



Stories about hunger and its root causes from the Oregon Food Bank Network 2013





1910

RENTAL HOUSES

FOOD PANTRY

Last 2 Tuesdays
of each month

4:30 - 6:00

802-7816



INTRODUCTION

Many people assume that hunger is confined to small sectors of our society, in certain faraway neighborhoods. But the real faces of hunger in Oregon are hundreds of thousands of our neighbors who struggle invisibly every day. Their stories show the toll that hunger takes on an estimated 270,000 people who, in an average month, eat food from an emergency food box provided by the Oregon Food Bank Network.

Every day, they face choices that no one should ever have to. In Salem, a man has to choose between an adequate diet, his prescription medications and the canned formula that his seriously ill wife requires, because he can't afford them all. In Seaside, the wife of a disabled veteran wonders how she can start over when she doesn't even have enough money to file for bankruptcy.

Their stories reveal disturbing truths about our great, but imperfect, society and force us to confront our shared fears. They make us doubt the common assumption that most individuals can escape from poverty through good personal choices. They show that people can work hard for decades without ever achieving one of the most fundamental aspects of the American dream: basic economic security.


We sincerely appreciate the honesty and courage of those who shared their experiences with us. Stories about their lives provide valuable insight and help us better accomplish our mission to eliminate hunger and its root causes ... because no one should be hungry.



SHINING A LIGHT ON HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Oregon Food Bank's annual Voices project brings attention to stories and insights from some of the people we serve. Each year, we travel across the state to talk with food-insecure Oregonians about issues that matter to them.

In October and November of 2012, 44 people who received emergency food in the last year attended Voices focus groups in Colton, Fossil, Klamath Falls, Pendleton, Portland, Salem and Seaside. Participants were recruited randomly by our partner agencies. This year, our discussions focused on food and nutrition, the economy and the job market, family economic security, civic engagement, and community.

A portrait of a man, Charles Klamath Falls, wearing a black baseball cap with a logo, glasses, a plaid shirt, and a camouflage jacket. He is standing outdoors in front of a chain-link fence and trees. The background is slightly blurred.

Charles Klamath Falls

I am at a point where I need help, but it's really hard to ask. I was raised to work hard, hard, hard. Do the job right the first time, you know. Old school. There's a lot of really hard workers like me in the same boat.

I NEED HELP, BUT IT'S REALLY HARD TO ASK

Charles, Klamath Falls

I've point-blank busted my butt all my life. I started out workin' farms. And I've logged. I was a tree faller. The doctor's been telling me to file for disability for about seven years and I've been fightin' to work as long as I can. Ripped up that recommendation, threw it away and kept working. I have a really bad back and about five years ago I had a major heart attack. I'm unemployed right now, but if a job opened now I still would take it.

I live with my wife, two teenage daughters and a granddaughter. I've skipped a lot of meals to make sure my kids are full. If I have to go hungry, I have to go hungry. I make sure they eat. The kids, they like to eat everything we get at the food bank. It helps.



Debbie
Klamath Falls

I worked for 40 years until I had a stroke and then they made me quit work. Instead of being able to afford three meals a day, my main meal usually comes about two or three o'clock. I think the sad thing is that once I've skipped one meal, it makes it easier to skip others, so I'm skipping a lot of meals now.

I'M SKIPPING A LOT OF MEALS

Kathy, Sublimity

I eat maybe twice a day. A lot of times I make something quick and then I'm out the door, with no money to get anything. My doctor's worried because I am malnourished. I lost 70 pounds. He says I'm supposed to eat as much protein as possible. Eggs, peanut butter, meats and beans have good protein. I'm supposed to be taking calcium and vitamin D and some other medications, because I also have osteoporosis and diabetes. But I don't take them because I can't afford them.

Taffy, Colton

Every day I eat once a day. Just dinner. I keep busy all day so I don't have to think about it. I'm not starving, really. Water's good.

Antonia Portland

We're struggling so bad. During the last week of most months my husband doesn't bring lunches to work, even though he should. He works such a hard job. But he won't, just so we can make sure our kids eat.



THE RECESSION DEFINITELY IMPACTED US

Antonia, Portland

I'm a certified professional nanny. My husband remodels and repairs homes.

I went to school in 2005 and I was getting great nanny jobs from the start — business was booming. In the last four or five years, the recession definitely impacted us. It's been especially bad because we provide services to other people who are not hiring because they are laid off. I worked for a pilot, but when he got laid off with hundreds of other pilots, I got laid off too. My husband's work depends on how much the contractor has going on in his business, and people aren't remodeling their homes as much as they were.

