

# ONE YEAR AFTER...

Reflecting on a year of higher food costs, without extra pandemic SNAP support.

Hearing directly from our neighbors across Ohio.





In the wake of unprecedented challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks traveled across the state, engaging in insightful interviews with recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These conversations provided a platform for our neighbors to candidly reflect on the effects that the pandemic, inflation, and the current economic landscape are having on their lives here in Ohio. **This lookbook emphasizes the experiences of individuals and families one year after the end of SNAP emergency allotments, while being met with the continued increase in food cost.**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, all SNAP households had been receiving the maximum allowable benefit for their household size. Households that were already at their maximum received an extra \$95 per month starting in April 2021. On average, households had been receiving \$90 per person, per month more in benefits. These boosted SNAP benefits, known as emergency allotments (or EAs) were put in place during the public health emergency and played a pivotal role in mitigating the financial hardships brought about by the pandemic.

As the public health emergency receded, the emergency SNAP allotments ceased one year ago, at the end of February 2023. This new reality affected 1.3 million SNAP recipients across Ohio who are also being confronted with continued high grocery costs. **This lookbook serves as a collective of narratives, featuring firsthand accounts from eight neighbors across the state from all walks of life.**





# Meet Amanda

**Hamilton County Resident.  
Mother of Four. Employed.  
SNAP Recipient.**

“We were actually **able to make it through the month without having to struggle**. With my son being autistic, he needs to eat organic everything and that is now really **cutting into my budget** bad.”

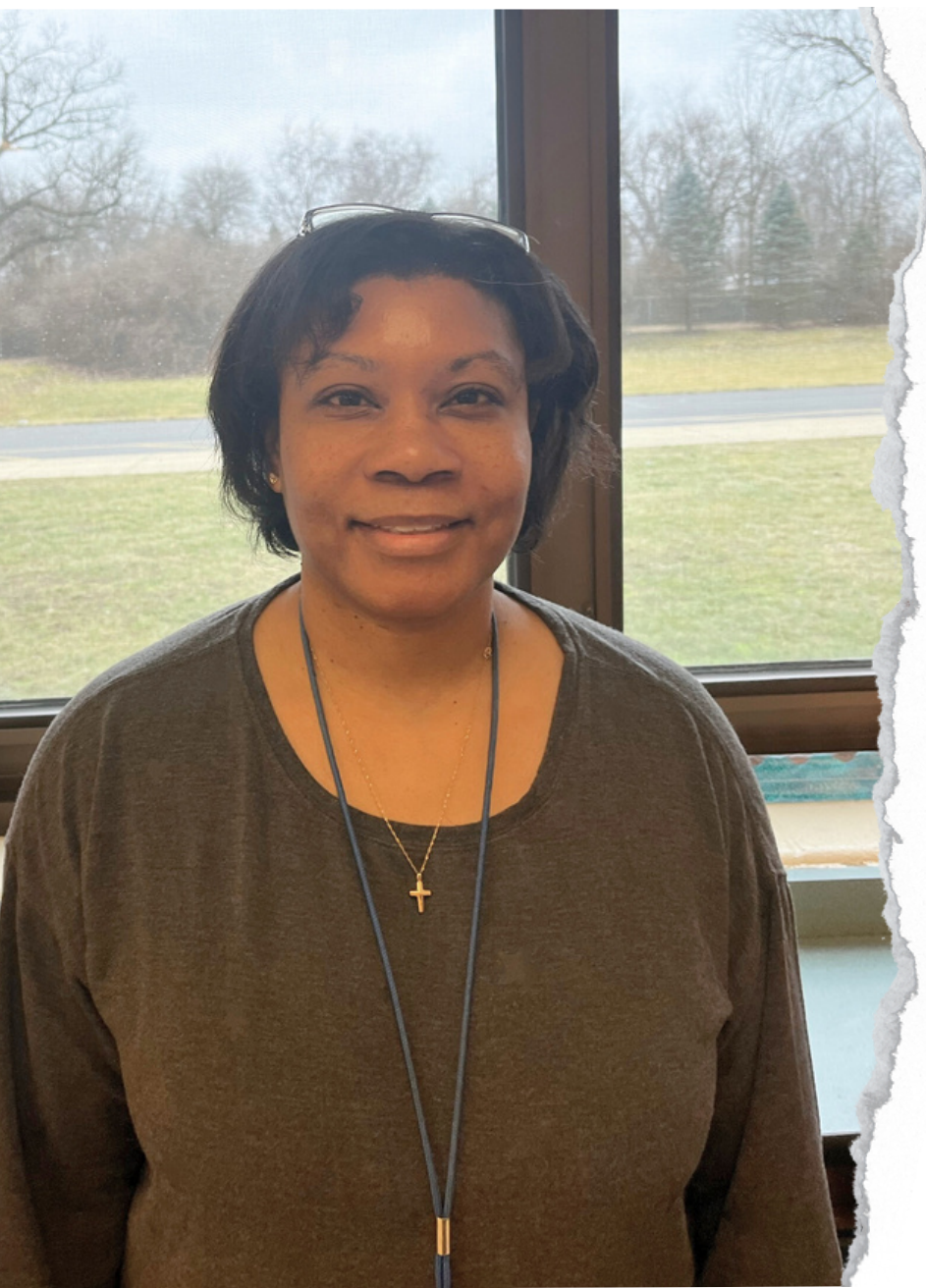
Concerning the additional emergency SNAP allotments.

