



A COLLECTION OF RESEARCH
AND PROGRAMMATIC INSIGHTS
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ADDRESSING TEEN HUNGER

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Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs, we provide meals to more than 40 million people each year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2019, more than 35 million people lived in food-insecure households in the United States, including nearly 11 million children—many of whom are teenaged.¹ The second decade of life is considered to be a period of tremendous growth, development, and change.² Yet, compared to younger children, less is known about teenagers and their experiences facing hunger. When it comes to service delivery, child feeding programs often need to be adapted to effectively reach teens.

In 2016, Feeding America released *Bringing Teens to the Table*, a report produced through a multi-year collaboration with the Urban Institute aimed at better understanding teens' experiences when food and other household resources are scarce. Since then, others have added to the body of knowledge about teens and hunger, though ample opportunity for additional research still remains. During this time, there has been a growing interest across the Feeding America network when it comes to innovative ways of engaging teens in child and family program initiatives. As this

report reveals, food banks are implementing creative methods to increase teen participation and meet teens where they are.

What follows is a compilation of insights about food insecurity among teens and the work being done to address it. The insights are drawn from a variety of sources: research, including the 2016 qualitative study released by Feeding America and the Urban Institute which highlights teens' experiences in their own words; exploratory work to engage teens in program design; program spotlights from five different food banks across the Feeding America

network; and a spotlight on the efforts of one national partner—YUSA—to address teen hunger. These insights reflect efforts and service delivery from before the COVID-19 pandemic, so a final section has been added to capture emerging efforts to address teen hunger since the pandemic began. This report is not meant to be exhaustive of the research and programmatic approaches focused on this area, but a resource highlighting the struggles and resiliencies of teens experiencing food insecurity and the successes and challenges of those working to support and empower them.

¹Coleman-Jensen, A., et al. (2020). *Household Food Security in the United States in 2019*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

²World Health Organization. (n.d.) "*Adolescent Development: A Critical Transition.*"



TEENS AND FOOD INSECURITY RESEARCH

In 2019, approximately one in seven children under the age of 18 in the U.S. lived in a food-insecure household, representing 10.7 million children. Beyond this measure, USDA's annual report on household food insecurity does not provide information specific to teens. While there is a sizeable body of research on food insecurity among children, it tends to focus on younger children. Limited information exists on how teenagers cope when food and other resources are scarce.

Bringing Teens to the Table

In an effort to further understand teens' experience of food insecurity, between 2014 and 2015, Feeding America partnered with the Urban Institute to conduct focus groups with teenagers in 10 communities across the country. From those discussions, the following findings and recommendations emerged:

FINDINGS

- Teens are active participants in family food acquisition and management strategies. Finding ways to get the most food at the lowest cost is a common focus, even though it often means choosing less healthy options.
- When household resources are scarce, teens often take on responsibilities for bringing in food and resources. This can mean going without to ensure younger siblings have what they need.
- Teens facing hunger fear stigma and are embarrassed to receive food assistance in publicly visible settings.
- Many teens are either unaware of or perceive that assistance programs are not available to them. For example, they may assume that summer feeding options are only for younger children, or that charitable feeding programs like food pantries are only available to adults.
- SNAP is an important source of support for many families, and benefits are valued because they allow households to acquire food by shopping in mainstream retail settings.
- Some teens facing serious deprivation resort to strategies to get food that involve personal risk and potential long-term negative consequences, such as exhibiting criminal behavior or engaging in transactional dating relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON INSIGHTS FROM TEENS:

- Address teen food insecurity in the household context, rather than focusing on a child-only strategy, since teens do not experience hunger in a vacuum.
- Mitigate stigma and encourage participation by combining food distribution with other services or activities, like health clinics or free games in the park. Offer programs in locations where teens typically congregate.
- Offer access to food through discrete means, such as home delivery, to both aid those without transportation and maintain confidentiality.
- Adapt food assistance strategies to meet teens' needs. When possible, engage teens in program design and outreach efforts.
- Improve outreach to teens by incorporating social media and expanding outreach through schools. Also consider teenagers' needs and preferences when choosing food and non-perishable offerings.
- Adopt a teen-lens in food insecurity research and program evaluation to better understand the needs and experiences of teens facing food insecurity.

