

A Spot at the Table – Living with Hunger and a Disability

"Every penny I receive from disability benefits is spoken for before I even get it," says Brian Clark, a member of the Community Advisory Network (CAN). Brian was the victim of random violence years ago that left him permanently disabled and unable to work. Brian lives on a fixed income from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and receives Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Since Brian's monthly income is limited, it is extremely challenging to cover the cost of his most basic needs:

"I'm capped, I can't ever move forward or do anything financially constructive to invest in myself. I'd love to be able to buy clothes, get a haircut, or get dental work done, but that's not realistic for me on my income. There's no money left over to prepare for an emergency expense or take care of car maintenance. I'm always just staying ahead of next month's bills."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the temporary State of Emergency declared by Washington state, Brian's monthly SNAP amount has been \$250, the max amount he is eligible for. With Governor Inslee's announcement that the State of Emergency will end on October 31, 2022, Brian's benefits will likely return to his pre-COVID amount of \$30-\$60 a month. This is not enough to access produce and high-quality ingredients, and the unpredictable fluctuation in monthly benefit amounts creates stress, fear, and dread. The pre-COVID SNAP benefits are not adequate, and people primarily end up eating processed foods which are more affordable but can lead to long-term health problems.

Brian's story, unfortunately, is not unique: nonworking disabled people are three times as likely as nondisabled people to experience food insecurity. Even before the pandemic, disabled people faced numerous barriers to accessing food, most commonly including high unemployment rates, low wages, restrictions around eligibility for social safety net programs, and physical and transportation barriers. SNAP is an important support for many people with disabilities. One in five SNAP households has a non-elderly adult with a disability.

But Brian knows that advocacy is needed for these programs to really support the people they are designed to serve. When asked what advocacy means to him, Brian said "It's trying to put in work to make us all equal – it gives me the chance to argue or debate with compassion. With the Community Advisory Network, I feel like I'm given a spot at a table where people will actually listen to me and not blow me off. It's easy to feel like my ideas or opinions aren't being considered in other spaces. Each time we meet, at least one of us will say something that will help make a difference."

Hunger is intersectional – it can impact anyone, but it is more likely to disproportionately affect people who are marginalized, whether that's a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, or someone with a disability. It is more important than ever to advocate for policies that increase access to, and adequacy of, SNAP benefits.

BE A PART OF HOME TEAM HARVEST FROM YOUR HOME

This Home Team Harvest we are excited to announce we will be hosting our first in-person food drive since the pandemic! Follow us on Instagram @NWHarvest for the location closer to the date (12/3). Dress warmly and bring your friends and family to help us reach our goal of 21 million nutritious meals for Washingtonians.

Or, stay at home and support Home Team Harvest by hosting your own community fundraiser among your colleagues, business, clients, friends, neighbors, or family.

In approximately 30 seconds, you can set up a fundraising page link that can be used to securely collect gifts from your community. You can keep it as simple as sending out the link via email or social media, or spice it up by organizing a pasta dinner, bake sale, or anything else that fits YOU!



For more information, scan the QR code or contact Jeff at jeffp@northwestharvest.org.

Policy Priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session

Universal School Meals

Superintendent Reykdal, Representative Riccelli, and Senator Nobles announced their plan to expand access to healthy school meals at no cost statewide in the upcoming legislative session. The proposed budget request includes universal school meals as a critical part of basic education services. Northwest Harvest applauds and supports this bold move that directly addresses the needs of students experiencing food insecurity. Research shows that participation in school meals improves academic achievement, standardized test scores, and cognitive function. It also boosts attendance and improves student behavior. The evidence is clear: making sure all kids are fed at school is an effective policy intervention.

