**Feeding Colorado**

**Elevating Voices, Ending Hunger**

**Listening Session Summaries**

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

**July 21, 2022**

**9 participants**

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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 having to move due to military situations. | One participant discussed having 4 kids in school, car note, insurance, and food costs. Family dynamic shifted and it’s chaotic. She’s not at home with kids all the time and is coordinating time differently with spouse.  One participant is a new military spouse. The first year has been really hard because she is used to having 2 incomes. Her family went from middle class to low class. Her husband got deployed, but was not getting paid for a while. Her mental health down is struggling since she’s not working anymore.  One participant expressed frustration because she has a social work degree and used to tell people how to fix struggling household. Now her family is struggling. It’s frustrating to go to grocery store and go from spending $100 to $300. She doesn’t work so she can get WIC assistance. If her husband gets promoted, she doesn’t get assistance.  One participant is frustrated because prices keep going up. Taxes went up, insurance went up, food’s gone up. Everything has gone except income. All gobbled up from utilities, wondering what’s going to take the next big chunk out of it  **"My husband is an E4 promotable. If he gets to E5 I'll get kicked off WIC."**    **"We only have two chicken breasts. I can't even count the nights where we sit down to eat as a family and I don't."**    **"The gas is connected to the car is connected to the job is connected to housing is connected to childcare and then you spend all your paycheck on that stuff and you're still behind."** |
| In order to thrive, participants explained that they need accessible, nutritious food in quantities that make sense; support from their community; and more provisions. | One participant explained that she gets groceries cheaper when she can (commissary, clearance aisle, pantries). She puts aside food from friends and neighbors who call for help. She also talks to and brings supplies to families at the homeless shelter who can’t make payments.  One participant said it would be helpful for active duty to have a sliding scale for more expensive places and rank. There was a scale with COVID, but E3 and above don’t apply, and she personally knows people in those situations who absolutely need the help. Military families need more accessible food banks in terms of timing and location.  One participant said she receives $47 a month from WIC for fruits and vegetables. She can buy 2 bags of broccoli, 6 apples, 3 tomatoes, bananas, pineapple, 2 bags of salad. Next to nothing and she has $8 left. Healthy food is not accessible.  Multiple participants make use of the Facebook group for moms to trade things, which is unique to CO Springs. |
| Participants want more solutions for families with children, including more accessible school meals and childcare. | One participant talked about how her kids are important. They go to school really early. Her son likes to hang out with kids and eat breakfast. Price jump for school meals there is insane. If you have more than one kid it adds up.  One participant knows friends and neighbors whose kids were happy to get a meal at school because knew they would get a meal at school not at home.  **“It’s hard for people with small children, it’s hard for moms to go to work while husband is gone as a soldier. Mom has to do everything by herself, cannot work.”**  It’s hard to make it work with one income. Childcare is so expensive and is by rank.  **“Even if I wanted to put my child in care to work, I have to wait 8 months for the waitlist.”** |
| Participants want more accessibility to adequate assistance, especially for military families. | One participant expressed that food banks should be able to have more food that’s high quality. They shouldn’t be getting the leftovers or what’s supposed to expire. People don’t want to take it.  Another participant said that TANF and SNAP should be more accessible for military families.Sometimes soldiers are not paid for months. Applied for food stamps, awarded $57 a month for family of 6.  **“Military families shouldn’t be struggling.”**  **“My husband was in Syria literally being shot at and yet I can’t pay my utilities?”** |
| Participants overwhelmingly want secure living and financial situations. They want to face future situations with confidence. | **"I’m tired of putting money in savings and immediately taking it out. I need a reserve set of money.”**  **“I was following Dave Ramsey and his advice and was doing fine. Then we joined the military. Within 6 months of being here, all savings were gone. I went from working to not working, having a child.”** This participant wants good savings, debt paid off, and to be able to spend $200 on groceries like she could 3 years ago. **“In eight years I would like to be where I was three years ago.”**  Another participant echoed that she used to be fine with spending more at the grocery store 3 years ago, but she’s struggling now. Cannot have kids know that they’re struggling.  One participant says she used to have 6 months of bills in savings. Now she has to choose between a choir trip and 2 car payments |
| Participants’ communities need more resources, housing, and affordable living situations in order to thrive. | One participant discussed how it is unrealistic to let people into the military and not pay them for their time.  Another participant discussed how the high cost of everything is sometimes shared among neighbors.  Even neighbors that are doing financially better have needs, too.  One participant said their community needs better pay, more available resources, better SNAP for military, and for gas prices to go down.  Trading is common in this community. One participant trades babysitting for a haircut so she can meet a priority of spending time with her husband.  One participant discussed the mental health stigma with military. Her husband cannot be diagnosed with anxiety and maintain current job, medically discharged. Got criticized and questioned. |