

Hunger Script – Aired National On AARP Radio - Prime Time – Sept 2014

Many seniors in the United States don't have enough food to eat. According to the charitable organization Feeding America, almost 3 million households with seniors experienced food insecurity issues in 2012. And the number of seniors who live alone and don't get enough food is over a million.

In another recent study, published last month in the Annals of Emergency Medicine, found that more than half of the elderly patients who visited the ER were malnourished or at risk for malnutrition.

Many of these older adults live below the federal poverty level. This year in Washington DC for example, the federal poverty level for one person living alone, is \$11,670 a year.

Add up the costs for rent, transportation, health insurance, doctors' bills, and medications - and something's gotta give. And both the experts and seniors tell us... what you CUT to make it, is FOOD.

I'm Mike Cuthbert.

Today on Prime Time we want you to meet three seniors who are grappling with these issues. Preston, Carolyn and Tessie all live in our nation's capital not far from the areas and celebrations many people enjoy.

SFX – sound of fireworks and the music of a broadcast from the 4th of July.

Like all big cities, Washington DC has its contrasts. There's the glitzy part where tourists and locals sightsee: the mall, monuments and museums, the White House - some really fancy neighborhoods, shops, and restaurants.

And a mile or two away, in the much more modest sections most tourists never see, you'll find both retired seniors and DC's working poor.

7 Preston – I look at people

Tape: I look at people, I'm saying: if the median income is like 26 thousand or 36 thousand, it's not 36 I'm sure – that's middle class – I'm mean probably like 20, 24, and you got a kid, a wife, rent, a car, food, medicine, gas for the car, repairs and shit... I mean it's like, something ain't gonna like balance out. And it's food. I mean they're going to end up with you know macaroni cheese is fine but not every night. (:31)

In fact the median household income in the Washington DC metropolitan area, according to The U.S. Census Bureau, is a little over 88-thousand dollars a year. And this explains in part why it costs so much to live in Washington. Many people can afford high priced rentals – in some areas thousands of dollars a month - and sticker shock mortgages.

For seniors on a small fixed income – expenses can add up fast. This certainly is true for senior Carolyn Vinson who has an aide seven days a week. Her medications are extremely expensive; thousands of dollars a month.

12 Vinson - Medicine before food

Tape: When you have to spend money on meds then that mean that food is gonna to run short. Because you know you gonna buy the medicine before you buy the food. (:11)

Luckily, right now, Carolyn’s medication costs are almost completely covered by Medicaid. That’s literally a lifesaver because her only income is a small Social Security Disability check.

So when it comes to food, Carolyn is a regular at several charity run donation sites. And since she’s still able to get up and go, Carolyn makes sure that others in need - who can’t get out - get something too.

13 Vinson – sharing food

Tape: Often times I will go to these places, and then I will take my blue Giant bags, Safeway bag, Wal-Mart bag and I will put so much in this bag, so much in this bag and I have 3 people that I go and I put the bag on their door, knock on the door and walk away. They’ll call me later and say thank you. They know where it came from. I don’t wait for a thank you. I know their situation, so this is what I do; often time I go because I know that there’s someone especially like toward the middle and the end of the month. And I just share. (:44)

Theodosia Robinson is another compassionate senior who not only thinks about her situation but other poor seniors too. Tessie, that’s her nickname, has been as assistant director at a community center and she heads up the resident council in her apartment complex.

9 Tessie – The reason I speak up

Tape: I have to be strong and I have to fight for those like myself that needs it and can’t do it. This is the purpose for me what to do this interview. “Cause there’s some people that may be shamed to speak up for themselves or don’t know how. Or feel that it’s not worth it. But to me it’s worth it. (:25)

Paula Reichel (Ry-kell) is the director of the Capitol Area Food Bank’s DC region.

10. Paula – national stats

Since 2007, which is the start of the recession, the number of food insecure seniors has increased by 49 percent nationally while the number of seniors in the total population has doubled. So we’ve seen a large increase in magnitude in this issue. (:23)

Preston L Williams Sr. calls himself a “young senior.” He’s 67 and retired. A former law enforcement officer who was injured on the job, he went on to get a masters degree in social work. Now retired with an income – before expenses – of a little over 40 thousand dollars a year, Preston struggles to pay his mortgage and Medicare payments. And now his bills are escalating because he’s really ill.