Hunger Free College Campuses

41% of students on college campuses in Washington struggle with food security. There are many reasons that students may experience post-secondary hunger: students may grow up in poverty and not have financial support from families, older students returning to school while raising families of their own, higher costs of food and housing, limited understanding about eligibility for SNAP, and inadequate financial aid packages. Northwest Harvest will work with the Washington Students Union, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and others to pass legislation that creates a certification for hunger free campuses. A hunger free campus provides a comprehensive approach to ensure that students have the fuel they need to focus on learning, including convening a task force of administrators, students, and community-based organizations, assessing outreach efforts and services, funding for college food pantries, a free or reduced cost meals plan, and a single point of contact to help students connect with SNAP and other public benefits.

Increase Investment in Fruit & Vegetable Incentives Program

The Fruit and Vegetable Incentives Program (FVIP) helps families on limited budgets afford more fruits and vegetables and encourages healthier eating. Since 2015, the Washington State Department of Health, state, and local partners have implemented a variety of fruit and vegetable incentives to make healthy food more affordable for low-income families in Washington. These programs include the SNAP Market Match (providing matching dollars for fruits and vegetables purchases at farmers markets), the SNAP Produce Match (providing discounts or matching dollars for fruits and vegetables purchased at grocery stores), and Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions (cash value vouchers to buy produce when prescribed by a doctor). Increasing access to these benefits and increasing the adequacy of them, will help make sure people can purchase, prepare, and eat the foods they want.

Funding for Food Programs

As temporary COVID-era boosts to nutrition assistance programs end and economic uncertainty loom, food and meal programs across the state are reporting increased demand for their services. We will continue to advocate for additional resources so that food outlets can provide emergency food for as many families and individuals as require them.

Related policy areas that directly correlate to mitigating hunger:

- Guaranteed Basic Income
- Working Families Tax Credit Expansions
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): broad hardship exemption, increase to cash benefit to meet 15% of state standard of need, end asset limits

TIME IS SHORT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION

Time is short for donors over 70 ½ with Traditional IRA's to take advantage of the annual Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD) as a tax-wise way of giving to their favorite causes. An even smarter move once donors reach 72 and must take a taxable Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) annually from their Traditional IRA. Donors can reduce the amount of their taxable RMD by offsetting it through QCD gifts. Using this tax saving feature provides you with a tax benefit while still taking advantage of the recently increased standard deduction.

Susan Jones is 73 and has been informed by her IRA Administrator that her Required Minimum Distribution for 2022 is \$30,000. Being philanthropic, she makes \$20,000 in charitable donations using the QCD option of her Traditional IRA and applying it against her RMD. This reduces her tax obligation to \$10,000 (\$30,000 required RMD reduced by \$20,000 in QCD gifts) thus realizing significant tax savings.

Contact your IRA Administrator for directions and forms to take full advantage of the Qualified Charitable Distribution by December 31, 2022. We suggest that you discuss these steps with your financial and legal advisors and complete forms by December 1.

For questions, contact Anne S Knapp: annek@northwestharvest.org.

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EVENTS

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KING 5 HOME TEAM HARVEST, December 3 | Join us on December 3rd on KING 5 TV for the 22nd annual Home Team Harvest and help us meet our goal of raising 22 million meals!

The Power of Community

The story of Northwest Harvest, at its core is a story of community. On September 11th, 2001, we collectively experienced tragedy. Across the world, people came together to help not only the victims of 9/11 but to build a stronger community at home. After the tragic events, our friends at KING5 looked for ways to search of hope and engage in action - and Home Team Harvest was born.

Home Team Harvest is Washington's largest food drive. Over the years, millions of pounds of food have been collected as part of the Home Team events. Every year, the outpouring of support from the community continues to amaze and inspire. One of the best parts of these events has been the opportunity to connect with the people who go out of their way just to help make sure their neighbors aren't hungry. Northwest Harvest employee, Jeff Peterson, shares these thoughts about serving as a site lead at the Northgate location:

"It is always so exciting to arrive at the site at 6am (usually in the rain) because you know it's going to be a magical day of watching people at their best. One of my favorite stories is having a boy pull up to the trailer with his little red wagon full of food. He had collected the food from his neighbors so it could go to make sure kids like him were not hungry. I was able to see this boy grow up over the years, and every year, he pulled up with his little red wagon."



