Waiting for “Recovery” in Southwest Virginia

Despite the national trends of economic recovery, the situation in Southwest Virginia remains in decline. Fueled by losses in the coal and manufacturing industries, this economic instability has unsettled our place and people. Without jobs to replace those that have disappeared, more and more people are left struggling to make ends meet, more and more people are at risk of hunger.

The recently released “Map the Meal Gap 2016” shows that overall food insecurity is decreasing in our region, due in part to the work of Feeding America Southwest Virginia and our partner feeding programs. However, this isn’t the case in the hardest hit areas. Eight communities saw an increase in food insecurity, totaling more than 2,000 men, women, and children who now face the problem of not having enough food.

These struggles can amount to dire consequences, impacting the quality of, and even length of a person’s life. According to the 2015 County Health Rankings by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, nearly 1,000 people died premature deaths (before 75 years of age) in Tazewell County, with a troubling 13,000 years of life lost. Providing food to meet the basic human need of these people is a small step toward increasing their quality of life—but it is a step.

With your help, Feeding America Southwest Virginia is working to reach the more than 154,500 people in our region who continue to face hunger. With your support, we’re working to change lives for the better.
A MESSAGE
from the President & CEO

“Waiting hurts. Forgetting hurts. But not knowing which decision to take can sometimes be the most painful...”

— José N. Harris, MI VIDA: A Story of Faith, Hope and Love

Sometimes we have to take a giant step out of our comfort zone to shed light on the harsh realities faced by our friends and neighbors.

Recently, I dug deep into my own personal experiences at our partner program conferences and also in Ted Edlich’s book, “Navigating the Nonprofit Rapids,” (a must-read for all nonprofit leaders) in order to explain why I am so passionate about feeding the hungry.

Over the years I have shared countless stories of individuals who have suffered tragedies and economic setbacks. Now, I am finally finding the courage to share my own experience with hunger.

During the early years of our marriage, despite the fact that both my husband and I were employed, our food budget for two weeks was only $25—leaving no money for baby formula for our infant son. It was a difficult time. The choice between paying for food, medicine, utilities or rent became an overwhelming burden. Eventually, I turned to public assistance for support. It was a painful decision. I was humiliated. But, it was what we had to do to survive.

This life-changing experience propelled me into a 35-year institutional commitment to advocate on behalf of the hungry in our region. These dismal choices haunt our neighbors every day. The fight against hunger is real, and it is personal and heartbreaking. We must realize that when someone reaches out seeking help, it is not an act of weakness, but an act of courage.

As leaders for food justice in Southwest Virginia, it’s our job to be there to help.

Interested in learning more about Ted Edlich’s “Navigating the Nonprofit Rapids?” The book is available in e-book and paperback formats from Amazon.com.
Summer Feeding Kicks Off
With FASWVA and No Kid Hungry

Feeding America Southwest Virginia joined Share Our Strength’s No Kid Hungry campaign and the Southeast United Dairy Industry Association (SUDIA) to kick off summer feeding programs in Virginia in June. FASWVA, No Kid Hungry and SUDIA were joined by Miss Virginia Savannah Lane and Virginia Delegate Sam Rasoul for a kickoff event with the Community Youth Program (CYP) at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Roanoke. Members of the Roanoke City Council, the FASWVA board of directors and representatives from Roanoke City Schools also attended the event.

The CYP children were fed supper and heard messages about hunger, healthy eating and exercise from FASWVA President and CEO Pamela Irvine, Delegate Rasoul and Miss Virginia. The program concluded with games and activities for the children. They also received “goodie bags” containing several items, including a pedometer—which was a huge hit as they ran in place to see who could accumulate the most steps.

In partnership with FASWVA, St. John’s Episcopal Church expects to serve supper to nearly 40 participants of the Community Youth Program each day from June 13 to July 22. CYP is an after-school and summer program for 4th through 8th grade youth attending Roanoke City Schools. The program offers homework assistance and promotes the development of a healthy self-image. CYP also engages children in service learning projects so they can learn the importance of giving back to the community.

Programs like CYP are critically important in the fight against child hunger, providing nutritious meals to children during the summer months when they do not have access to regular free and reduced price school lunch programs. In Roanoke City alone, more than 85% of children are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

Children who face hunger may struggle with a number of health and development issues including being sick more often, being at higher risk for chronic health conditions, having growth deficiencies and struggling academically and socially.