5 Preston – One meal a day

Tape: I usually eat one meal a day, maybe one meal a day, and some peanuts. On a good day 2 meals when I when I have an appetite.

20. Paula – response to 1 meal a day

I think unfortunately that’s something we hear far too often. Seniors who are missing meals as a result of not having access to food, and seniors who are having incomplete meals – eating peanuts obviously – that in and of itself is not sufficient. We’re missing a lot of central nutrients that help seniors maintain active lifestyles. (39)

Nutrients from fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy fats from fresh fish and lean meat – another words less of the cheap stuff like starchy *fill me up* foods and heavily salted canned goods.

11. Paula – nutrition and health

There’s an extremely strong connection between nutrition and senior health. We see that seniors are potentially the most vulnerable group to the effects of food insecurity.

What does the term food insecurity mean? Here’s how Paula Reichel describes it:

22. Paula – definition of food insecurity

Tape: Food insecurity is sort of the middle ground – what we’re seeing with seniors. Those are seniors who regularly missing meals as a result of not having enough income for food. They are facing tradeoffs – often between purchasing food and purchasing medicine or housing – and they frequently have to identify sources for food outside of what they can procure with their income. (:33)

How bad can it get? When he’s short on food, Preston scrounges through his old can stash in his pantry.

6 Preston – U gotta do what u gotta do

Tape: I’ve had to step it down, but I’m not down to cat food. I’m not down to cat food. Ok. So I’m doing all right. I’m doing all right so far. (:13)

Perhaps this doesn’t happen often. Let’s hope it doesn’t. But what IS happening...is pretty alarming.

11. Paula – nutrition and health (second half of cut)

One study showed that seniors who are food insecure are 60 percent more likely to suffer from depression. They are 53 percent more likely to have a heart attack, and 40 percent more likely to have some sort of heart disorder. So it really has a profound affect on senior health (:36)

And another study, the 2010 National Health Interview Survey, found that 85% of those aged 60 and above have one or more chronic conditions, including diabetes, arthritis, cancer, or heart disease. Preston L. Williams Sir:

12 Preston – minute I turned 65

Tape: The minute I turned 65 I got Medicaid. It's like here he comes. One thing after another: prostate cancer surgery, thyroid cancer surgery, the other kind of things. But they ain't getting' me down. You know you can let it get you down. So you just make it through. (:20)

Carolyn Vinson has also had severe health issues. She's just had another in a long line of surgeries. This one on her left wrist that was so fragile, it needed steel pins inserted to keep it from breaking

3 Vinson – fifty-five 2001 disability

Tape: Fifty-five. 2001 and 1. That was when I had to come out on disability.

When she got sick, Carolyn was working as an event coordinator in the private sector.

3 Vinson – fifty-five 2001 disability

I was not mentally nor financially ready ah to come out on disability. But I had no choice. So you do what you have to do. (:19)

In Carolyn's case that meant coping with a chronic progressive condition.

1 Vinson – arthritis

Tape: When I was initially attacked with arthritis, it really attacked. I had the stiffness. I had the swelling. I had the aches and the pains. And I worked for about a year and a half going through this. And then finally my doctor said: "Enough is enough." Because I had, bones were had started deteriorating rapidly. And then with medications it slowed down. And I began to function better again. (29)

But even before she became ill, like most of us, Carolyn had a few financial setbacks including the loss of a major asset.

2 Vinson – who is

Tape: I did have a house and my ex and I divorced. At that time I was living in Baltimore. I came back to DC with my baby girl and we moved into an apartment. And I worked. And we were comfortable and life wasn't bad. I had my parents until my dad died in 1990. My mom died in 2009. I've always had family support. (28)

Thank goodness Carolyn had that loving support. She wasn't alone when arthritis struck. But love alone can't pay the bills when illness stops your paycheck.

4 Vinson – can't foresee these things

Tape: I had not began to start saving toward retirement. You can't foresee these things. (10)

Now with basically a social security disability check to get her through the month, Carolyn's income dropped in half and she qualified for the federal government's rent subsidy program.