“It would be nice if we could buy hot foods. Having so many kids and I am restricted with not being home sometimes because of work and their dad is disabled. It would help a whole lot but instead my 18 year old is trying to cook dinner for his younger siblings.”

“I’ve **not been able to go to a lot of my own doctor appointments recently** because I simply don’t have the money. My **son isn’t getting all the medicines he needs because it needs to go to food**. I’ve made cuts everywhere I can.”



# Meet sisters, Sunni and Starla



## Starla

**Franklin County Resident.  
Foster Parent. Substitute  
Teacher. Food Pantry  
Volunteer. SNAP Recipient.**

Sunni and Starla are both Franklin County residents where they currently reside and work.

Starla is a substitute teacher in the public school system and receives SNAP benefits for herself and her fifteen-year-old foster daughter. Starla's daughter has an eating disorder which adds an additional layer to the household and makes navigating food security a bit more challenging. In the summer months when not teaching, Starla works at a local summer camp. When she isn't working you can find her and her daughter volunteering at the local food pantry where they both serve clients and are clients, themselves.

“For me, it afforded me to be able to buy things I wouldn't normally buy, like meat. **I was able to incorporate better meat into my diet,** leaner cuts.”

Concerning the additional pandemic SNAP allotments.

“She has an eating disorder so I always try and make sure I have an abundant amount of food in the house so when she's ready to eat, she can eat.”



“For **elderly people, some of them are already trying to maneuver things on a restricted income** now because they might be on social security. They have to pay for prescriptions, and on top of that food. **It’s like another punishment for working your whole life.** So, you’re telling me now in the time that they need you, and they decided to work and make money and now only qualify for \$20 or \$25? There should be X amount guaranteed for people over 65+ years old.”

“There’s been a little bit of sacrifice but that is due to my mom’s condition. She currently has to have **low sodium items so making her meals right now is tougher with groceries being higher.** A lot of time those better for your food are more expensive so then you have to figure that and maneuver that with the little bit she’s got. **It can be a little tricky because why does the healthier stuff cost more money?”**

Sunni does not receive SNAP but cares practically full-time for her elderly and disabled mother, Patti. Sunni is Patti’s authorized representative for the \$25 SNAP benefits she receives every month as a retired, divorced, 68-year-old woman, aging alone.

Patti was born in Indiana but has lived most her life in Ohio. She worked as an accountant for the hotel service industry for over 20 years and is now retired. Patti insists on aging in the comfort of her own home, but Sunni admits the limited SNAP assistance she receives makes this difficult.

## Sunni

**Franklin County Resident.  
Full-Time Caregiver to  
Elderly Mother, who is a  
SNAP Recipient.**





# Meet Crystal

**Franklin County Resident.  
Currently Without Stable  
Housing for Herself and Her  
Son. SNAP Recipient.**

**“Due to my health issues, I can’t digest a lot of fatty foods so for me, the extra benefits allowed me to shop more appropriately. I didn’t have to buy the cheaper, processed foods, so I was able to get more fresh vegetables, fresh fruits. **The extra money allowed us to be healthier.**”**

Concerning the additional pandemic SNAP allotments.

**“In my situation right now, if a friend wasn’t letting us sleep on their couch, I would be **sleeping in my car and how would I prepare food outside of the hot foods I can buy in the store with my SNAP card?** I really feel for the homeless community for that reason because they may not have the necessities to be able to cook. It’s one thing to make it in life and have a home but if you’re struggling and you don’t have that stuff, a lot of people take that for granted. Walk a mile in my shoes.”**





## Meet Adam

**Lorain County Resident.  
Disabled. SNAP  
Recipient.**

“I drink protein drinks daily and fortunately they are covered by SNAP benefits. But these protein shakes are something I **must have** [concerning his diet] **and they’re really expensive which takes a majority of my food stamp dollars.**”

“Those extra SNAP benefits were really helpful. **They allowed me to go to the food banks less.** Once I lost the benefits, I notice I was relying on the pantries more.”

