**Feeding Colorado**

**Elevating Voices, Ending Hunger**

**Listening Session Summaries**

**Mt. Carmel Veteran’s Center Colorado Springs, CO**

**August 6, 2022**

**6 participants**

**THEMES**

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| **THEME** | **QUOTES/SUMMARIES FROM PARTICIPANTS** |
| Life is difficult, scary, and unknown right now. There are lots of life transitions happening in either having to enroll in or be removed from various benefits. Folks are having to face new and unknown situations due to COVID. | **“I'm starting to pay for things by myself for the first time, food stamps were taken away when I started working, and I have to go pantry to pantry for food.”**  **“Coming out of COVID, everything has changed, everything is higher in prices. I got a decent job, got kicked off food stamps. I can’t have my kids starve.”**  One participant became disabled, is unable to work, got low-income housing, and is finding it difficult to feed herself due to cost. She buys what she can with food stamps and relies on family and friends to make up what she needs.  One participant lost some income when husband passed, not a lot to fall back on. She is grateful that she has senior living, but it’s a HUD facility and they base it on income. She lives on a pretty fixed income and makes tradeoffs on what she wants to buy from the grocery store.  One participant, a military spouse, is not sure when they’re moving because of military. She can’t find a job and cannot afford childcare and has to stay at home. She struggles with postpartum depression. |
| People do not feel like they are thriving. They do not have the ability to spend money on things and experiences besides basic needs. They have to make tradeoffs and make sure their dollar stretches further than ever | **“Sometimes you have to make a choice on how you spend your dollars. They’re not going far enough now, and you have to be selective.”**  One participant is enrolled in SNAP, but she’s not sure if she’s thriving. She doesn’t think you should have to work to stay on SNAP because she wants to work, but can’t.  One participant was frustrated because she can’t go out to eat with friends, see a movie, or do anything fun because of the cost.  One participant is stressed thinking about how to decide to spend her money: gas or bills or food. She is a part of an agricultural community, so she spends money on animals. **“We have to take care of them to make it to the next year, but how do you make it to the next year?"**  One participant can’t remember the last time family went out to eat. She actively chooses less expensive items at the grocery store.  One participant said it’s hard to sit at home because she is diagnosed with depression. She has to choose between taking care of herself, going out, dental work, car, etc.  One participant just wants to not feel insecure about what is happening next. She wants to say, **“Whatever happens we can afford it. We’re going to be okay.”** |
| When asked what they need to thrive in terms of SNAP, participants said they need increased SNAP benefits, decreased income eligibility, a decreased Cliff Effect related to SNAP, the ability to save money without retaliation, and stability. | **“Don’t take SNAP right away when someone’s job changes.”**  One participant started saving, then got SNAP taken away. She says EBT needs to be less judgmental and more accommodating. People need to have an easier transition off of SNAP instead of cutting off benefits.  **“I want to be able to not be on SNAP and EBT. Even though it’s helping, I would love to not be on it.”** This participant is tired of getting the looks when she uses her benefits. She would love to have a mortgage and a house where she can have an office and a dining room table.  Even though one participant’s family is above the SNAP limit, they struggle. The eligibility should consider debts and moving expenses. This participant spends most of her money on moving because she is in a military family. **When her husband, who is in the military, got promoted, she couldn’t qualify for SNAP and that was the end of the conversation about.**  **“You should be able to have cushion in your checking account and they don’t use it against you, you have to have a backup plan and stability.”** |
| Participants overwhelmingly want secure living and financial situations and to be free from need for governmental assistance. They want to face future situations with confidence. | One participant knows someone making $40,000 with two children, one who is autistic with very specific eating habits. Between credit card, rent, two children, she barely makes ends meet.  One participant said if she had a family, she knows 40,000 wouldn’t make it. She used to be able to help the working poor and have been in that position. It’s so hard. Food pantries are really great and she appreciates it, especially with the food. |
| Participants’ communities need more opportunities to come together and support each other with their needs and more affordable housing. | One participant is from a rural community where the nearest grocery store is 30 minutes away. **“Don’t take away from agriculture communities. Come out to us. We will do trades (meat for eggs). We need more ability to build greenhouses to make their own food.”**  One participant lives near a shopping area. They need more community efforts to support each other, like a trade system without all the rules and regulations.  **“We need more food banks and farmers markets.”**  We need more affordable housing. Things have gotten really bad here in Colorado Springs and in Denver.  Having a house is really important. Making it easier to have housing is important. |
| Participants believe that the root causes of hunger that need to be addressed are the rising costs of food and housing. | **“Food cost is increasing, rent is inflating, so is childcare.”**  Food cost is increasing. Rent is just too much, even for people who are working and have good jobs.  Everything you go, things are $1 or $2 more expensive.  One participant has to travel far to get to a grocery store because he lives in a food desert and everything is expensive in CO Springs. Raising minimum wage makes everything else more expensive, feels like a catch 22. |
| Regular access to affordable, healthy food is extremely important. Choice is important as well. | One participant has older kids who are eating more and want to play sports. He has to make sure that they are healthy. It’s vital.  Several participants discussed the difficulties in either themselves or family members having allergies. It’s difficult to access what you need. |