5 Vinson – that was what saved me

Tape: And that was what saved me - moving in here; because here you pay according to income. (07)

5 Tessie – Rent

Tape: My rent has been reduced to \$229 plus \$102 dollars paying for back rent. So you talkin' about 331, 332 something of that nature. (:14)

Theodosia Robinson is 62. She and her grown daughter Carsia share a rent-subsidized apartment in one of Washington's poorer areas: ward 6. Six months ago Tessie was working as a front desk clerk.

2 Tessie – Passes out at work

Tape: What's been going on: I've been working and on April the 15th I was at work and I passed out at the desk. I don't know why it happened. My supervisor called the ambulance and they taking me over to Georgetown University Hospital. I was there for about... about a week, ran all these tests on me, and ah to find out if I had a heart attack or stroke, what have you. I didn't. (32)

Tessie has just been diagnosed with Type II Diabetes and something else is also going on. Her doctor told she has some sort of severe calcium deficiency and she needs to see a specialist. On Medicaid it's a long wait – several months for her appointment. Tessie's been calling every day trying to squeeze in if someone cancels. So far – no luck:

3 Tessie – That's the part that hurts

Tape: That's the part that hurts the most. Because my doctor's telling me until I see a specialist it really wouldn't be any good for me to go to work. (:13)

Under the Family Medical Leave Act, some workers may be protected if their employer has fifty employees or more. Then your job is held for up to three months while you take leave without pay. But where Tessie worked for nine years, there are only three people. Now someone else sits in Tessie's chair.

10 Tessie – No income whatsoever

Tape: No income at all. None. All the leave that I had – sick leave as well as vacation leave – I’ve tapped out of it. I thought by now that I would have been seen a specialist. Everything would be OK. And it’s not. I’m angry. I’m I am mad as hell. You shouldn’t have to just work and work and work, and then when you come to a point in life things happen. And then you go to your job. You’re job can’t even offer you anything. I’ve been on this job for 9 years. And it’s nothing. I mean social security, the Medicaid, and that’s it. They have this um act whereas you be able to go back to work, where I am now, I finds out that that doesn’t even. Doesn’t go for me. Where I work has to have 50 or more employees. And I couldn’t believe it. So... I’m going up a creek without a paddle. (1:26)

Well a small paddle. Tessie’s daughter Carsia is working. She doesn’t make much but she’s paying the rent. And Tessie feels just awful that she can’t do it herself.

Preston too is very upset. He’s a veteran, a medical corpsman who served in Korea and at several hospitals in the U.S. But now he cringes when he thinks about the recent reports of the VA’s mismanagement of medical appointments.

9 Preston – Disappointed in this country

Tape: I’m really kind of disappointed in this country that they’re treating the vets like that. They’re playing games with the vets. I’m almost not proud to say I’m a vet any more. I’m really ashamed that that I made a contract to serve my country. And it was supposed to take care of the wounded and the widows and the orphans and they ain’t doing such a good job. And I’m I’m almost ashamed to say I’m a vet.

And when he thinks about his twin brother Paul who fought in Vietnam, Preston grows quiet for a minute lost in memories.

10 Preston – brother went to combat

Tape: I was married and I had a child at the time, but they were drafting married guys with kids in 68. He went in and I went in. I went in to learn to be a combat medic in a hospital in 12 weeks and he was in the infantry. And he got orders for Vietnam and I got orders for Vietnam. But he told me that um according to the law, you can’t send twins or two brothers into combat zone. And that he would go because he was the oldest. And that was the end of the story. So he made that choice. (:37)

When Paul came home:

8 Preston – I’m a veteran

Tape: He bought some demons and devils back with him. And I understand how vets really get the short end of the stick because he was dead when he came home for all practical purposes. He couldn’t get the care. But more so he he couldn’t get the compassionate and understanding. (:30)

Preston's brother passed several years ago. Preston tries to keep his spirits up with several hobbies. He's a trained master gardener who's very proud of his marigolds, ferns, and day lilies. He's taught adult literacy classes and volunteers at a senior center. But a year ago yet another medical issue stopped him cold.

