

A Hungry Man Is an Angry Man

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
June 2015

You try eating at the federal poverty level



Day 1: My seven-year-old buried his face in a couch cushion, frustrated he couldn't have dessert -- because there was no dessert. "I didn't choose this challenge, Daddy. I don't want to do it anymore."

"People don't choose to be hungry," I said. "This is what it feels like."

We're eating at the federal poverty level of \$4.50 per day per person for one week. That's a total of \$18 per day, \$128 per week for the four of us.

Day 3: We'd just gotten up. Our two boys finished their oatmeal and ran around shooting each other with Nerf guns, while my wife barked through bloodshot eyes: "Clear your computer and all your stuff off the dining room table. It's *not* your office." I reached for the boys' dirty bowls.

"So you're going *there* right now," I said. "Just because you can't drink the coffee, don't take it out on me."

Day 4: My wife's Facebook post: "Halfway through the SNAP Challenge (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps) and I have to admit, I can't wait for it to

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end. I feel badly for saying that, as I know how many people don't have that option, and I recognize that for us, this is totally self-imposed and limited in time. I've had a headache for three days and feeling foggy from no coffee (the two-dollar bag we purchased was gag-worthy and tasted toxic -- had to throw it out)."

Clearly, we're privileged if the hardest part of hunger is bad coffee. But I, too, feel sluggish and confused; I assume this stems from lack of nutrients. I've lost three pounds. How does a hungry child concentrate all day at school, and then try to focus on homework?

My wife spearheaded a food drive in Morningside, and we ambled door to door on sun-dappled streets, pulling a little red wagon full of various nonperishables. The food bank is nearby, and as we unloaded our full Honda Pilot, the regal, older black woman in charge said, "By tomorrow evening, every bit of this will be gone."

Her unremarkable warehouse serves 5000 hungry people each month, just minutes from some of the most affluent neighborhoods in town, including *yours*. How does the richest nation in history get to a place where 46.5 million people, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors, are food insecure, uncertain where their next meal will come from?

One reason is fools in Congress, like recently defeated Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia, who sat on the House agriculture committee, which oversees the federal school lunch program for the underprivileged. This allegedly devout man proposed that children who participate in the program be required "to sweep the floor in the cafeteria" to promote a work ethic and "instill in them that there is, in fact, no such thing as a free lunch."

It's not lazy eight-year-olds who are the problem, you hypocritical fool.

In 2013, while the United States spent more on its military than the next 12 nations combined, Kingston's team cut subsistence food subsidies for kids, slicing \$8.7 billion over the next ten years from the federal budget for nutrition assistance programs like SNAP.

How can we fix this complex problem?

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For starters, let's vote out those whose ignorance de-emphasizes education and whose self-righteousness espouses falsehoods like, to be a true patriot, you must be totally self-sufficient *right now*. That's like deciding your infant should swim by throwing him in the pool and folding your arms until he does.

We need equal parts intelligence *and* compassion to activate the idea of teaching a man to fish and feeding him for a lifetime. The key word is teaching. Twelve million hungry kids and the Dow at an all-time high. This is not Darfur.

If we properly educate *all* our children, in a few generations, those smart and well-prepared kids will solve these intractable problems themselves.

Please take two minutes to add your name to a petition that lets Congress know you support SNAP, not misguided budget proposals that increase hunger in America. The link is: http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5118/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=19755.

Organize simple food drives in your neighborhood:

Kosher Food Bank, 2056 NE 155th St., North Miami, 305-946-8093.

Curly's House of Style, 6025 NW 6th Ct., Miami, 305-759-9805.

E-mail your Congress members to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Budget funds that expire in September. This provides school lunch, breakfast, and summer food service programs for families who are at 130 percent of the poverty line or below:
www.contactingthecongress.org/cgi-bin/newseek.cgi.

Without food in his belly, a child's potential is wasted, and eventually, the social safety net is

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needed. A mind, let alone tens of millions of minds, is far too precious to waste. Mother Teresa said it well: "If you can't feed 100 people, then feed just one."

Find more ways to help at <http://frac.org/leg-act-center>.

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