the extremely long line ahead of you. The line continues to grow as you wait for your turn at the register. You just want to get home and make the dinner you so carefully planned out.

But, did you know that more than likely, one of those seven people in line with you is food insecure? Like you, they are thinking about the dinner they so carefully planned out. However, they have much less in their carts to make that happen.

Feeding America's release of *Map the Meal Gap 2019* revealed individuals in the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank service area are more likely to face hunger than the overall population across America. The study showed that the individuals in our service area are more likely to be food insecure, with the overall food insecurity rate at 12.5% compared to 14.8% for our service area.

That means 1 in 7 people in our 11-parish service area are facing hunger. Still, 36% of the food insecure individuals in our service area are not eligible for federal nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC.

Another study done by Feeding America, *State of Senior Hunger 2019*, revealed Louisiana is the number one state in the country with food insecure seniors.

"These seniors living in our community desperately need our support and we must do all we can to provide for the less fortunate

who are struggling to make ends meet," said Mike Manning, President and CEO of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. "The summer time in particular is a challenge for seniors who face rising energy costs and have to make the difficult decision to buy less food. We must be there for them."

As upsetting as it is to learn so many in our service area are food insecure, it is even harder to learn 1 in 5 children in our service area are food insecure as well. The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has the BackPack Program for children facing hunger during the school year. However, when those children are out of school they are still facing hunger with very little resources. Similar to the overall statistic, *Map the Meal Gap 2019* revealed children in our service area are more likely to face hunger than the overall population of children across America.

Food insecurity is a struggle for everyone, but it is even harder for children in our service area. Without proper access to enough food to live a healthy, active lifestyle, children can suffer academically. "Learning fractions and multiplication is hard enough, it is even harder not knowing if they will have dinner on the table when they get home," said Manning. "Children are our future and it is crucial they have all they need to succeed."

To learn more about food insecurity and those facing it, please visit map.feedingamerica.org or our website, brfoodbank.org.

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MIKE

MAP THE MEAL GAP 2019

THE GREATER BATON ROUGE FOOD BANK



Map the Meal Gap 2019 is the latest Feeding America report on food insecurity and the cost of food at both the county and congressional district level from 2017 data. It is the only study that provides food insecurity data at a local level. Below are highlights from the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank service area.

OVERALL

1 IN 7 INDIVIDUALS IN **OUR SERVICE AREA** ARE FOOD INSECURE RANGING FROM:

9.3% OF THE POPULATION IN **LIVINGSTON PARISH**

—**TO**—

20% OF THE POPULATION IN **ST. HELENA PARISH**

OF THE **129,030** FOOD INSECURE INDIVIDUALS IN OUR SERVICE AREA

36%

ARE **NOT ELIGIBLE** FOR FEDERAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE UNDER CURRENT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

CHILDREN

1 IN 5 CHILDREN IN **OUR SERVICE AREA** ARE FOOD INSECURE RANGING FROM:

17.4% OF CHILDREN IN **ASCENSION PARISH**

—**TO**—

25% OF CHILDREN IN **ST. HELENA PARISH**

OF THE **41,030** FOOD INSECURE CHILDREN IN OUR SERVICE AREA

37%

LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD THAT IS **NOT ELIGIBLE** FOR FEDERAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE UNDER CURRENT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The USDA defines food insecurity as limited or uncertain access to enough food for all members of a household to live an active, healthy life. With SNAP benefits at risk in the current Louisiana budget debate, it is more important than ever to let your voice be heard.



Q&A

WITH BOARD MEMBER
ALICIA ROBERTSON



In part of an ongoing series, we will be sharing thoughts and ideas on the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in a Q&A format so that you can get to know our board members better and also learn how we are working to better serve those in need. We recently sat down with board member Alicia Robertson, EVP and Chief Treasury Management of Business First Bank.

Q: What are some of your hobbies?

A: Reading, any outdoor activities or projects and, of course, spending time with my family - especially my two grandchildren (the third will be here in October)!

Q: What's one thing people may not know about you?

A: I've dreamed of owning my own business.

Q: Why did you decide to join the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank's Board?

A: The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has always been the non-profit organization of choice when I think about where I want to donate my time and financial support. When a current board member/friend reached out to our bank looking for a nominee to fill a seat, they chose me and I was honored. I was excited for the opportunity to get "behind the scenes" of the food bank, learn more about how it operates and find opportunities to serve in an even more meaningful way.