For complete information about the study, visit
www.feedingamerica.org/teen-hunger-research



Other Research

The body of research on how teens experience food insecurity is still growing. This list of findings and studies is not exhaustive, but provides added insight into the ways that teens cope with food insecurity.

- Teens are often active participants in family food acquisition and management strategies.^{3,4}
- Focus groups with rural teens living in food-insecure households revealed that young teens can feel isolated from their broader community, but connected to others who share similar experiences of facing hunger.⁵
- When compared to their food-secure counterparts, food-insecure high schoolers in rural areas consumed fewer calories, were more likely to participate in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program, were less likely to report good health, were more likely to have a lower GPA, and were less likely to report weekly strenuous exercise or participation in a sports team.⁶
- Adolescent food insecurity is associated with mood, anxiety, behavior, and substance disorders.^{7,8}
- In a study of food-insecure Hispanic and Latino youth, compared to their food-secure peers, Hispanic/Latino youth in food-insecure households had greater parent and child acculturative and economic stress,⁹
- One study found that teenage labor force participation has a protective effect on food insecurity among children in general, and particularly for those at the severe end of the scale, though it was unclear if work activities to help alleviate a family's material hardship interfere with the ability of teens to participate effectively in school, create additional stress, or have other unintended consequences that may be less positive.¹⁰

³Gustafson, A., Wu, Q., Spees, C., Putnam, N., Adams, I., Harp, D., Bush, H., & Taylor, C. (2014). "How Adolescents and Parents Food Shopping Patterns and Social Interaction when Shopping is Associated with Dietary Outcomes in Rural Communities". *Journal of Obesity and Weight Loss Therapy* 4 (2), 214.

⁴Larson, N. I., Story, M., Eisenberg, M.E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2006). "Food Preparation and Purchasing Roles among Adolescents: Associations with Sociodemographic Characteristics and Diet Quality." *Journal of American Dietetic Association* 106 (2): 211-218.

⁵Mott, R., Keller, J. Britt-Rankin, J., & Ball, A. (2018). 'Out of place around other people': Experiences of young people who live with food insecurity. *Children & Society* 32(3): 207-218.

⁶Shanafelt, A., Hearst, M. O., Wang, Q., & Nanney, M. S. (2016). Food Insecurity and Rural Adolescent Personal Health, Home, and Academic Environments. *The Journal of School Health*, 86(6), 472-480. doi:10.1111/josh.12397.

⁷Whitsett, D., Sherman MF, & Kotchick, NA. (2019). Household food insecurity in early adolescence and the risk of subsequent behavior problems: Does a connection persist over time?. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 44(4). Doi: 10.1093/jpepsy/jsy088.

⁸Mclaughlin, K. A., Green, J. G., Alegria, M., Costello, E. J., Gruber, M. J., Sampson, N. A., & Kessler, R. C. (2012). Food Insecurity and Mental Disorders in a National Sample of U.S. Adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 51(12), 1293-1303. doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2012.09.009.

⁹Ptochnik S., Perreira, KM., Bravin, JI., Castaneda, SF., Daviglius ML., Gallo, LC., & Isasi CS. (2019). Food insecurity among Hispanic/Latino youth: Who is at risk and what are the health correlates?. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 64(5). Doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.10.302. Epub 2019 Jan 30.

¹⁰Hamersma, S., & Kim, M. (2015). "Food Security and Teenage Labor Supply." *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy Advance Access*, published online March 31, 2015, 1-20.



Community-based Participatory Research: Engaging Teens in Program Development

Building on what was learned through focus group research with teens, Feeding America continued working with the Urban Institute over a period of two years (2015-2017) to engage teens in one community—New Columbia, a mixed-income housing community in Portland, Oregon—to design and implement programming to better address hunger among their peers.

MOBILIZING KEY CONTRIBUTORS

The project relied on the mobilization of two important groups. The first was a stakeholder group which took the name Portland Teen Food Collaborative (PTFC), and consisted of Home Forward, the public housing authority for the city of Portland and Multnomah County; the Oregon Food Bank, a member of the Feeding America network serving Portland (and the entire state of Oregon); and Food Works, a youth development and employment program operated within the New Columbia community. The second was a group called the Youth Community Advisory Board (YCAB), comprised of approximately 12 teens.

