

SPRING 2018

# the Harvester



food bank  
of the Southern Tier

Working Together To Build And Sustain  
Hunger-Free Communities Throughout The Southern Tier



*"If there's a way to live easy on benefits, I must be doing it wrong. Because I don't have extra of anything."*

- Wendy, Food Bank advocate and SNAP recipient

ADVOCACY IN ACTION  
..... 2



AGENCY OF CHANGE  
..... 4



FARM BILL & SNAP  
..... 4



## ADVOCACY MATTERS

What's it like to live in poverty in the Southern Tier? To stifle your pride and accept help to make ends meet? To feed yourself on \$6 a day?

Wendy can tell you. She is a food pantry client and a graduate of the Food Bank's Speakers Bureau. Wendy is also a Food Bank advocate and she wants to clear up some stereotypes about people who need food assistance to get by.

continued on page 3



**food bank**  
of the Southern Tier

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**BECOME AN  
ADVOCATE TODAY!**

Please use the enclosed postcard to tell your representative in Congress why SNAP and other federal nutrition assistance programs matter. The **text in green** in this issue contains data you can use in your comments. Thank you for advocating for families facing food insecurity!

**New York 23rd District**

Congressman Tom Reed  
89 W. Market Street  
Corning, NY 14830

**New York 22nd District**

Congresswoman Claudia Tenney  
49 Court Street  
Metro Center, Suite 210  
Binghamton, NY 13901

Find the representative for your area at [govtrack.us](http://govtrack.us)

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

**ADVOCATING FOR  
CHANGE IN 2018**

Dear Friends,

When most people think about the work of the Food Bank, the first image that probably comes to mind is a can of food. We talk a lot about our food distribution activities, as that is the core of what we do. But we know it takes more than food to build and sustain hunger-free communities. The truth is, hunger and food insecurity are complex issues that cannot be solved by charity alone. Through advocacy, the Food Bank works to address the systemic issues that contribute to and perpetuate the problem of hunger in our society.

One piece of legislation that has direct impact on food security is the Farm Bill, which funds SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). The Bill is up for renewal this year and includes **proposed cuts to SNAP** which will significantly increase the number of people seeking help from pantries and meal programs that are already stretched thin.

If we truly believe in working toward a future without hunger, we must raise our



collective voices in support of a strong Farm Bill that includes adequate funding for SNAP and other nutrition programs.

We envision a future where access to healthy food is recognized as a fundamental right that is essential to the well-being and success of individuals, and the foundation of a strong, vibrant society.

This vision will be achieved only through a combination of food distribution, community partnerships, education, and legislative policies that end hunger. The work we are doing today brings us one step closer to that future. We hope you will join us on this journey!

In Partnership,

Natasha R. Thompson  
President & CEO

**ADVOCACY IN ACTION:  
MARK BORDEAU**



Mark, right, volunteers with state Sen. Fred Akshar at a Mobile Food Pantry.

Mark Bordeau's passion is food. More specifically, his life's work is making sure all people have access to healthy and nutritious food.

Mark is Senior Director of Food Services for Broome-Tioga BOCES, and serves on the Food Bank Board of Directors. Mark is chair of the Food Bank Advocacy Committee which addresses the root causes of hunger by advocating for policies that impact both the Food Bank and its constituents.

"We need to be the voice to our legislators and advocate for legislation that will reduce food insecurity in our community," Mark says. "Through our educational efforts, the Advocacy

# ADVOCACY MATTERS

continued from page 1

Wendy was a 23-year-old college student when she sustained a traumatic brain injury at work. She was left with debilitating headaches from spinal fluid pooling in her brain. Despite chronic pain and nausea, Wendy completed a bachelor's degree in Human and Community Services and began working with a women and children's program. But multiple brain surgeries kept her from pursuing that passion. Wendy will require surgeries for the rest of her life to control her condition.

Wendy, now 50, lives on \$825 per month from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and \$192 from SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps. Wendy is frustrated by the stereotype that people who need government assistance don't want to work, and that recipients are living easy, leisurely lives.

"I'd give up benefits in a minute if I could be healthy and earn \$1,000 a month working," she says. "Anyone who's on SNAP would give it up if they could have a job that met their needs."

Wendy's full-time job is maintaining her health; she has at least three doctors appointments a week. Every surgery leaves Wendy with less ability to focus, organize and concentrate. She struggles with anxiety, depression and intense fatigue.

Wendy's story is common among people relying on SNAP and other social assistance programs. **Nearly 3 million New Yorkers use SNAP. Nearly 90 percent of SNAP recipients in New York state are children, elderly or disabled.**

**Most SNAP recipients who can work do so. Among SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult, more than half work while receiving SNAP. According to census data, more than half of able adults receive SNAP for less than two years.**

Federal assistance programs cover Wendy's rent in low-income housing, utilities and groceries. Medicaid covers her medical needs; her former employer does not, although she was hurt on the job. Wendy has learned to live very simply, and she budgets every dollar carefully.



"I'm a bit of a counter," Wendy shares. She knows exactly how long a bottle of shampoo is likely to last and how many rolls of toilet paper she'll need in a month. She knows the best prices on milk and dairy products, and the price differential between buying or making her own yogurt and cottage cheese.

Wendy also relies on local pantries and low-cost farm shares. She prepares and freezes vegetables to get through the winter.

After her bills are paid and basic needs met, Wendy has about \$25 left over per week for unexpected expenses and an occasional splurge, like lunch out with a friend or a Dunkin' Donuts coffee. Sometimes, she'll budget \$7 for a pound of shrimp that she can use in four meals.