Q: Why do you think the work of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is important to the community?

A: I think the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is so important because it has the presence and voice to take on the bigger hunger crisis issues on behalf of the local pantries it helps to supply, allowing them to focus on serving families in need.

Q: What excites you most about the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank's future?

A: As a board member, I get a sneak peak of the future plans. It's exciting to see how the latest in technology will play such a big part in the work of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

Q: What can the community do to fight hunger?

A: DONATE - food, time, money - DONATE

ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL



“People should keep in mind that hunger and food insecurity aren’t issues that go away.”

KOREY

On May 23, 2019, food banks, community organizations, partner agencies, advocates and legislators from around Louisiana came together for Feeding Louisiana’s Anti-Hunger Advocacy Day at the Louisiana State Capitol. For the first time in five years, this day allowed attendees to hear from some of the champions in the fight against hunger while advocating for the food insecure in Louisiana.

“This is our opportunity to come together and celebrate our work, connect with the state legislature, talk about the work that’s taking place and elevate hunger and food insecurity as a significant issue that a lot of people are dealing with across the state,” said Korey Patty, Executive Director of Feeding Louisiana.

Feeding Louisiana and their five-member food banks, including the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, work together with a network of community and faith-based partners to provide more than 64 million meals annually to individuals and families in need. However, pushing back on the

stigma and myths surrounding food insecurity are vital steps to improving the condition of the hungry in Louisiana.

“As most of you know, the amount of SNAP benefits a household receives depends on the number of people in the household and the net income,” said Alfreda Tillman Bester, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. “But what you may not know, is that the SNAP program’s name leads with the word supplemental because we know that the amount of allowed benefits that we pay to households each month is not enough to meet the need.”

Feeding Louisiana had a budgetary request to the state legislature for \$1 million that would go to purchasing food from Louisiana’s farmers to distribute to people in need. This request would have provided both local and nutritious food to Louisiana’s patrons and support to Louisiana’s farmers and growers.

“It is absolutely incredulous that in a state like Louisiana, which celebrates rich and

varied food traditions that are famous, and we produce so much food that it is exported worldwide but there are so many people here without enough to eat,” said Mike Strain, Commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Unfortunately, the budgetary request was not approved, but the voice of our advocates was still heard. With the potential for a major turnover in the Louisiana legislature, our orange shirts were visible and our voices were loud. One setback will not stop our continued effort to advocate for the issue of food insecurity in our state.

“People should keep in mind that hunger and food insecurity aren’t issues that go away,” said Korey Patty, Executive Director of Feeding Louisiana. “They’re longstanding in the state and across communities and it’s going to take the work of our organizations, volunteers, businesses and policy makers to really make a dent in the issue.”

SPRING FOOD & FUNDRAISING EVENTS HELP FILL SHELVES HEADING INTO SUMMER



Date: Monday, April 8, 2019

Summary: The sixth annual Empty Bowls, presented by The Baton Rouge Clinic, WVLA & WGMB, was a unique fundraising event where area artists come together to craft and donate hundreds of pottery bowls to be sold at a special event with a simple meal. The event featured hundreds of bowls from local artists, exclusive silent auction items, and music by Clay and Jodi. All event proceeds from tickets purchased and silent auction items directly benefited the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

Funds Raised: More than \$17,000 dollars, which could provide over 51,000 meals.



Date: Saturday, April 13, 2019

Summary: The 27th Annual Slice of Life Golf Classic, presented by Sigma Engineers and Constructors, Inc, was a fun and enjoyable atmosphere for all attendees. The event was filled with food from local restaurants like Geisha and Zorba's and even a live auction with unique items like signed footballs from LSU Football Coach Ed Orgeron. With all team sponsorships sold out, funds raised directly contributed to the fight against hunger in our community.

Funds Raised: More than \$56,000, which could provide over 168,000 meals.



Date: Saturday, May 11, 2019

Summary: The 27th Annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, presented by Home Bank, in conjunction with Team Automotive Group, Surgical Specialty Center and The Advocate, was a one-day food drive in the Baton Rouge Area. Hosted by the United States Postal Service and the National Association of Letter Carriers, this nationwide food-drive, allowed residents to leave nonperishable food donations by their mailbox for local letter carriers to deliver to the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

Pounds Collected: 40,435 pounds were collected which could provide more than 33,000 meals.

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