KEY ACTIVITIES

The project progressed through two phases of work: 1) Program Design, and 2) Implementation.

During the Program Design Phase, members of the PTFC met monthly to design discussion guides for meetings of the YCAB. After recruiting teens to participate on the YCAB, the PTFC facilitated a series of seven discussions which explored the causes of, and potential solutions to, teen food insecurity in an effort to inform potential new intervention approaches. By the end of the design phase, the YCAB decided to move forward with an intervention comprised of three components: 1) A Harvest Share, or free farmer's market, 2) the Teen Food Literacy Program—a continuation of the YCAB experience for future cohorts of teens and 3) community engagement activities.

During the Implementation Phase, the YCAB teens, with support from the PTFC, began implementing a monthly Harvest Share. A new cohort of teens progressed through the Teen Food Literacy program with support from adults as needed. Though the Community Engagement component of the program presented some challenges, the teens hosted a “Teen Summit” in May 2017 which was attended by 50 local teens.

Across both phases, staff from the Urban Institute and Feeding America provided technical assistance and facilitation support and conducted a formative evaluation to document the program design and implementation process. This included periodic site visits, interviews and focus groups with teens and partners, and data collection from the Harvest Share.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Though the project just described was designed to be place-based, there were challenges and lessons learned from the work which may be valuable to service providers and teens in other communities looking to engage in similar efforts. A summary of that information is provided here. For additional detail, the full report about the project is available on the [Urban Institute's website](#).

Harvest Share

// SETTING UP AND CLEANING UP

CHALLENGE

Early on in particular, events may require a substantial time commitment from teens and adult volunteers

Inconsistent volunteer attendance by teens

LESSON

Clearly establish roles, timing and tasks for setup and cleanup

Create a large volunteer pool

Maintain consistent timing for setup, distribution, and clean up

// ENGAGING TEENS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

CHALLENGE

In practice, identifying and engaging teens to develop and lead events can be difficult

LESSON

Involve teens as facilitators to help encourage other teens to attend.

Take teen food preferences into account in order to improve the participant experience

Program Management

// MAINTAINING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARTNERS

CHALLENGE

Communication among partners was sporadic and roles and responsibilities were not clear as the effort moved from planning into implementation.

LESSON

Establish expected roles and capacities of each partner organization and create plans for ongoing communication and sustainability.

// ACHIEVING TRANSPARENCY WITH TEENS

CHALLENGE

Teens expressed confusion over their role vs. the roles of the organizations involved.

LESSON

Make roles clear to teens at each stage of the project.

Establish partner points of contact for teens to reduce confusion and maintain communication.

Be consistent about stipends, meeting times and resources to keep teens engaged and bought-in to program efforts.

// MAINTAINING CONSISTENT STAFF

CHALLENGE

Staffing changes occurred which were disruptive to the work with teens and undermined trust.

LESSON

Plan for staffing transitions

Have a system in place to communicate changes and maintain open to reduce confusion and time required for rebuilding relationships after staff transitions.

Teen Food Literacy Program

// GROUP DYNAMICS

CHALLENGE

YCAB teens were included as cofacilitators of sessions, creating unanticipated tension between TFLP teens and the YCAB teens who felt ownership over the program yet disconnected from the TFLP.

LESSON

Make roles clear. Establish training, protocols, and expectations for teens in peer mentor or facilitator roles to help avoid tensions and encourage open communication among teens.

// REACHING VULNERABLE TEENS

CHALLENGE

The program did not appear to reach teens experiencing more severe levels of food insecurity.

LESSON

Recruit strategically, not just opportunistically. Teens experiencing family instability or more severe food insecurity may face barriers to participation, even when modest stipends and food provided

// COMMUNICATING WITH TEENS

CHALLENGE

Because of staffing changes, project delays, and shifting priorities, clear communication was lacking between program staff and teens which eroded teen trust in the program.

