

Families Struggle When School's Out for Summer

Rita managed a store for more than 17 years before retiring but went back to the job for a few years after her husband passed away. She retired for good to help take care of her grandchildren.

"My son lives in a house right behind me, and honestly, I don't know what he would do without me," she said. "It's hard being a single father of seven kids."

With ages ranging from 5 to 17, Rita said keeping growing children fed, especially when school is out during the summer, is a challenge.

"It seems like every other day you have to go to the store to get something, and it's because they're home all day, and they have to eat," she said. "I'd rather us adults go without; these children can't."

Rita said she limits snacks, but the grocery bill still adds up quickly.

"We can't go out and buy the little packs of meat, since we have seven kids to feed," she said. "We've got to get the big packs of meat and that's almost if not over \$20. We cut back on spending on other things because its more grocery buying than anything. It's a struggle."

Rita said she watches for food distributions, like the food bank's ABC (A Better Childhood) Mobile Pantries, to help keep her family fed, especially in the summer. She said she is able to make multiple meals for her family out of the food she receives.

"It feels good, to know that I can go home and feed my grandkids," she said. "You know what I mean? Because ... around this time we usually have to go buy food with money that's supposed to be used for other things the kids need."



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Mark Avery

Chairman
Tyson Foods

Danielle Poyner

Vice Chairman
Drury Southwest

Laura Parker

Secretary/Treasurer
Coalter Insurance

MEMBERS:

Buddy Barger

Walmart Neighborhood Market

Chris Conroy

KFVS-12

Julianna Ford

Americare Systems Inc.

Roger Guilliams

Guilliams Farms

Frank Jones

Member Emeritus
CPU Inc.

John Leible

First Midwest Bank

Marty Platz

Coast to Coast Signs

Kathy Swan

JCS Wireless

Chris White

Procter & Gamble

Joseph Keys

Chief Executive Officer

Administrative Offices & Main Warehouse:

Southeast Missouri Food Bank
600 State Highway H
Sikeston, MO 63801

Mailing Address:

Southeast Missouri Food Bank
P.O. Box 190
Sikeston, MO 63801-0190

Cape County Location:

4536 E. Jackson Blvd.
Jackson, MO 63755

Phone:

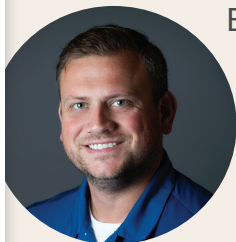
Sikeston
(573) 471-1818
(855) 703-FOOD (3663)
Jackson
(573) 510-4610

Mission

To end hunger and leverage the power of food to build healthy communities.

Giving Our Neighbors a Voice

Have you ever had a friend, co-worker or neighbor come to you with a problem and quickly offered a solution without taking the time to think about it? It is easy to do. We all live busy lives and when a quick solution is at hand, it's easy to point at it and move on, right?



But, sometimes, those easy solutions are just quick fixes. They don't necessarily address the root cause of the issue. That's why listening and taking the time to understand is so important.

That is very much true for the work the food bank does across southeast Missouri every single day. We know many of our neighbors are facing hunger across our 16 counties. They don't have enough to eat, so we provide food. And while we want to ensure everyone has enough to eat, we know that providing food alone does not solve the root cause of hunger.

While we serve our neighbors through our network of partner agencies and direct service programs, we know it also is vital that we take the time to listen to what they have to say. Our neighbors facing hunger are the real experts on the challenges of food insecurity, and their voices must be at the table when finding solutions.

To that end, Southeast Missouri Food Bank and the Feeding America Network are focusing on giving these neighbors a voice.

Last year, we formed an Action Council comprised of neighbors facing hunger, enlisting their expertise to help us address hunger in southeast Missouri. The council meets regularly, discussing roadblocks to food security in our area and identifying issues the food bank can address to better serve our neighbors. (Please read more about the Action Council in Theresa's story on Page 3.)

The work we're doing locally is also being done on a national scale by the Feeding America Network, which includes the Feeding America national office, partner food banks, agency partners and neighbors. Feeding America's 2023 Elevating Voices: Insights Report surveyed more than 1,000 people across the country who received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity in the prior two years. Their insight helped Feeding America focus policy recommendations in four areas: prioritizing dignity, increasing access, expanding opportunity and improving health.

When you think about it, those make a lot of sense by removing the stigma of needing food assistance and increasing accessibility to healthy food.