I work with a couple different families as a nanny now. One family cut my hours from three days a week to two and then to one. I've applied for five jobs in the last two days. The jobs that are out there now are the lowest pay, of course: minimum wage and sometimes even less.

I have three children, all boys. We don't ever want to tell them no within reason or say, 'I'm sorry we only have crackers.' SNAP is so helpful. I just want to cry having that money. It's accepted in so many places and we don't buy junk food with it. We love fresh fruits and vegetables. I also coupon to make it stretch more. I'm an extreme couponer.



John Klamath Falls

We're running out of foods we used to take for granted, like sugar and dried beans. We go look for them and they're gone. And those foods are what we get in food boxes, so the food pantry has helped a lot.

WE'RE BOTH UNEMPLOYED RIGHT NOW

John, Klamath Falls

There's things that come up in life that you're not expecting to happen, and there's no explanation for them. Doesn't matter how much money you're making. I have three sons and a daughter — finally got a daughter — they're 23, 19, 9 and 5. My littlest boy got leukemia when he was 18 months old, and now he's 9 and living with leukemia. Five years of chemo, a 300-mile round-trip every Friday. The chemo was killing his taste buds so they had to put in a feeding tube.

I played baseball for Oregon State and my oldest boy actually won a college world series for Oregon State, pitching. I went in the Navy after playing for Oregon State. I was a Navy diver for almost six years. Then I was an RV salesman and I was actually the number-one salesman for Winnebago in the country. My wife was a polysomnography technician; she analyzed people's sleep. So we were doing well financially.

We're both unemployed right now. The job market is bad. Hopefully, that will come back around and I can get back to selling. I'm crossing my fingers, holding my breath.



Thomas Portland

My sister couldn't take care of her children, so I stepped up to take care of my nieces and nephews. Kids at their ages — they're 13, 15 and 11 now — eat like you wouldn't believe. Oh my god. Everything I put in that kitchen is gone.

IT'S HARD TO FEED A FAMILY

Thomas, Portland

I found out about the pantry from a referral list.

I'm not a lazy person — I work hard and I always provided for myself — but when I first became the caretaker for my nieces and nephews, I needed more food in the house. The kids eat everything. I cook a big pot of spaghetti and it might last for two days. And food disappears at night. I have one that puts food in her suitcase under the bed. Because of her mother. Her mother had to lock food up because the kids were taking it and giving it to people outside.

I had to step my game up when the kids came into the picture. You'd be surprised how much money you can save by just creating your own garden. I grow collard greens, tomatoes, basil, green onions and parsley.

A woman with brown hair, wearing a light blue jacket over a grey t-shirt and black cargo pants, stands on a green lawn. In the background, there is a multi-story orange brick building on the left and a single-story white building with a blue roof on the right. The sky is overcast.

Jess Pendleton

I'm a burn victim. My clothes caught on fire when I was 8 and a half years old and luckily, I lived. I wasn't supposed to. I was actually declared dead twice and I have burns on 46 percent of my body.

I DON'T WANT TO BE PARALYZED, I WANT TO ENJOY MY KIDS

Jess, Pendleton

The doctors told me that if I push myself as hard as I used to — when I had two jobs, went to school 14 hours a week and took care of three kids — I'll be paralyzed by the time I'm 40. I'm 36 years old. I don't want to be paralyzed. I want to enjoy my kids. They're bright and giving, they stick up for the underdogs, and they would give up everything they owned if it meant feeding or taking care of another kid.

Right now I don't exactly have a home, but I'm trying.

The only job I've been able to do is delivering newspapers and it barely pays for my gas. To make it work, I'm doing Tuesday to Saturday at ungodly hours. I get my papers at 12:30 a.m. and I drive all of them, even my foot routes, because I can't carry the papers. One of my routes is 90 miles long and takes a quarter-tank of gas in my car.

When I have to scrape and scrounge for gas, I go out canning. I dig in dumpsters to get cans and bottles. Twenty of them makes a dollar and, sometimes, I need that.



James Salem

I keep joking with the checkers at the grocery store: nice thing about inflation is you don't have to carry so many bags when you buy \$20 worth of groceries.

A QUARTER OF A MILLION IN MEDICAL BILLS

James, Salem

I was a miner underground at Sunshine Mining Company for almost 20 years and I also had a construction and landscaping business here in Oregon. People who don't go out there and work, who don't get slivers in their hands and a sweaty brow have no idea what it takes anymore to put a pot of beans on the stove or buy a prescription medication you need.

I had my first major heart attack in '02. I had no insurance and the bills mounted to almost a quarter million dollars. Now I've had three major heart attacks and 13 stents in my heart.