It's important to Wendy that people know she wouldn't survive without the vital support she receives, and that she doesn't take it for granted.

"If there's a way to live easy on benefits, I must be doing it wrong. Because I don't have extra of anything," Wendy says. "Most people who receive help wonder all the time about how anyone could get rich off the system. Most of this 'free money' goes right to my landlord and utility bills."

A reduction in SNAP benefits this year would mean more visits to food pantries, less nutritious food, and being a little hungry sometimes. As things are, Wendy maintains, "My needs are met and my wants are few."

Committee provides opportunities for people who are food insecure to tell their story, and teach us all that hunger does not discriminate; that so many of us are one paycheck away from facing hunger."

Mark oversees the Rock On Café program that provides nutritious foods for all 15 school districts in the Broome-Tioga BOCES. The need in those districts is great; 61 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The Food Bank supplies Backpacks of food to students at risk of hunger and has recently started a school food pantry pilot at East Learning Center in Binghamton.

This work is not just a job to Mark; it's a passion that he puts into action. Almost daily he can be found volunteering at a Backpack RePack shift in Binghamton, working with state and federal elected officials on policies affecting school meals and access for kids, or pitching in at a Mobile Food Pantry distribution, often alongside his family.

"Food is something no human being should have to worry about. The Food Bank provides a tremendous service to families that, for many unforeseen circumstances, are struggling to put healthy food on the table," Mark says. "And we are also asking the tough questions of why food insecurity exists and how we can end hunger."

Food pantries and other charities help alleviate hunger in the moment but only policy changes can systemically end food insecurity, Mark says. He points to the Farm to Food Bank Tax Credit Bill passed in New York state last year, which gives farmers more incentive to donate to food banks, and Governor Cuomo's No Student Goes Hungry proposal which aims to reduce food insecurity for K-12 and college students.

"Make no mistake, if we did not advocate for these changes, change would not happen," Mark says. "Hunger and food insecurity impacts an entire community. It is going to take all of us to eradicate hunger in the Southern Tier."

# AGENCY OF CHANGE



Anne Haus manages the Trumansburg pantry and advocates for her clients.

Anne Haus has been co-coordinator of the Trumansburg Food Pantry for 10 years. The pantry, located in the Trumansburg United Methodist Church, serves 300 individuals each month.

As a partner agency, the pantry works with the Food Bank to provide food and programs for families in need in the Trumansburg area. Anne has also joined in the Food Bank's efforts to educate her community and local lawmakers on the need for hunger relief services in the Southern Tier.

"We are doing all we can to meet the need in our community but we really do need help from outside, from the state and federal level," Anne says.

Nationally, charitable organizations provide just five percent of assistance needed to feed people living with food insecurity. Federal and state programs provide the rest. Food banks, pantries and other hunger relief organizations simply could not meet the need on their own.

For this reason, the Trumansburg Food Pantry hosted a visit for New York State Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton last year to educate her about local hunger and show her how the pantry operates. Anne also accompanied the Food Bank to Albany to lobby for increased Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) funding the Food Bank uses to provide nutritious food.

"It is important for legislators to know how state funds are working locally," Anne says. "My experience with the Food Bank has made me much more knowledgeable and comfortable speaking about the issues," Anne says.

Anne uses her knowledge of state and federal resources to educate her neighbors and to seek support for the pantry whether it is a donation of time, funds or a voice. We are so grateful to Anne and our other partners who not only serve families in need but also advocate on their behalf.

## THE FARM BILL AND WHY IT MATTERS

We are focusing our advocacy and outreach efforts on the federal Farm Bill as it nears renewal this year. The Farm Bill significantly impacts our mission to build and sustain hunger-free communities throughout the Southern Tier.

"The Farm Bill is predominantly a nutrition bill," says Randi Quackenbush, Advocacy and Education Manager at the Food Bank. "About 80 percent of the funding in the Farm Bill covers nutrition programs, such as TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) which provides us 15 percent of the food we distribute to partner agencies and clients."

The Farm Bill also covers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - formerly known as Food Stamps - an important source of food for many households served by the Food Bank. The bill is typically reauthorized every five years. The current Farm Bill, the Agricultural Act of 2014, included an \$8 billion cut to SNAP.

"Although a lot of misconceptions about SNAP exist, it is one of the most effective and least frauded government assistance programs," Randi says.

The US Department of Agriculture estimates the SNAP fraud rate at one percent. And the number of Americans in need of SNAP assistance is declining as the economy rebounds. Additionally, a USDA study of SNAP participation found that slightly more than half of all new recipients participate for less than one year and leave the program when their immediate need passes.

### YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Please use the enclosed postcard to share your voice with your federal representative and support the continued funding of SNAP — a program that works for those in need.

SNAP also generates \$1.70 in economic activity for every federal dollar spent, adding tens of millions of dollars into local economies. A reduction in SNAP spending would not only negatively impact thousands of families, but also local food retailers, farmers and food manufacturers.

SNAP kept 714,000 New Yorkers out of poverty from 2009-2012. If there are further cuts to SNAP, food banks would not be able to meet the increased demand. Nationally, charities provide just five percent of the food assistance needed to feed people living with food insecurity and hunger. Government nutrition programs provide the rest.

Hearings for Farm Bill reauthorization continue this year. In February, our Advocacy team took four pantry clients to meet with elected officials in Washington DC, bringing people who have experienced hunger and received nutrition assistance into the discussion. All year, we will continue to educate our legislators on the importance of these programs and advocate for the families who rely on us.

Working together to build and sustain hunger-free communities throughout the Southern Tier.

[www.foodbankst.org](http://www.foodbankst.org)

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