



Presentation for Roundtable Discussion on Hunger with Congresswoman Scanlon and
Congressman McGovern

Actions and Steps to Prevent Food Insecurities and Poverty

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Good afternoon Congresswoman Scanlon, Congressman McGovern and guests. Thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to be here with you today speaking on the impacts of food insecurity in the communities in which I both live and serve.

My name is Desiree' LaMarr- Murphy and I am the Founder and CEO of Murphy's Giving Market and I also represent many other pantries as their administrator and pantry coordinator. I have been fighting to help support families and navigating systems to support families for over 15 years especially as it relates to food insecurity. I founded Murphy's Giving Market roughly 6 years ago out of a desire to connect school aged children and their families to food sources that could inevitably help to reduce the pangs of poverty.

Murphy's Giving Market and its Subsidiaries

Organizations include:

Murphy's Giving Market- Sellers	Upper Darby
Murphy's Giving Market- Wright Elementary School	North Philadelphia
Murphy's Giving Market- Mitchell Elementary School	Southwest Philadelphia
Grace Tabernacle Christian Church	Southwest Philadelphia
Resurrection Community Church	Southwest Philadelphia
Ujima Friends Peace Center	North Philadelphia
Prayer Chapel Church	Upper Darby

Services provided:

Each organization provides a variety of services to help heal and provide support for the whole person/ whole family. We take a "holistic" approach to fighting poverty and food insecurities because we know that providing food as a resource is just our entry point to solving and eradicating food insecurity. Thus we offer free food, clothing, pet food, health screenings, healthcare company information and resources, political information as it relates to registering to vote and knowing when elections are upcoming. We also provide connection to ESL classes and training, job training, GED courses, tutoring, tenants rights counseling, personal counseling etc.

Dates and times services are rendered:

Each location operates on a different schedule which is determined by the staff and administration according to the needs of the community.

Although each location has set days and times of operation, each is open on an “on call” basis for emergency situations.

Types of food sharing:

Each location offers total choice and voice at each location. Each client/family has the experience of shopping at all sites from a variety of options obtained through purchases, donations and from various menus from either Philabundance or SHARE.

These options always include:

- Breads and pastries
- Fresh produce
- Dairy
- Dry Grains (rice and or pasta)
- Canned goods
- Snacks
- Cereal
- Beverages
- Meat (Fish, Pork, Poultry, Beef etc.)
- Household/ Cleaning items (when available)
- Hygiene products
- Paper products

Program Affiliations:

Each of our sites is affiliated with and partners with Philabundance. One of our sites partners with SHARE and each site receives donations from ACME, COSTCO, Blessings of Hope, Sunday Breakfast Mission and other non profit organizations.

Operations:

Each of our sites operates solely by volunteers. These volunteers are responsible for:

- Ordering/organizing food and other items to be distributed
- Receiving deliveries
- Making pickups
- Setting up
- Cleaning up/breaking down
- Distributing items
- Greeting neighbors
- Supporting programs/operations
- Ensuring safety for everyone
- Compliance related tasks

What is “Food Insecurity”

According to Feeding America and the USDA it is, “a lack of consistent access to enough food, for an active, healthy life.” It is also one's inability to obtain food, whether through lack of resources or lack of access. Inevitably, one does not have to be impoverished to be food insecure if they have financial resources but lack opportunity or access to obtain food.

COVID 19- How has the pandemic affected/changed how we operate?

Prior to the pandemic, each site was able to function in whichever way suited them whether that be indoors or outdoors. Several offered lunches, meals, worship or prayer sessions while people waited or even childcare. That is no longer the case as the health and safety of both our neighbors and volunteers was made paramount.

Initially, many locations closed or reduced hours. All locations moved distributions outdoors only with no access to bathrooms or shelter from the inclement weather. This made it especially difficult on seniors and those with disabilities. It was also challenging for families with young children as they were not able to access sites unless they had childcare or if the weather permitted.

One positive thing that did bring about change during the pandemic was an increased level of support and resources for families. Our locations were able to receive USDA boxes, PPE as well as grant and funding to allow us to increase our level of commitment to our communities.

Implications of COVID 19

As a direct result of Covid 19, all of our organizations that were able to remain open, more than doubled and some even tripled the number of neighbors relying and receiving support. Prior to COVID 19, at Mitchell, for example, we served about 100-125 families weekly. During the height of the pandemic we were at one time up to 550 families each distribution and there were biweekly distributions at that point. At Prayer Chapel, prior to the pandemic, we served 25 families each distribution. At the height of the pandemic, we were serving from 100-125 families each distribution.

To date, although the sting of the pandemic has dulled and people are getting back to work, we still are well above pre-pandemic levels at each site. Still more than 150% over pre pandemic data reflects.

Survival

All of our organizations have been able to survive with the generous donations and contributions of donors, family and friends or volunteers. We have also been able to survive using the strength and power of networking and organizational resources and sharing. What is one man's trash is another man's treasure. We lean on and depend on other organizations when supply is

low or limited but also when there is an overflow. We not only share tangible items, we share knowledge and systems that have had proven success.

Policy Recommendations

- Remove barriers that prevent any child from receiving free lunch while in public/charter school. Many schools or districts use a child's household income to determine need. Data shows that even though a family may be able to show on paper that they have income that there are gaps which prevent them from meeting all of the families needs which leads to food insecurities.
- Permanently increase SNAP benefits and increase earning limits slightly that more families can be eligible and receive sufficient support.
- Make fresh produce more affordable and accessible to everyone.
- Provide support or incentives for local supermarkets and produce vendors allowing them access to some neighborhoods that are currently food deserts.

Conclusion

When I started this fight for families battling food insecurities, it was very modest. It started out of the trunk of my van in my church parking lot just picking up donations from other pantries and markets. It was not until I got to really engage the community and witness their struggle that it was made clear to me that my purpose was to help those in need and to fight for those who were not able to get their fair share. I have been doing this work for 15 years now and have grown to support 7 agencies in Southwest Philadelphia, North Philadelphia and Upper Darby. This is not only a true labor of love but out of a desire to find post traumatic growth opportunities that may one day help to improve or transform the lives of others.

I Thank you for allowing me to share my presentation today and I an assured that something good will come from our discussions that may lead to real change for our neighbors and friends.