My wife had polio when she was an infant and is now suffering from the late effects of polio. Her breathing diaphragm is shutting down and we had a feeding tube put in her. Many hospital bills. She needs canned formula — very costly.

I'm not that particular and I don't eat that much. I eat three meals a day but small, small. I'm down about 30 pounds in the last six months and my wife's down 70 pounds.

Going to the food pantry gives you a little bit extra in your pocket for those things that don't normally go in the shopping cart, like fresh milk, eggs, bread. We're both trying to fine-tune the diet to fit the budget with a view towards maintaining our health.

Tina Seaside

At 48 years old I don't think we're gonna meet our dreams of having our own property. A lot of vets like to live out in the hills. It's a dream we've both had. I look at tiny houses — 200 square feet. If we had an acre of land we could have some chickens, some rabbits and a garden. I'm thinking less house, less cleaning, less heat, less bills ... you know?



THE VA'S TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM

Tina, Seaside

My husband's a disabled vet. He was over in Iraq. He's been hocking his guns for gas money to get to the VA for his appointments.

The VA's trying to figure out what's wrong with him, and they've got him on the disability list right now. They told him don't get a civilian job, because he can't deal with civilian people. Living in a tourist town ... that's really bad.

I am currently working with seniors and disabled. I take on extra jobs. Sometimes I take live-in caregiving positions that take me out of the house overnight two or three times a week, because we need the money that bad right now. We're filing bankruptcy, but we can't even finish it because we don't have the funds. Our 10-year-old's upset when he comes home, because there's no snack for after school.

I've gone once at this food pantry and once at the little one in Seaside when we were really down to nothing. It's hard when there's so many days off school for kids. The boredom kicks in, and then the food cravings kick in and then they're eating everything in the household.



Lois Pendleton

I've always liked to help others instead of myself. If there's a neighbor who doesn't have any food, I share from my food box because a lot of them are proud — they feel that food boxes are not meant for them. I used to feel that way too.