LESSON

Make sure communication is consistent and transparent to teens, and involve teens in decision making throughout the process.

// COMPLETING AN ACTION-PACKED CURRICULUM

CHALLENGE

The curriculum was long and it was difficult for teens to stay engaged.

LESSON

Adjust the curriculum to be relevant for specific community contexts, such as different ages of participants.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH TEENS

Obtain permission from a parent or guardian.

Create a safe teen-oriented space.

Allow teens to avoid personal responses.

Compensate teens for their time.

Provide healthy food at each meeting.

Enlist teens in data collection.

Encourage group cohesion.

Be prepared to provide access to supportive services.

Train teens and set expectations for participation.

Acknowledge teens' expertise and knowledge



ADDRESSING TEEN HUNGER ACROSS THE FEEDING AMERICA NETWORK

As of 2019, nearly 11 million children who live in food-insecure households may not know where their next meal will come from. Many of these children and their families rely on federal nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). However, some families with children do not qualify for these programs or may need extra help, especially during summer months, in order to make ends meet.

The Feeding America network of food banks serves children and their families at risk of hunger through food pantries, national program models (including the Backpack Program, Kids Cafe, and the School Pantry Program), and other federal programs (such as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)). Recognizing the unique needs and circumstances of teenagers relative to younger children and adults, many food banks within the Feeding America network have developed innovative approaches aimed at better serving teens in their communities. Information about five of those food banks is shared here.

Utilizing Teen Input to Inform Teen Food Programs

Spotlighted by: Caitlin Fitzpatrick

“When we are targeting youth, we want to make sure that there is really no one left behind. That’s why we do these teen programs, to make sure they are not getting left behind or left out of the conversation.”

After reading *“Bringing Teens to the Table”*, Food Bank for New York City began to advocate for increased teen food programming. The food bank’s newest initiative, Supper Klub, provides meals to teens, as well as the opportunity to serve their community and each other by preparing the meals.

Another teen program, Students Against Hunger, is an education and volunteering initiative for young people looking to become involved with the food bank. As part of Students Against Hunger, the food bank works with schools to engage students in hunger relief activities and provides them with a toolkit to help them take action against

food insecurity in their own communities.

One of the food bank’s original teen initiatives, EATWISE, started out as a peer-led nutrition education program for teens. The teens-teaching-teens format was developed after the food bank found that “teens knew what foods were healthy, but they didn’t think that it was important that they made those healthy choices, and the people whose opinion they cared about the most, were other teenagers.” EATWISE has since developed into a community service internship with a focus on food justice. Every summer, interns engage in community service and nutrition workshops and develop

a service project targeting food insecurity in their community.

During summer of 2019, one project was a back-to-school movie night offering a free meal, groceries, personal items, and school supplies. EATWISE interns were instrumental in planning the event and helped develop marketing materials. The teens’ advice was incorporated every step of the way, making the event accessible and tailored to teenagers. In designing and implementing successful teen food programs, the food bank believes you must seek out and incorporate teens’ input.

BIOGRAPHY

Caitlin Fitzpatrick is Food Bank for New York City’s Associate Director of Nutrition and Health Services and has been at the food bank for seven years. She has worked on teen initiatives specifically for the last five years, and previously was the food bank’s Youth Engagement Manager.

How The School Market Program Addresses Barriers Around Access, Stigma, and Awareness to Combat Teen Hunger Throughout Central Florida

Spotlighted by: Cheyanna Johnson

The School Market Program started as an answer to service gaps throughout the Central Florida region. Other programs for kids were not reaching teens because of barriers related to access, stigma, and awareness. The School Market Program addresses these issues through deep involvement from teens themselves.

When a school approaches the food bank with interest in the School Market Program, the first step is identifying and selecting a student group to plan the program and decide on how they want it to be run. The student group chooses the name of the market and the

logo (to go on reusable bags available in the market), which gives them a sense of ownership at the outset. From there, teens are trained to operate the School Market Program independently. Some schools have developed classes that incorporate the program into their education, making the space an interactive learning environment.