To end hunger, collectively, we must listen to the voices of those who have lived experience. We must take the time to understand what they face day in and day out. By doing that, together we will build a stronger southeast Missouri.

Joseph Keys

CEO of Southeast Missouri Food Bank

southeast missouri
FOOD BANK
help more. reach more. feed more.

MEMBER OF
FEEDING AMERICA



Food Bank's Action Council Gives Voice to Neighbors

Theresa worked most of her life, managing chicken farms with her husband and then at the Tyson plant in Dexter, and also as a CNA. Now she helps with her nine grandkids, five of whom are autistic.

"It's a lot, running them back and forth to Kenny Rogers (Children's Center for therapy) and going to Columbia and St. Louis for doctors' appointments," she said.

Now unable to work, Theresa receives a Commodity Supplemental Food Program senior box once a month from SEMO Food Bank to help stretch her groceries.

It was at one of these distributions that she learned about an Action Council the food bank was forming, made up of neighbors who have experienced food insecurity.

"They were asking people in the line if they would be interested and giving out a paper with a number to call," Theresa said. "I thought, 'You know, if y'all are helping me out, I'll do anything I can to help you.'"

The Action Council was created under a NEAT (Neighbors Empowerment and Advocacy Training) grant from Feeding America to enlist the expertise of neighbors with lived experience of food insecurity.

"It's good because we're all from different groups, ages and backgrounds," Theresa said. "And we all

talk to our peers and give our ideas."

She said the council conducted a survey — some via QR code and some physical — asking neighbors what they say is the biggest issue for getting assistance.

"We're trying to get transportation that's reasonable for people who can't afford it," Theresa said. "Maybe if we pick up our food, picking up and delivering for others. We're looking at maybe getting a grant for gas cards for people who help deliver food."

Theresa is proud of the work she's done with the Action Council.

"It has made me be more outgoing, being around a group and all pitching in," she said.

She also has advice for someone who finds themselves needing food assistance: "Don't be embarrassed, because I've been in that situation. If you need help, go to the food bank or check in your community."



Providing Healthy Food for Veterans

A few years ago, Steven moved to Poplar Bluff from Texas. Not long after, the veteran found himself in the John J. Pershing VA Medical Center, facing multiple health issues.

"I had to learn to walk again, breathe again, and I even had a hard time eating because I had to learn to get my hand to my mouth," Steven said.

His caseworker at the VA also got Steven set up with the food bank's Veterans Healthy Food Program. Operated in partnership with the

medical center, the program provides veterans like Steven with a monthly box of nutritious food, including lean proteins and fresh produce.

"This (food) helps out so much, because it depresses the crap out of me to go grocery shopping because of how much prices have gone up," Steven said. "I was relieved when my caseworker told me about this (program) and, man, am I thankful she did."



Helping Families Stretch Resources

Laquita lives on a fixed income, which itself has been challenging with rising food prices, but now she has more mouths to feed.

She said she's been raising her oldest grandchild, now 8, since she was a baby, but recently two more grandchildren, ages 5 and 3, joined her household.

She visits Southeast Missouri Food Bank's ABC (A Better Childhood) mobile distributions to supplement her groceries and stretch her budget. It's even harder during the summer with hungry kids needing three meals a day.

"We visit (mobile pantries) when we can to make money stretch, but we have to cut back where we can and make due," she said.

Laquita said taking in her grandchildren hasn't come without challenges, but she is grateful to the food bank, its partners and donors, for making things a little easier.

"I appreciate it, I really do," she said. "People really need the help. Last time I came they gave us watermelon, and these kids loved it!"



Save the Date!

**13th Annual
Golf Classic**

Monday, Sept. 23, 2024

Make plans now to join us for the 13th annual Southeast Missouri Food Bank Golf Classic on Sept. 23 at Dalhousie Golf Club in Cape Girardeau. This four-person scramble has a 12:30 p.m. shotgun start and includes lunch and refreshments on the course.

All proceeds benefit the food bank's hunger-relief programs.

Contact Heather Collier at hcollier@semofoodbank.org or 573-471-1818 to sign up or discuss sponsorship opportunities.

Hurry – the roster is limited and fills up fast! Priority will be given to sponsor teams.

Leave a legacy that makes a difference for families facing hunger. Ask us how to include Southeast Missouri Food Bank in your estate planning. Contact Sarah Garner at 573-471-1818.