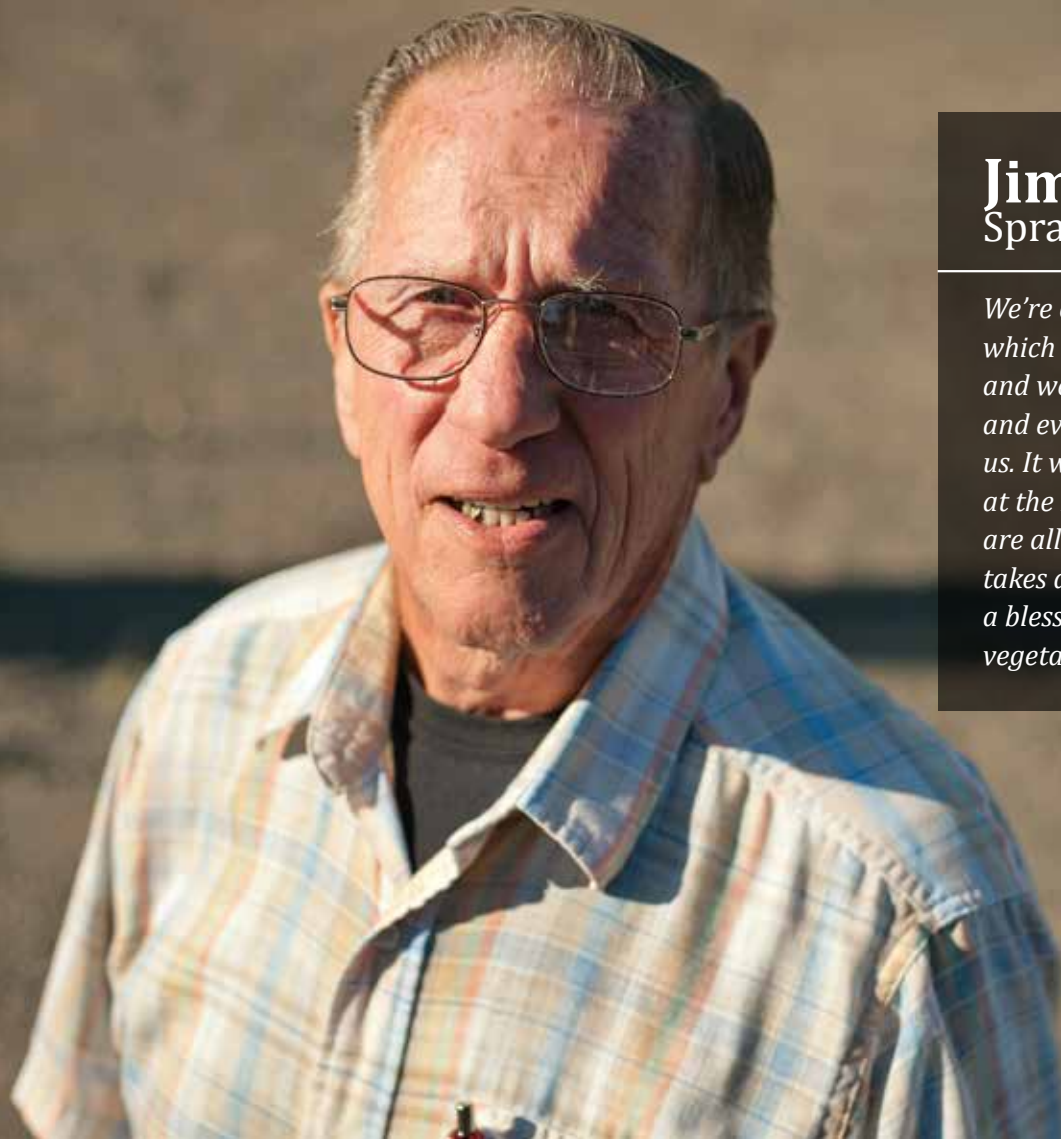
I AM THANKFUL FOR WHAT I HAVE

Lois, Pendleton

I eat a lot of ramen noodles. When I turn into a walking noodle, watch out!

I thank God every day for food pantries and the people who work there because if it wasn't for those boxes, there would be so many people hungry and going without. I get Social Security, but most of that goes for rent and other bills like lights. I get \$75 a month in SNAP and I go to the food pantry when my food stamps run out.

I am thankful for what I have. I have a roof over my head, thank God. Some live under bridges, freezing all winter long, no shoes. People are still homeless, still hungry, still wondering where they're gonna go and what they're gonna do. That's not right; we need to fix the economy.



Jim Spray

We're on a set income, which is below poverty level, and we share too. We share and everybody shares with us. It works out. The people at the Fossil food pantry are all volunteers. Nobody takes advantage. It's really a blessing. We get groceries, vegetables, fruit.

WE SHARE AND EVERYBODY SHARES WITH US

Jim, Spray

I've had my own mechanic shop for 35 years and retired from that last week, after they life-flighted me into Bend with a stroke. I'm pretty well getting back to normal. It was just a blood clot that went through my brain. So nothing. No biggie. Went through.

It's kind of hard pulling away from my own business. My Social Security is quite a bit less than my wife's, but we still make enough to pay our overhead. As far as our living is concerned, we are pretty careful as to what we spend. We don't eat out; we make all of our own meals.

And I do a lot of volunteer work. They've got me hooked into the city council in Spray. I'm in the parks department. Last year, we got involved with the Ford Community Foundation. My wife is curator of the Spray museum. And I drive for the Wheeler County Community Transportation Service. We got grants for vehicles and fuel to drive seniors and disabled people who need transportation to the doctor. It's all volunteer. And I drive a bus to Fossil for the food pantry and help people load and unload their groceries. As long as I can still move stuff for them, I'll do it.



Michelle Seaside

We wouldn't make it without SNAP. I'm going back to school, so hopefully my situation will change enough that I won't need help anymore.

MY DAUGHTER DESERVES A CHANCE TO STAY IN SCHOOL

Michelle, Seaside

I have a 14-year-old and a 19-year-old. The 19-year-old just started up at PSU this fall. More than anything, I want to keep my daughter in school and see her succeed. She's worked really hard and always been a 4.0 or just under a 4.0. She deserves a chance to stay in school, so I'm doing everything I can to keep her there.

My daughter got a lot of grants and some subsidy loans, but there's still almost \$200 per quarter that we're short for tuition, and that leaves nothing for books. I pay for her school off the top, then I pay my rent and then I pay everything else.

A portrait of a woman with long dark hair and bangs, wearing glasses and a black top. She is looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The background is an outdoor setting with trees and a building.

Brenda Molalla

Sometimes my SNAP benefit lasts until the last week of the month, but this month I bought meat, so I have \$18 left for the next two weeks. I'll hang on to that for milk for the kids.

INVEST IN OREGON'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY

We need to create more living-wage jobs to increase long-term economic security for Oregon families. As more Oregonians get back to work, more families will be able to meet their basic needs. This will not happen overnight. In the meantime, public programs help to keep many of our neighbors fed, housed and clothed while they look for work.