From the food bank’s perspective, the School Market Program has been a great model because of the ownership and involvement on the part of the schools. By connecting schools with local community sponsors

(churches, rotary clubs, nonprofits etc.), the weight of fundraising and logistics is removed from the School Staff’s responsibilities, thus reducing the likelihood of burnout. This leaves schools responsible for student involvement, food safety, and oversight of distributions.

For organizations that are currently engaging teens or wanting to begin, the food bank encourages “learning from the teens themselves what is going on in their area, because all neighborhoods are different, and no two kids are going to experience the same thing.”

“Teens are in an in-between space where they are treated like kids by adults and seen as adults by younger kids. Because of this there is a level of independence that needs to be honored and a level of development that needs to be honed.”

BIOGRAPHY

At the time of the initial interview, Cheyanna Johnson was Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida’s School Market Program Manager and had been with the organization for 4 years. She created the program in 2017 as part of the Child Hunger Corps and began managing the program full-time in 2018. In addition to the School Market Program, Cheyanna oversaw the food bank’s Backpack Program and College Partnerships. As of December 2020, Cheyanna is a Program Specialist at Feeding America.

Addressing Stigma: Utilizing School Pantries to Better Meet Teens' Unique Needs

Spotlighted by: Eugenie Sellier

“Our school pantry program is primarily being piloted at high schools, because we have seen in the past that our backpack program does not do well in high schools at all; there is a lot of stigma associated with the backpacks, and the teens refuse to take them. They just don’t want to take a handout from the counselor.”

In recent years, Feeding the Gulf Coast Food Bank has increased its programming targeting teen hunger, having acknowledged that teens have been a missed population in the past. Current offerings include the Farm-to-School program, through which the food bank provides local produce and agriculture/nutrition education, and the School Pantry Program.

In spring of 2019, Gulf Coast Food Bank began to pilot the School Pantry Program at Gulfport High School in Gulfport, Mississippi. Previously, the Backpack Program had been in operation but failed to meet the needs of high school students due to stigma. While the School Pantry Program offers nonperishable food items similar to what were offered in the packs

distributed through the Backpack Program, the School Pantry model operates under a flexible client-choice model where teens pick what items they want based off their household size. During pilot testing, the food bank found success in limiting the number of students who access the pantry at one time; when larger groups visited the pantry, the chance for stigma seemed greater. The School Pantry also provides teens with reusable drawstring bags to carry the food home. In the future, the School Pantry program will expand to two more schools, and the Gulfport High School Pantry hopes to begin offering personal care items to students.

Feeding the Gulf Coast credits the success of its teen food programs to partnering

with local organizations that have pre-existing relationships with teens in the community, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the Parks and Recreation Department. Partnering with these organizations has allowed the food bank to get their foot in the door and learn more about best practices when serving this group. On a larger scale, joining statewide collaborations, such as Alabama’s End Child Hunger task force, has allowed the food bank to further teen hunger advocacy work. Overall, the food bank has found it essential to seek out both local and state-wide partnerships when creating and expanding teen hunger programs.

BIOGRAPHY

Eugenie Sellier has worked for Feeding the Gulf Coast Food Bank for seven years. As their Director of Child Nutrition Programs, she focuses on distributing food to kids outside of school hours through the food bank’s afterschool meals and backpack programs, school pantries, and their new farm-to-school program.

Engaging Teens Through Program Development Opportunities to Build and Foster Trust

Spotlighted by: David Lloyd

Central Pennsylvania Food Bank advocates for the grab and go and/or in-class breakfast models, because the food bank recognizes that, “teens tend to get to school right as class starts and may miss breakfast hours.” In addition to the food banks’ involvement with encouraging teens to participate in school meal programs, the food bank also engages teens through other programs such as summer feeding.

Over the past years, the food bank is focused on establishing the School Pantry Program model in high schools as a way of engaging teen participation. The program has operated for 5 years now and is a combination of elementary, middle school, and high school

sites. The school pantry model addresses this need and allows schools to take more agency of the problem and switch from backpack models.

Many of the pantries are located in areas that are already close to 100% eligibility for free and reduced-price lunches. “Elementary and middle schools have better participation because the families will shop after school when they come to pick up students after school on Wednesdays.” In addition to operating their models in elementary schools, the food bank also implements this program in high schools. “The kids do more of their own shopping, but there is still good participation.”