You can help FASWVA fight child hunger by:

- Donating to FASWVA, where $1 = 7 meals (www.faswva.org/donate)
- Volunteering at FASWVA or a children’s program site (www.faswva.org/volunteer)
- Conducting a child hunger food drive. Most needed items include pop-top fruits and veggies, chewy granola bars, peanut butter and pudding cups. (www.faswva.org/give-food)

Summer Meals Texting Program

Families in need simply text the word “Food” to 877-877 to receive a text back with the address of summer feeding sites closest to them.

“Text for Summer Sites” is a service of Share Our Strength’s No Kid Hungry campaign, which is ending child hunger in America by ensuring all children get the healthy food they need, every day.
Partner Program Conferences: Sharing, learning, motivating — together

Spring is a time for renewal. So, what better time to get together with our partner programs and renew our commitment to each other and the clients we serve?

The partner program conferences held in Salem in March and in Abingdon in May, sought to do just that. Each conference offered attendees the opportunity to hear from FASWVA President and CEO Pamela Irvine about our commitment to fostering positive relationships and supporting our partners in every way possible.

Attendees also participated in breakout sessions on topics such as grant writing, succession planning and the new “FeedTheNation” computerized reporting platform.

The major highlight of each conference was the keynote address from Joy Sutton of the “Joy Sutton Show.” Sutton is a dynamic TV host, entertainer and award-winning journalist who lived up to her media moniker of “the next Oprah” during a warm, funny and enlightening keynote. She kept things interactive and invited our partners to share their stories, several of which brought tears to the eyes of audience members as they were reminded of the crucially important work they do.

Despite the challenge of bringing together so many busy people, these conferences showcased just how important it is for our partner programs to connect with us and with each other to share stories, learn new strategies and most importantly, understand how much FASWVA and their communities appreciate them.
Partner Program Profile:
Henry County Food Pantry

Henry County Food Pantry, a partner of FASWVA for 10 years, is both a testament to old-fashioned, community-based hunger relief and a leader in the future of charitable food distribution in Southwest Virginia.

Tucked into a corner of the historic Basset High School, Henry County Food Pantry is organized by the Wright family (who own the building and run the many ventures housed therein) and staffed by nearly 70 local volunteers. The second Wednesday of every month, the volunteers gather to break down pallets of food into ready-made boxes that will feed more than 1,000 people. After the sorting is complete, Mom and Dad Wright cook up a fine lunch for the volunteers and serve the food themselves.

Eventually, the Wrights began wondering how else the pantry could help their clients. “After all this time serving people,” said Sharon (Wright) Mills, “you get to see the greater need, the underlying need. People need more than food. They need help to stabilize their lives and break the vicious cycle.”

And so, Adam Wright began developing the software that would eventually become FeedTheNation, a program that tracks distribution and client data, and completes reports that once took hours in a matter of minutes. However, FeedTheNation does even more than that. Clients entered into the system can receive text messages about job openings, financial assistance programs, child care services and more—opportunities that will help them far into the future.

Henry County Food Pantry has been using FeedTheNation for more than a year now. With support from FASWVA and The Harvest Foundation, the Wrights hope to bring 15-20 agencies onboard by the end of the year, and eventually expand to all of FASWVA’s partners.

The fight against hunger depends on the community investment and innovation seen at Henry County Food Pantry. Contact Amy Morgan, amorgan@faswva.org, or Adam Wright, adam@emiimaging.com, for more information on FeedTheNation and to find out how you can help solve hunger.

PPU Fast Facts

- Number of FASWVA partner programs participating in PPU: 115.
- Pounds of food picked up by FASWVA partner agencies in 2015: more than 10 MILLION!
FASWVA Volunteer Profile:
Bill Richards

When he’s not helping his Allstate insurance clients dry out a flooded basement or figure out what to do when a wayward bear has a late night party in their Nissan, Bill Richards enjoys helping his community by volunteering with Feeding America Southwest Virginia. He has volunteered in the quality assurance area of the Salem distribution center alongside some of his Allstate colleagues, worked with other volunteers at the Stamp Out Hunger food drive and he also runs the Mobile Produce Distribution site at Rockingham Court United Methodist Church. Needless to say, hunger relief is a cause close to his heart.

“You know, we talk about economic recovery, but I personally don’t see that,” he says. “I know my customers are struggling – I can see it, and it’s people from all walks of life, right in our own backyard.”

It’s that unique insight into his fellow Virginians’ struggles to make ends meet that keeps him motivated to fight hunger. “We really do need to help people right here in Southwest Virginia,” he says.