ROCK THE HARVEST

For the last 25 years, Northwest Harvest has partnered with our friends at 102.5 KZOK to bring you one of our most engaging and entertaining events of the fall.

Rock The Harvest is a 12-hour long radio-a-thon that brings out big energy, big donations, and even bigger prizes. In years past we've seen hourly incentive prizes, including our most popular custom-made t-shirt prize when you donate \$102.5. Our grand prize has always been the coveted signed guitar, so our donors can live their best rockstar fantasy while supporting your neighbors.

We rocked out on 10/25 with a plethora of support from volunteers and staff. We had a blast at this volunteer favorite event, where good people and great vibes intercept.



On behalf of the Northwest Harvest team, we also extend a heart-felt thank you to Evergreen Home Loans. Evergreen Home Loans has been our sponsor for Rock the Harvest over the years. We are thankful for your commitment to making this event so successful. Your generous contributions over the years have helped to make our vision a reality. You are truly appreciated.

Yakima Updates!



Our new center in Yakima is approaching completion. This 10.6 acre campus will reshape the experience of food access through Northwest Harvest and across Washington state. We want to express our gratitude to all those who made this project possible.

In addition to the new distribution center, the campus will include a no-cost grocery store – Fruitvale Community Market will be opening spring of 2023! The store will feature in-market shopping, a waiting area with coffee and snacks, drive-thru service for those cold winters, and consult rooms to provide shoppers with local resources or host events. No ID or documentation is required to shop at the market. If you would like to support this new grocery store, please consider giving to our capital campaign.



RECIPES AND COLLABORATION

Northwest Harvest is excited to announce the launch of our recipe card project in our quarterly newsletters! Whether it's trying a new ingredient or falling in love with the flavors of a new dish, we believe that food brings people together – in the joy of cooking or eating! Our collection of recipes will include dishes from several different cultures who live right here in Washington. Every dish will help to educate us and bring us closer together to all the amazing people who inhabit the great Pacific Northwest.

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Architect rendering of Fruitvale Community Market

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Interested in learning more about working for Northwest Harvest? Check out our job openings at northwestharvest.org/careers.

All Ideas Are on the Table

A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, THOMAS REYNOLDS

Right now in Washington, the number of people who are not sure where their meals will come from is skyrocketing. At the same time, Northwest Harvest and most of the food banks, food pantries, and meal programs we partner with have significantly depleted food stocks to offer to people who are seeking food. The corresponding availability crunch for people who experience food insecurity is alarming to me. Inflation is crushing household budgets. Food in our region costs as much as 25% more than last year.

As an organization that exists to provide quality, in-demand foods to people who do not have enough resources to make their budgets stretch until their next paycheck, I am seeing the resources at our distribution centers shrinking while at the same time the need for households to stretch is expanding. I'm finding this to be true from Bellingham, to Yakima, to Spokane, to South King County, to neighborhoods in Seattle and on the Eastside.

I have talked with my friends and colleagues in other parts of the country – they are reporting similar challenges. Food is scarce across food banks.

I don't have the option to lament the situation and wait and see if things get better.

We must act now. We are increasing our food purchasing budget this year. We are talking with government agencies and elected officials about what we are seeing and making suggestions on what can be done. We are brainstorming new ways to acquire food and make food available. All ideas are on the table.

For me, I am worrying about fulfilling the heart of our organization's mission. That pales in comparison to the worry families are experiencing when money is exhausted and risk of hunger weighs heavily.

Please consider pitching in and providing us with the financial resources to make food available for our neighbors caught in the vice grip of food inflation alongside fuel, housing, and utilities costs rising in unison.

Best regards,

Thomas