David has found that partnering with student councils and peer groups is an important step when deciding on menu items and what to stock. It is best to engage teens in choosing what they want to eat. Through building partnerships through a variety of community partners and with school social workers, the food bank has seen success in building awareness. David advises other food banks to, “work with school social workers and food service directors, look into Boys and Girls Clubs and the Salvation Army, because lots of teens come to them for help already after school or during the summer because they need homework help etc.”

“It isn’t just younger kids who need this, teens don’t like to be stigmatized about having a need or being hungry so if they can go in after hours or in a college setting at their leisure it makes them able to get the food they need without people knowing they need that help.”

BIOGRAPHY

David Lloyd, Programs Manager at Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, has been involved with teen programming for the past forty years. Before coming to the food bank, one of his past roles included serving as a Food Service Director in schools, which allowed him to gain extensive knowledge in working with teens. In addition to his work around teen engagement at the food bank, David also oversees the food banks’ Backpack Program, School Pantry Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the food bank’s current work with implementing pantries on college campuses.

Meeting Teens Where They're At: The Importance of Location and Timing in Teen Food Program

Spotlighted by: Phoebe Kitson

“Our teenagers are going to be the future of our community and we want them to have a great experience and love living here. We feel that the work we do will help them be better students, better participants in their community, and better support for their families.”

The Chester County Food Bank (CCFB) partners with organizations throughout Chester County, a suburb of Philadelphia, to specifically address teens experiencing food insecurity. Collaborating with The Point, The Garage, and The Lighthouse, they join forces with school programs so participating teens can access meals and perishable and non-perishable food. This provides items that can be prepared at home with and for their families.

CCFB works with both public and private schools to make emergency food boxes available to teens and families identified by school nurses and counselors. To further address teen hunger at

school, CCFB offers a Weekend Backpack Program and Summer Food Boxes. In 2020, due to the pandemic, they had to pivot and altered the Backpack Program to offer a larger “Sunshine Box” to support feeding teens and their families during quarantine.

Another CCFB teen hunger initiative is working with Coatesville Youth Initiative (CYI), a leadership training program for at-risk youth. The program offers internships to high school students focused on how issues of food insecurity in the Coatesville area impact their peers, neighbors, and families. Through the program, the interns are visible in the community and work to make personal connections with

the goal of linking CCFB resources to groups of teens that have traditionally been difficult to reach. Due to COVID-19, this program is on hiatus, however, CCFB is continuing the conversation so that the program can begin operations as conditions allow.

Open communication and strong collaboration have provided the foundation to create successful teen programs working to erase the barriers and stigma of accessing community food. Chester County Food Bank leverages existing programs and partners that already have the trust of the community allowing them to come alongside teens and their families with food security programs.

BIOGRAPHY

At the time of the initial interview, Phoebe Kitson-Davis was Chester County Food Bank's Director of Agency and Community Partnerships, having served in that role since CCFB's inception in 2009. During her years at CCFB, Phoebe was instrumental in developing the community partnerships needed to implement their teen and youth feeding programs. Reverend Kitson-Davis retired from CCFB in April 2020 but continues to support food security initiatives as a part of her new role with a church that is a CCFB member agency offering a food cupboard and food delivery program for homebound seniors.

NATIONAL PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: YMCA TEEN PROGRAMMING

Local Ys are trusted sources within communities and provide safe spaces for teens to enjoy enrichment programs and healthy meals. However, many Ys have reported that teens are underrepresented at their meal sites and increased efforts are needed to better serve this age group. To address these challenges and strengthen the foundation of communities, over the next ten years, YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) is focusing efforts on transforming the organization into one that can support and engage youth to act as changemakers and to create strong communities.

A panel of local Y Subject Matter Experts unanimously agreed that serving teens was an appropriate expansion strategy to engage more Ys and spark innovation and sustainability. Feeding America and the Urban Institute's *Bringing Teens to The Table: A Focus on Food Insecurity in America* recommendations were a call to action for the Y. With the generous support of the Walmart Foundation, Y-USA saw a clear opportunity to build upon the recommendations from the report by piloting them at local Ys.