Richards is a Richmond native, but he has called Roanoke home for the last 34 years. His involvement with Feeding America Southwest Virginia started when the former pastor of his church initiated the mobile produce distribution and asked him to get involved. When the pastor left, Richards didn’t want to see the program discontinued, so he volunteered to lead it. He has been in charge of the distribution for the last year and a half. He extended his FASWVA volunteer resume last holiday season when he decided to take his entire office to the Salem distribution center for a day of volunteering in lieu of a holiday party. The group described the experience as “one of the best things we’ve ever done.”

Richards has also put the philanthropic arm of the Allstate Foundation to work for the Food Bank via a special grant that contributes up to $1,000 to organizations at which Allstate agencies volunteer.

His generosity doesn’t stop there. He’s also actively involved in a teen driver safety program called “Partnering for the Privilege” with Roanoke County Schools, Roanoke County Police Department and the Allstate Foundation.

Want to help your neighbors just like Bill Richards? It’s easy to get involved with FASWVA. Just contact Director of Volunteer Services Barb Putney at 540-342-3011, ext. 7016, or visit www.faswva.org/volunteer to learn more.
Legal Food Frenzy

Law offices and firms throughout the Roanoke Valley participated in the 10th Annual Legal Food Frenzy -- a food and fund drive competition among all Virginia law firms and organizations. The Frenzy raised $15,148 for Feeding America Southwest Virginia this year. Together, the legal community provided 106,036 meals for hungry kids, seniors, veterans and families in our 26-county service region.

On behalf of the many people who benefit from this generous support, thank you to all the offices and firms who took the challenge.

Bristol Junior Leagues/Food City Food Drive

The Junior Leagues of Bristol, Kingsport and Johnson City Tennessee held their 26th annual food drive in April, sponsored by Food City stores, to collect food donations for Feeding America Southwest Virginia and the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee. The Leagues collected a total of 18,388 pounds of food -- well over the group’s 15,000 pound goal. The food was distributed between the two food banks based on the geographic area where it was collected.

Giving Days

Roanoke Valley Gives Day

March 16 was Roanoke Valley Gives Day, hosted by the Foundation for Roanoke Valley. The day encourages charitable giving to nonprofit organizations whose work benefits the Roanoke Valley. In 24 hours, our fantastic Roanoke Valley supporters helped us raise enough funds to provide 19,810 meals -- WOW!

Give Big NRV

April 20 was the GiveBigNRV Giving Day, hosted by the Community Foundation of the New River Valley. The day encourages charitable giving to nonprofit organizations whose work benefits the New River Valley. With the generous contributions of the New River Valley community, we surpassed our goal of raising enough to provide 85,000 meals -- we raised enough to provide 87,850! Thank you, NRV, you gave BIG!

Recent Events at FASWVA

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Friends of the Food Bank

As the economy struggles toward recovery, long-term unemployment is taking a toll in Southwest Virginia. Even people we once looked to for contributions are now turning to FASWVA for food.

*It’s as easy as*

**One…**

**Two…**

**Feed.**

In this time of increasing need, we count on a special circle of supporters.

Friends of the Food Bank are our most committed group of donors – those who choose to support FASWVA every month with a gift of any size.

The majority of our annual support tends to come in during the holiday season, but monthly giving helps make sure we can respond to hunger concerns as they arise throughout the year.

These recurring monthly contributions are easy and efficient and reduce administrative costs so more of each gift goes to food aid. Think of it like a baker’s dozen – the extra money saved in time and postage could equal a 13th gift. There’s no easier way to help fight hunger.

It’s as easy as “One… Two… Feed” to show your deepest commitment to fighting hunger. Visit www.faswva.org/donate and select “Month” under repeat payment to join the Friends of the Food Bank.

More great ways to give

**Kroger Community Rewards Program**

Donate money anytime you buy groceries at your local Kroger store. Visit kroger.com to create your profile and select the store where you shop most frequently. Open your Account Summary screen and in the “Community Rewards” section, search and select Feeding America Southwest Virginia. That’s it! With every Kroger shopping trip, you’ll be feeding both your family and the hungry in our region! (PS - don’t forget to re-enroll each August!)

**Charity Miles**

This free iPhone/Android app lets you earn money for Feeding America national while you exercise! Simply download the app, search and select Feeding America, choose your type of exercise, and then, get ready…set…go fundraise! Find out more at www.charitymiles.org.

Visit www.faswva.org/donate or call 540-342-3011 to learn about EVEN MORE great ways to give!