2 Preston Pulmonary embolism

Tape: I had a pulmonary embolism. It's like you get a blood clot in your leg and it goes up and then it collapses a lung. And I guess I was lucky. I was in the hospital for 39 days, and they did some reconstructive surgery and everything inside, but I just wasn't aware of how ah much it took out of me. (19)

Now often too weak to go to the grocery store without taking a cab – when he goes it's only on double coupon day - Preston is really stuck. So this time when he finally could go home after his last serious medical issue, the social workers at Georgetown Hospital set him up with a service he didn't know about: free home delivered meals:

13 Preston – independent old man

Tape: I wasn't expecting it, you know. 'Cause I'm kind of like an independent old man, you know. I made it this far, you know, I don't really like to bother people, but I needed the help. They sort of knew I needed the help and they didn't judge me. They say we're gonna work with you. (18)

Now just a few steps from his bedroom, the frig is stocked with something nutritious ready to heat up. Preston spends a lot of time in that kitchen. He's on Oxygen; he has COPD and more recent cancer issues to deal with.

1 Preston – I didn't know how sick

Tape: And I live alone. So preparing food. I've got a one-year anniversary coming up. And I feel much stronger and I know that without the nutrition that it would have been impossible, And then I found out I had sleep apnea. I don't like to complain but sleep deprivation. And so just having the food there, I mean it's like a lot of times you don't have an appetite, and if you don't eat, just having that food available. And I mean you know it's there. You don't have to prepare it, slice it, dice it, wash it. And it's like when your sick your appetite comes and goes and you gotta eat when you're hungry. And it's just been really nice having it there like that. I mean I don't see how people do without it. I mean I really believe in this wellness, this body wellness thing. You gotta take care of your body. You gotta eat greens, you gotta eat fruit, and not to have the money. I mean just to it's a really terrible situation to be in ah when people don't have food.

But even with his bi-weekly food delivery, Preston still runs short sometimes. Now he feels more optimistic and tries not to dwell on the past:

14 Preston – law of unintended consequences

Tape: I try not to think about what it was like before. (sighs) It's kind of private and personal. I'll just say that um some things were revealed to me as a result of the tests

ah while I was in the hospital in the condition that sort of brought everything together sort of like made me realize that I had some issues – health issues, emotional issues, physical issues – and ah if I had to come back to where I was before um probably would have been the same rut. I wouldn't have made a change. It's the law of unintended consequences. And the meals played a real important part of it. You can't imagine. It's like when you're in college and used to get care package from your parents on Christmastime and stuff. They would send you little stuff in colleges. I mean it just means a lot emotionally. It just makes you feel connected. So I know that's maybe kind of far out for some people to understand, but you know just talkin' to the people on the phone when you reorder, 'cause you got a connection with somebody. Perhaps there's somebody who didn't take their medicine this mornin' or that are getting meals forgot what day it was or somethin'. So there are a lot of good things other than the nutrition. A lot of love goes into those meals - a lot of thought and I want the people to know that it's more than nutrition. It is. It's more than nutrition. (1:32)

Preston gets his home delivered meals from a national organization called Mom's Meals. This very nutritious program has many options for homebound people including a self pay option and in some cases like Preston's the service is free. The Capitol Area Food Bank has a home delivery meal program too. It reaches over 300 seniors in Washington DC.

17. Paula – food delivery-sickness

The home delivery meal program is intended for seniors who may not have the ability or the means to prepare meals on their own. That could be as a result of an illness or not having the facilities to prepare a meal. So they do play a critical role. What we see with the senior nutrition programs, are that certain programs fill very specific needs. So the home delivered meal works well for seniors who may be ill, that may not have the ability to prepare foods.

The Capitol Area Food Bank also runs other food programs for low-income seniors.

17. Paula – food delivery-sickness

Tape: The commodity program works well for seniors who want to stay engaged, who have the ability and the wherewithal to prepare meals and who enjoy preparing meals. And that's I think a key component of the program. It engages seniors to transform these ingredients into healthy meals for themselves. (1:06)

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program is available in almost every state.

12. Paula – funding for commodities

It's a federally funded program. About 50 percent comes from the federal government, and we're lucky enough in DC to have other 50 percent be covered by the local government. (12)

This program is a safety net for really poor seniors like Tessie who now receives a large bag of groceries every month.