Recent Efforts, Funding Opportunities, & Moving Forward

Through the support of Walmart Foundation, Y-USA provided \$10,000 grants for 20 Ys to focus on reaching teens through afterschool and summer meal programs (utilizing CACFP/SFSP) in 2018 and 2019."

The grants built upon the recommendations from Feeding America and Urban Institute's teen hunger report. Ys were asked to: strengthen food sites with complementary teen programming (offer activities specifically designed for teens), engage teens in program design and outreach efforts (create a teen advisory panel and provide

opportunities that ensured teens have voice and choice), adapt charitable feeding strategies to meet teens' needs (be cognizant of teens' need for discretion and make the focus the program rather than the food), and offer programs that leverage locations where teens typically congregate (identify areas where teens were already congregating and take the meals directly to the teens).

In partnership, with Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Center, in 2019, the Y brought together a focus group of Subject Matter Experts from these pilot teen meal programs

to harvest and develop best practices. Early learnings show these pilot teen meal programs yielded increased teen engagement in meal services and strengthened participation in teen programs. Ys offer a variety of complementary programs and services with their teen meal programs such as financial literacy and leadership development, recreational and fitness activities, and college-readiness programs. Ys also reported that pairing food with teen specific programs helped to reduce stigma and preserve

Feeding America and Y-USA have partnered closely for many years on various efforts that impact the children and families we serve. In recent years, both Feeding America and YUSA have been deeply invested in understanding how teens are impacted when it comes to food insecurity.

The information below was provided by Stacey McDaniel. Stacey is a nationally recognized non-profit leader and anti-hunger advocate currently serving at the YMCA of the USA. Under her leadership, the Y launched a peer mentor network to promote innovation and strategic planning, developed sustainability and fundraising resources to preserve food programs for years to come, collaborated with community partners to mold a flexible framework for food programs that uniquely builds upon each communities' strengths and resources, and scaled federally funded child nutrition programs to reach 5,200 sites nationwide—touching the lives of nearly a million kids last year alone. During her tenure, the Y has expanded its anti-hunger work, increasing service per year for the number of youth by 435% and meals by 386%.



the dignity of teens struggling with hunger.

Initial findings confirm that teen involvement is critical. Giving teens a voice and choice in food options, activities, and marketing campaigns increased their engagement and satisfaction with meal programs. Pilot Ys have had to work closely with teens in their programs and often adjust their

strategies and tactics based upon teens' feedback.

With the success of the pilot year, a record setting number of Ys sought funding to launch additional teen meal programs in 2019. The Y movement has shown a large appetite for more funds to support this work with such a large volume of applicants for the teen meal program grants.

YMCA Teen Food Program Spotlights

YMCA OF METROPOLITAN DETROIT

The YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit has seen considerable success with the introduction of “Flavor Stations” – restaurant-style caddies filled with condiments and custom spice blends – which give teens more voice/choice. Additionally, anytime the Y introduces a new meal, surveys are included on the delivery tickets to garner feedback and ensure follow up, so teens know their feedback is heard and valued. The response from youth at all sites receiving Flavor Stations has been positive and resulted in increased consumption of meals.

the teens' feedback, meals were moved to earlier in the afternoon, cold sandwiches and a spice bar with hot sauces were added. Meals were also moved from a separate space to the program space. With the teens fully onboard, participation increased.

YMCA OF DELAWARE

The YMCA of Delaware has focused on providing engaging activities specifically for teens. Along with providing healthy meals for teens, the Y offers sports, music, advocacy, and college readiness preparation. While sitting around the dinner table with the youth, the teen director noted many teens were interested in employment but were having difficulty getting that elusive first job. In response, the Delaware Y, with the support of their community, developed an extensive Workforce Development Program to empower and aid teens in breaking down barriers to gain employment. The Teen Workforce Development program prepares teens to be successful in their first job and gives them the skills necessary to build for their future career.

