

Looking at hunger through a personal lens

BY ALEXANDRIA CONE

Close to one million children are experiencing hunger in the U.S. This means they are missing meals, going whole days without eating, feeling physically hungry, and having the quality of their meals cut because their parents cannot afford enough food (USDA, 2013). Despite the facts, child hunger and food insecurity tend to be sensitive politically-charged topics.

Policy and Community Outreach Director, Carrie Draper, partnered with graduate research assistants, Nick Younginer and Jason Craig, to work on a project shedding light on the problem of child hunger.

The team's research is being compiled into a participant-made video that will help explain how those who cannot afford food get by and points to changes communities and policy makers can make to ensure hunger no longer happens in SC.

"I think a lot of times we're a judgmental society, and I think hearing and seeing people's stories is a way to get people to understand why others make the choices they do given their constraints," said Draper.

Draper goes on to explain, "There is insufficient funding for assistance in South Carolina. If you have a low-income and your child needs medicine, and you can't get any assistance for medical expenses, you may have hard choices to make for your family, including eating less expensive foods that are often lower in quality than healthier options, or skipping meals altogether."

The video project started in the fall of 2013 after an in-depth survey was conducted about factors associated with food insecurity and child hunger. Each participant was given a video camera. They were asked to record aspects of their daily lives, in their own environment, and what they would like for others to see about their experiences.

"I think with video production we have a chance to tell some of the stories that aren't normally told," says Craig.

Younginer sees the methods of the video project changing the dynamic of traditional research. He explains, "A lot of times there is a boundary between researchers and participants. In this project, the participants are the researchers because they're the experts on their lives".

Younginer explained, "It is important for the participants to be advocates in the community, so root causes of hunger can be addressed. "

Draper agrees. "People who have never had to decide between food and medicine or food and electricity don't have this personal perspective, and so public assistance programs continue to get cut. If people saw what was going on in other people's lives I don't think that would be as likely to happen. This project offers a unique opportunity for a personal perspective on living on a very low income in South Carolina."

The video project is expected to be completed in the summer of 2014. For more information about the video project, please contact Carrie Draper at draper@mailbox.sc.edu

Key Points

- Close to one million children in the U.S. are experiencing hunger.
- A participant made video hopes to shed light on why people can't afford food and what support is needed.
- The study hopes to give insight to the personal struggles of hunger that aren't normally conveyed.