8. Paula – requirements qualify for commodity

So to qualify for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, a senior will have to be at 130 percent of the federal poverty line or below. The way that income is calculated: some of it may be earned income for certain seniors who are working. It also includes social security benefits, other benefits from Taniff, and there are a number of other programs that we look at to determine eligibility. For a single individual, the total benefits cannot exceed about 15 thousand dollars. For a two-person household, it's about 20,500 dollars. (:46)

But just like Preston didn't know that free home delivered meals were a possibility, Paula says many seniors haven't heard of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. So this vital resource isn't reaching many people who qualify for it.

18. Paula – 6 K vs. 15 K commodity

For the commodity program we reach about 6,000 seniors and we know that there's 15 thousand seniors that are in need of assistance. So we have a long way to go. (12)

To help close this gap, The Capitol Area Food Bank is now helping people apply for benefits at two of its walk-in facilities.

5. Paula – response to knucklehead clip

Tape: Many seniors don't know how to fill out the form. It's very consuming. It requires many backup documents, and it also requires knowledge of how the form should be filled out for a senior. A lot of people don't take deductions for their medical expenses. And their medical expenses could be a large part of the money they have to use during the month. So this is why assistance with the application is so important. DC Hunger Solutions, as well as the food bank, we're working to incorporate that assistance as part of our programs to really show individuals that you do qualify for the program. We have a helpful tool that is a quick questionnaire that we're going to start having at a few of our Commodity Supplemental Food program sites. For the most part low-income seniors I do believe will qualify for these programs so long as they have the assistance they need to really describe their situation within the form.

This means an applicant has to provide personal financial data, something many seniors feel is a scary invasion of privacy. Carolyn Vinson:

14 Vinson – ask and you will receive

Tape: A lot of times we don't have because we don't ask. Or this is my personal business. But you needs. So what make it so personal? (09)

Reassuring people that it's OK to fill out forms, that's one of senior Carolyn Vinson's missions. A former accountant with a good head for details, she's helped several of her

neighbors apply for benefits including Medicaid and SNAP, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program – formally called food stamps.

15 Vinson – too many with no family

Tape: There're too many of us that don't have family or family not involved, I'm not going to say not interested, but not involved, so somebody have to do it; so if I have an answer or if I can get an answer for you, why not me. (19)

Vinson gets SNAP benefits, but not very much.

9 Vinson – not a raise – food stamps

Tape: Initially I was getting \$30. They cut me back beginning of the year – this is 3 or 4 years ago – they cut me back to 25. Last raise we got they cut me back to 15. I mean so we don't really get a raise. (:20)

Paula Reichel:

19. Paula – average SNAP benefit

On average in DC, an average senior will receive about 120 dollars in SNAP benefits when the minimum benefit is about 15. So that is something that is a long held belief that doesn't hold true in reality. (16)

Once again, how you fill out the form might make all the difference. It certainly did for Tessie Robinson who after about a month of waiting started receiving SNAP benefits: \$189 a month.

15. Paula – deductions

So to qualify for SNAP, there are a number of factors. It's actually a pretty lengthy application which is another reason why seniors may be discouraged from applying. You have to be at a certain income level for your household. There's also a number of deductions that seniors can take they often aren't aware they can take. For example, medical bills; you can even, to the best of my knowledge, deduct transportation to and from the doctor. This is something that most seniors who apply for SNAP aren't aware of and which will raise their benefit to that 120-dollar level. (:40)

But while many poor seniors - and others with a low-income - do legitimately qualify for government assistance, including SNAP, many people – including many of the seniors who receive these benefits - frown on those who abuse the system.

5. Paula – response to knucklehead clip

There's very little fraud that takes place in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. But when it does, of course as in many federal programs, what that does is blow out of proportion people's perception of what is happening with food stamps.

And that applies to people who are recipients as well as to people who are outside of the system.

11 Vinson – problem with knuckleheads

Tape: And my problem is that you have young people out here, and babies come from somewhere and I know that, but you have young people that are having babies, babies, babies; they get food stamps; they get Medicaid. They get everything else that the system has to offer; have not put a dime into the system; never worked anywhere. And here we are as seniors, we have worked, we have put into the system and we don't qualify. That's disturbing to me. Then you have the knuckleheads that have spent time in jail or prison; they get food stamps, Medicaid, and everything else that's available, and then you see them on the corner: "You want to buy food stamps? You want to buy food stamps?" "They've never worked anywhere, and they get everything. And the seniors that have put into the system can't get it. That's unfair. And I'm very bitter about that. That is truly unfair. (1:02)

Unfair says Carolyn Vinson when you've worked your whole life and paid into the system, paid your taxes, and social security. Unfair agrees suddenly unemployed senior Theodosia Robinson who says she was turned down for some benefits because she isn't raising young children at home.