MALDEN YMCA

The Malden Y developed a teen panel for its food program after seeing firsthand the importance of giving teens a voice. The Y added full hot meals to its music program (which engages teens in lyric writing, beat making, music production and performance). However, participation was not what was expected, and the Y quickly realized the teens needed to have more of a say in the meals. The staff sat down with the teens to gather input on the type, timing, menu descriptions, and food being served. The talks were informal and included discussions with the larger group, smaller groups and the youth leader staff. Based on

ADDRESSING TEEN HUNGER IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

The previous pages are reflective of the need for food and ways that food banks and other partners addressed that need prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Much has changed since the pandemic began.** Feeding America projects that 1 in 8 people overall may experience food insecurity in 2021. This would include 1 in 6 children under the age of 18, many of whom are teenagers.

In turn, food banks have reported serving more people in 2020. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the way food banks are able to engage with and serve their communities. Schools have long been an access point for food assistance for children, teens, and their families, but distance learning kept many students out of the classroom in 2020 and into 2021. Many existing programs that support teens have had to close or adapt their program models to allow for social distancing, so effectively reaching teens takes more creativity and involves thoughtfulness about how to maximize safety. Teens can still contribute to programmatic formation by sharing their ideas about the best ways they can access food in their communities. Teens may also welcome the opportunity to serve as volunteers in order to get out of their homes and give back to their communities.

From the implementation of non-congregate meal distributions to working with a unique set of community partners, food banks are developing creative solutions to ensure children and families continue to have access to meals during the school year.



How four Feeding America member food banks have adapted teen programming in 2020

FEEDING THE GULF COAST

When schools began closing in March (2020), Feeding the Gulf Coast food bank had to suspend its school pantry programming. The food bank shifted to the summer meals program and continued to operate this program through August. The summer meals program was the primary outlet for serving teens. The food bank also operated multiple food distribution programs to provide more food to families, including distributing TANF foods, CFAP boxes, and scheduling mobile pantries at summer meals program partner sites.

With schools returning for the 2020-2021 school year, Feeding the Gulf Coast transitioned from the summer meals program to the afterschool meal program (CACFP) and the Backpack and School Pantry programs and continued to distribute TANF foods, CFAP boxes, and produce bags to partner sites and schools.

“Due to distant learning, fewer teenage students have participated in feeding programs because transportation is a barrier, especially in rural communities.”

Feeding the Gulf Coast

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA FOOD BANK

For the 2020-2021 school year Central Pennsylvania Food Bank has been supplementing school meals with boxes of food for teens and their families at sites where school meals are being distributed. Due to Covid-19, they would open two days a week to distribute meals only. The food bank was able to bundle both breakfast and lunch so families could take three days of meals home on Monday for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and two days of meals home on Thursday for Thursday and Friday. This protected the teens and made it possible to make sure they had breakfast and lunch for the week.

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida actually felt more confident reaching teens during the summer of 2020 because of the non-congregate waivers that allowed delivery directly to families at their homes. In previous pilot models, this proved to be ideal for reaching teens with its Summer Food programming. There are schools in the area operating both virtually and in-person this year, and the food bank is piloting an online ordering platform to maintain students' access to food. The orders will be placed online and picked up in a curbside model or grab-and-go setup.

The food bank is aware that there has been an increase in the need among students for mental health resources, with many dealing with instability in regards to their education and future. Given the relationship between food insecurity and

mental health issues like anxiety and depression, the food bank is working hard to make sure schools and communities are aware of the resources that it provides and will continue to partner with schools to provide resources and expand opportunities for home delivery methods as well.

CHESTER COUNTY FOOD BANK

As in many places across the country, in the community served by Chester County Food Bank, learning pods have become common, though the demand continues to exceed the number of seats available. While all of the districts are providing devices, access to reliable internet service also presents challenges due to spotty service and/or unstable housing situations. Teens are getting tasked with not only managing their own education but also that of their younger siblings. Lack of transportation for families to learning pods and/or food distribution sites continues to be a significant barrier.

The food bank is continuing to work with community partners to provide or augment food resources at a variety of sites. This includes school district's breakfast and lunch distributions, community-organized learning pods, university-based pantries, and youth-serving organizations.

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Feeding America is a nationwide network of food banks that feeds more than 40 million people through food pantries and meal programs in communities across America and leads the nation in the fight against hunger.



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