Concerning the additional pandemic SNAP allotments.


“I feel that an increase in SNAP benefits for single people would be very helpful. I would advocate for the single male and females that do get SNAP benefits and don’t get that much.”





# Meet Maura

**Clark County Resident.  
Single Mother of Three.  
Paraprofessional. SNAP  
Recipient.**



“I’ve made sacrifices when it comes to buying things like processed food. I’ll get a hamburger helper which is **cheaper but not as healthy**, but it does feed my family.”

“I definitely would eat better when I had the extra money. It made me feel like **I could get healthier options**, like organic which is pricier.”

Concerning the additional pandemic SNAP allotments.





## Meet Jennifer

**Cuyahoga County Resident.  
Single. Fully Disabled. SNAP  
Recipient.**

Jennifer is fully disabled and is living with her 28-year-old son while currently battling a recent cancer diagnosis. She is on a fixed income and receives SNAP benefits.

Jennifer's previous and current health concerns make navigating her diet much more challenging and financially straining. Jennifer talks highly of growing up with a family who thankfully taught her about budgeting, couponing, canning, and how to stretch a dollar. However, even with these smarts, Jenn is finding it difficult to stretch her dollar during this economy.

“The additional \$95 helped out because I was able to get meat **AND** fresh produce opposed to having to skip that month of fresh and go on canned items that I have. **I could eat healthier.**”

Concerning the additional pandemic SNAP allotments.

“With my surgery coming up, I don't know if I'll have swallowing issues with my vocal cords and I might not be able to swallow properly so I have to make sure I have foods that are easily able to be puree or liquify and that I can bulk up with protein powders, things like that. And that's the thing, **some protein powders are covered under SNAP benefits, and some are not** so it's the balance of finding the ones that are actually covered and not crazy expensive because getting a protein powder that I need to add to my meal are way more expensive and that takes away from my food stamps money. **They need to start considering dietary options for people as well because I'm sure I'm not the only one out there struggling.**”

“People can't afford rent anymore, can't afford utilities, can't afford food and they say the economy is booming but **lower class people are not the ones feeling it. The retirees are not the ones feeling it. The disabled are not the ones feeling it. They're feeling hurt, not the benefit.**”





# Meet Jolara

**Franklin County Resident.  
Single Mother of One.  
College Student. Teacher.  
SNAP Recipient.**

“I don't know if you've ever seen a fifteen-year-old eat or a stressed-out mom eat, but luckily, we have a couple of safety nets built in with local pantries. Other than that, there isn't much for us as expenses continue to spiral up to unobtainable, unmanageable rates. **Right now, our grocery bill is more than our internet, gas, electricity, and water.** It exceeds those four things, so it's tough.”

“It's been really hard. I need to build a solid foundation for us. Health wise, the anxiety and uncertainty of not knowing, being a person of low income, I decided I couldn't wait anymore and came back to Columbus State after many years. **There is this idea attached around starving college students and it's not as attractive or as character building as it is made out to be and I challenge anyone who says it builds character to go 24 hours.** Once you go 24 hours without a good meal, it goes downhill from there and **we can't endanger our physical health and our mental health in the name of some type of character-building exercise** that everyone should suffer because someone suffered.”





After conducting a month-long interview process featuring eight Ohioans from diverse backgrounds spanning five counties, it became evident that each participant, whether residing in rural homesteads or urban rental properties, continues to face financial and physical challenges. **The end of emergency allotments one year ago during the public health crisis and the simultaneous rise in grocery prices have impacted households across the state.** Despite their varied circumstances, common themes included:



**6 of the 8 households had a member with a disability.**



**7 of the 8 households had a member with a dietary restriction.**



**All 8 households said the additional SNAP allotments allowed them to eat healthier.**



**All 8 households expressed concern around the current increased grocery cost.**



**All 8 households commented on the importance of fresh produce and their desire to incorporate it into their diet more but struggle due to its cost in comparison to processed foods.**

We want to thank the Ohioans who participated in this project that allowed the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to uplift their voice and raise awareness. SNAP is a critical line of defense in our fight against hunger in Ohio and we value the insight of our neighbors with lived experience.



**OHIO**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
FOODBANKS

100 E. Broad St. Ste. 501  
Columbus, OH 43215  
614-221-4336  
EIN: 34-1677838

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