11 Tessie – Kicking me to the curb

Tape: It's like kickin' me to the curb. And I'm like no you can't do this. Ah and forgive me for this, if I need to be forgiven. But you have people that's out here receiving benefits and they doin' things that they shouldn't do with the benefits, but they are. I just need some help. I'm not into all that other stuff. I don't see why I or anyone like myself have to go through all this. (:43)

Paula – paid into the system

Tape: It is true that many seniors who participate in food assistance programs have paid into system. They have worked. They may be collecting retirement, social security certainly, and those seniors make have fallen on hard times for some reason. And as a result they are having to seek assistance and in many cases this can be accompanied by shame – for never having to want for assistance in the past to being able to support yourself whether for medical reasons or other to no longer being able to provide enough food to stay nourished and well. And I think that's very true for our seniors in DC and likewise true nationally. (:58)

This fact is certainly on Carolyn's mind. Particularly when she hears that one or more of her poor neighbors didn't get SNAP benefits because their income placed them just a smidgen over the limit to qualify.

10 Vinson – over qualified

Tape: And then they would tell you that you over qualify and I would think: I'm overqualified by 25 or 30 dollars too much. Well how much do I over qualify? It

says that you can't make but \$10.75 and you making \$11.25. You know that's ridiculous to me. Angel: When you're saying making, I don't understand. I mean not making you receiving from social security, your SSI, or wherever your money is coming from, you're receiving too much money monthly. We not talking about a lot of dollars. We're talking about 2 or 3 dollars or something. Not everybody fall in that category, but there are some of us that fall in that category that we make less than five dollars more than what's on paper for you to make. And that disqualify you. I don't mean this to sound rude, but there has to be a line some place? It has to be a line, but I think should be broadened some. I don't think that 50 cents or a dollar and I not exaggerating when I say that. I don't think that less than five dollars should disqualify you from getting a decent amount of food stamps. (1:09)

Paula Reichel:

1. Paula – response to over-qualified

So assuming that this senior knows someone who is within five dollars of the benefit, and is denied any benefit, as the result of exceeding the allowable income, it could be a number of cases. So, case one could be they haven't sort of taken the appropriate deduction. So their income without the deduction may exceed the allowable limit for SNAP. But with the deduction it may qualify for SNAP. So the 2nd possibility is that maybe they do make too much money to qualify for the SNAP program. And I think in that case that is why charitable institutions like food banks and food pantries are so important. Because we recognize that government standards alone are never going to truly meet the need. There's always going to be someone that is still having difficulty identifying food resources and providing for themselves but may not for benefits. And so that's why we exist. We exist to put food into the community for those who need it and for most of our partner organizations who distribute food through pantries, there are no income screens, or it's fully self declare. So I think that's where the charitable sector can step in and provide resources to those who are underserved by federal government programs. (1:40)

This is good news for low-income seniors, many of whom also have a huge responsibility.

21. Paula – response to look at people

A lot of seniors in our region as well as nationally are taking care of grandchildren. So they may have childcare costs that they incur.

Preston L Williams Sr.:

1 Preston – I didn't know how sick

Tape: And they ain't getting paid for it. I'm sure there're cases where the people will share the food with the grandchildren and I know that's not how it's set up, but just having that food it just has unintentional consequences, so they need to step it up. They really need to step it up. I don't know what else to say. (1:33)

The Capitol Area Food Bank is stepping it up. The organization has a new huge storage facility filled with donated and purchased foodstuffs it distributes through its many partners. And the staff has developed a sophisticated mapping system to figure out exactly where in D.C. more services are needed.

9. Paula – lack of information

We can look at all the food resources in the community and see sort of on a limited level how infiltrated they are within that community and whether or not there's a need.

Now the food bank is advertising on buses in wards 7 and 8, D.C. poorest wards. The food bank is hoping to reach seniors who use mass transit because they either don't own a car or can no longer drive.