Policies and programs that put more money in the pockets of low-income people are the most effective investment we can make in economic recovery. People quickly spend these funds at local businesses, like grocery stores and gas stations, enabling those businesses to keep their doors open and retain employees. These employees are then able to maintain their spending in the community as well. Every dollar we invest in SNAP, for example, has an economic multiplier effect that results in \$1.72 in economic activity.

Invest in our economic recovery, protect local businesses and help Oregonians meet their basic needs by supporting the following policies and programs:

- The Oregon Hunger Response Fund (formerly called the General Fund Food Program)
- Food and nutrition programs like SNAP and Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid
- Housing, utility and homelessness assistance programs
- Low-income tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit



Ree Ann Fossil

I want honesty from candidates who run for office. Stop promising changes you can't do alone. The government has checks and balances, and that's a good thing. Just say: this is a good concept, a good law, and I will work with the rest of the government and see if we can get this put together.

WORKING TOGETHER TO FIGHT HUNGER

Although most focus group participants planned to vote in the fall of 2012, many said that they feel increasingly frustrated by broken promises. Some wondered how they could make a difference in a time when even elected leaders struggle — and sometimes fail — to keep their promises and make positive changes.

Focus group participants came from all parts of the political spectrum, and the vast majority agreed that we should make food a priority. Individuals, businesses, nonprofits and all levels of government need to work together to help Oregonians meet their basic needs.

Mike, Salem

This was the first year I voted since 2000. I got really disheartened by politics. I voted this year because my grandmother showed me some info about how our state representative supports Oregon Food Bank. She's funny. She says, 'Oh I love him.' And I said, 'Well good, vote him in because he supports the food bank.' After I helped with her ballot, I went home and pulled out mine. It had been sitting there for a week and a half and I wasn't gonna touch it. But I voted because I wanted to support the guy who supports food assistance programs.

Sandy Colton

I skipped meals a lot when the kids were growing up. I would like to see every person in Congress — right up to the president — come and live in our shoes for one month and figure out how to survive. Here's what it's coming down to: you have to sell everything you own — your house, your cars, everything — just to survive.



WALK IN OUR SHOES

The phrase “walk in our shoes” echoed through almost every Voices focus group conversation for the past two years.

In communities across Oregon, the people say there is a growing stigma against those who don’t earn enough to cover basic necessities — even if they are good, hard-working, generous people impacted by circumstances beyond their control.

They said that people who have never personally experienced poverty should try to understand their experience better by budgeting like they do, eating like they do and living like they do if only for a short time. Here’s how:

- Try to eat a healthy diet on a SNAP budget of \$30 per week.
- Organize a fundraiser, food drive or volunteer work party to support a food bank, food pantry or meal site in your area.
- Eliminating hunger and its root causes will require strong public-private partnerships. You can help by advocating for public policies and programs that prevent hunger.

For more information about or assistance with any of the above activities, contact Sarah Flynn at sflynn@oregonfoodbank.org.



Walk in my shoes for six months and live on what we have to live on for six months before you cut the food program or the kids' meal programs.

Sheryl
Pendleton

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the work and support of many people.

Most of all, thank you to each and every one of our focus group participants.

We owe a special thank you to the partner agencies that assisted with this year's Voices focus groups: Fossil Community Food Pantry, Salvation Army Pendleton Corps, Colton Helping Hands, Portland Adventist Community Center, Friends Church Food Pantry in Klamath Falls, New Hope Food Pantry in Salem and St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Gearhart.

Thanks also to the regional food banks that connected us with partner agencies: CAPECO Food Share, Oregon Food Bank Metro Services, Klamath/Lake Counties Food Bank, Marion Polk Food Share and CCA Regional Food Bank.

Project coordinator, focus group facilitator, report author: Sarah Flynn

Photographers: Brian Lee of Brewhouse Studio (Fossil, Pendleton, Colton, Portland, Salem and Seaside) and Steven Scardina Photography (Klamath Falls)

Report editor and project manager: Brian Schaeperkoetter

Designer: Jamie Meyer | Digital editor: Amber Young | Transcription coordinator: Anneliese Koehler

Transcription volunteers: Kathy Brown, Shelley Signett, Valerie Zike, Shelia Johnson, Vician Xiong and Lucas Gryzbowski

Note takers: Phillip Kennedy-Wong, Katie Carter, Mike Jezewski, Jeff Kleen, Ali Abbors, Judith Auslander, Erin Carver and Tarn Allen







and the Oregon Food Bank Network

www.oregonfoodbank.org/voices

A member of **FEEDING
AMERICA**[™]

© Oregon Food Bank 2013