9. Paula – lack of information

Tape: What we see in reality is that people do not know about available food resources, even if there are food resources within blocks of their house, it may not be made known to them that they're available to them which is why I think applications like the DC Food Finder are so important. We at the Food Bank also have what is known as the Hunger Lifeline where anybody in the community can call us and be directed to emergency food resources. But even though those resources are available, there's still a lack of information out in the community, specifically to seniors who may not be interfacing with the environment as much as others as to where to obtain food on a regular basis. (1:20)

Is all this effort to get out the word working?

2. Paula – statistic DC

So the most recent statistics we have are about 15 percent of DC seniors are food insecure. That equates to about 15,000 individuals in DC who are in poverty and lacking food resources. (15)

That's a high number, but maybe it would be even higher if it weren't for the best publicity of all... word of mouth - the grapevine.

13. Paula – hidden hunger – connecting resources

Senior food insecurity or senior hunger is often referred to as hidden hunger because seniors are least likely to go out and pursue resources. Oftentimes, seniors are identified through their friends who are having to provide resources to them or connect them with resources in their community. (23)

Both Caroline Vinson - who writes down when donation sights are open on her calendar and then calls her neighbors to remind them to go - and Tessie Robinson, who now relies on these food donations, are very grateful.

6 Tessie – Roof over heads - groceries

Tape: Food: we have National Food Bank. We have Bread For The City. You have Emmaus, that's for seniors, where you can pick up food what have you. So food, that's fine. It's been holdin' out for us.

7 Tessie – When I was working

Tape: When I was workin' I didn't have to use them. And, and I'm not being selfish or shame or anything like that. But I was in a position whereas I could put it on the table for my family and be thankful for it. Also be considered of a person who may not have that position of purchasing it that could go and receive it. I'm not a selfish person. I'm not a greedy person. So I didn't have to go, but I have recommended these different places to other people who may have needed help.

Carolyn Vinson:

8 Vinson – no excuse to go hungry in DC

Tape: There are too many places that you can go and get food. And I don't understand it how when I hear people say I don't have food unless you are invalid or sick and just cannot get out. But if you can get out there's no reason in my opinion, and I might be wrong, there's no reason in my opinion that there should be anyone in DC that's hungry with all the places that's available to get food that you can bring home or even those places you can go and you can eat on site. Like I say unless you are physically disabled and just can't go, that's my personal opinion. There's no reason for anyone in this city to be hungry. (:49)

Paula Reichel (Ry-kell), director of the Capitol Area Food Bank's DC region:

16. Paula – ending

We know our federal safety net is less than perfect. How can we step in with our resources to make that impact so that we don't see children going to bed hungry, and we don't hear about seniors who are sitting at home without food. And that's really our goal. Of course it is a stretch goal but we think working together with other community organizations we can reach it. And we can solve hunger in this community if not nationally with a bit of effort. (:39)

It'll be a challenge. As the economy continues to falter, the nation's food banks are now a vital resource for more and more people including seniors.

3. Paula – taking advantage of food banks

Tape: What we're seeing at the food bank is that people are taking advantage of food resources, and they're having to go to food pantries frequently. Food pantries are meant to be emergency food resources, but we're seeing chronic use of what are called emergency resources. So for the people that are taking advantage of resources that are available to them in their communities, they're using them frequently. (15)

And by the year 2040 the number of seniors is projected to rise to 79.7 million. That's more than twice the number of seniors counted in the year 2,000.

Preston L Williams Sr.:

15 Preston – nobody should starve

Tape: You got to feed people. You got to feed people. You got to make it available, I mean. Nobody should have to starve in this country. Nobody should have to go to bed hungry. I can't... I can't solve that problem. (16)

Theodosia Robinson:

12 Tessie – This has to end

Tape: This has to end. It's gotta be a better way. No one should have to - ah an - no one. (Alyne: And I bet you see other seniors in this position.) Yes. And it's sad. It hurts. It really truly hurts. And they're older than I am. I'm just a young senior. OK. And they tell me I'm still a baby. And it hurts because I see it. And those the ones that don't have a voice for theirselves. They don't want to say anything because they might lose what they do have. (40)

Food... other than water you can't get more basic than that.

3 Preston – Civilized society

Tape: I can't put a value on it. It's one of those things that you can't equate to dollars and cents. It's a sign of civilized society. (09)

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