



Episode 1: Welcome to Just a Bite!

Audio Transcript

Sarah Kuhns 00:00:27 Welcome to Just a Bite, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks new podcast. It'll be hosted by the external affairs team and new episodes will be released every other week for you get to know the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and what this podcast will be about. You should get to know us, your hosts. My name's Sarah Kuhns. I'm the advocacy and administrative coordinator here at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. I've been here for just about three months.

Joree Novotny 00:01:00 And I'm Joree Novotny director of external affairs here at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. I just recently celebrated 11 years in service here at the association. And I can tell you it's been so fun to see Sarah get acclimated to our work. I'd love to hear what something you've been involved in recently that's made you feel hopeful about our advocacy work going forward, Sarah.

Sarah Kuhns 00:01:25 Yeah, along with Senator Portman's Southwest district director, we went to Shared Harvest Foodbank in Fairfield, Ohio to show her what we do as food bankers. She graciously volunteered at their food distribution and we discussed federal recovery legislation and the upcoming child nutrition reauthorization process and what our priorities are for both.

Joree Novotny 00:01:55 Yeah. That's a great example of the kind of work we regularly do to lift up anti-hunger and anti-poverty priorities here in Ohio and across the country. It's been really fun to see you get yourself right into the work as our new advocacy and administrative coordinator. It's a pleasure for me to have you on the team and to launch this podcast with you. You know, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks is the state association that represents Ohio's 12 Feeding America food banks, as well as their 3,600 hunger relief agencies, food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, supplemental feeding sites, and many place-based food pantries and meal programs. And along with supporting that network, we also advocate for what our food banks and the people they serve need. We purchase food of course, as well as other necessities for our food banks to ensure that they can meet the demand that they're seeing day to day and fill the gaps and the needs of, um, around 2 million different Ohioans who rely on our services.

Joree Novotny 00:03:08 We also run other programs, including a work experience program here in Franklin County that makes sure that unemployed and underemployed adults here in the central part of our state are connected with federal food assistance through the SNAP program, as well as opportunities to develop themselves as workers in our workforce. And we also place national service members through our AmeriCorps VISTA programs in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service to help further capacity across our network. Those are just a couple of the things that we do as a state association. And we do that throughout all 88 counties across the state of Ohio. We serve many different agencies and organizations and provide a lot of wraparound services that you might not traditionally think of as food banking. And I'm sure in future episodes, we'll dive into some of those in more detail. Um, but as the external affairs team, we also are

engaged in an ongoing way in anti-hunger and anti-poverty public policy because we know that hunger is a symptom of poverty, and we know that poverty is driven by systemic issues in our society and injustices that we want to help address - those issues that intersect with, or cause food insecurity and hunger, from poverty to homelessness and housing insecurity to wealth and wage inequity to racial and social justice issues.

Joree Novotny 00:04:48 We also know that as food bankers, we can only do so much. We need our partners in public policy, in government and in the private sector to help us address food insecurity and poverty holistically. So we're really excited to bring some of those topics to your table through this podcast.

Sarah Kuhns 00:05:17 I'm still new to the food and nutrition policy space. You, the listener will be learning alongside me as I go through the rest of my first year at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and beyond. This is a great year for me to begin my career in the health and human services, advocacy space, and for you to learn too, because of all the opportunities over the next year to make lasting change, to end poverty and hunger like Child Nutrition Reauthorization, and the Farm Bill. If those terms mean nothing to you, that's okay, we're going to become better informed anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocates together. With that being said, we thought we would share some updates about what is happening on the federal level recently that we are working on, which is federal recovery legislation. If our experience as hunger relief providers over the past 30 years, especially the last year and a half has taught us anything, it's that the charitable sector can't do it alone. We count on public private partnerships and effective, efficient public policy as the real backbone of any work to reduce hunger and food insecurity and address the symptoms of poverty. Similarly, we know that government can't be all things to all people, and there will always be a need for charitable social service and emergency service providers to fill gaps, prevent folks from falling through the cracks and implement programs that address the social determinants of health and community wellbeing.

Joree Novotny 00:06:58 You're so right, Sarah, you know, it's much more cost efficient and effective to drive meaningful lasting solutions to child poverty and hunger wage and wealth, inequity, and racial and social injustices that are baked into our, a lot of our systems and our society as a whole through investments like those that are under consideration now in the federal human infrastructure package that is moving in Congress. How do we know that as the Ohio Association of Foodbanks? Because, well, for example, a survey by the US Census Bureau that was recently released linked the first expanded child tax credit payment, which we're going to talk a little bit more about to a 24% reduction in food and sufficiency for households with children that one payment that gave a little boost to those families with kids gave them so much added security that brought food insufficiency for households, with children down to the lowest levels we've seen since the pandemic started.

Joree Novotny 00:08:11 And those levels have been concerning us and worrying us incredibly for the past year and a half. So that is just extremely encouraging. And similarly, when we've seen stimulus payments or other pandemic related relief hit pocket books and grocery budgets, we've seen corresponding declines in what has otherwise been historic levels of demand for help from our food bank network. We know it's really common sense that giving workers and families more spending power means more ability to afford adequate nutritious food, right? More access to secure, affordable housing, improved access to reliable childcare and other work supports, and ultimately providing that boost to family budgets means less financial stress, more stability, and more ability to look forward and get excited about what the future brings and what it can hold.

Sarah Kuhns 00:09:14 Exactly, Joree. We know some of what's being considered and prioritized because the \$3.5 trillion budget resolution passed by the Senate in mid August, outline the framework for how the money should be invested. Also just recently the House passed the same budget resolution and are able to move forward in the process. So here's what we're most excited about and asking our congressional delegation to support: these things include summer EBT, the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, other things like expanding housing vouchers and additional TEFAP funding. So summer EBT for those who do not know, and this is something I definitely had to learn over my first three months, reduces childhood hunger during school closures. When hundreds of thousands of Ohio children no longer have access to free and reduced price lunches, like the pandemic EBT program, which has provided families with children, additional spending power at the grocery store during school closures, summer EBT will provide households with a modest boost.

Sarah Kuhns 00:10:35 Once the summer comes, we hope that this would be made permanent so that it can continue to help families in need. The next thing is the Child Tax Credit, which has been getting a lot of buzz recently. Um, it is a tax credit that most filers with children normally claimed during tax season, but the American Rescue Plan Act passed a few months ago, expanded this refund for the year to make it fully refundable for filers and non filers that are income eligible. This credit has been increased from \$2,000 to \$3,000 or \$3,600 for children under six and is sent out as advanced payments of around \$300 per child each month, depending on the age of the child. We hope that the upcoming federal recovery legislation will make this expansion permanent because of course we know that this tax credit is life-changing for families in need.

Sarah Kuhns 00:11:44 The Earned Income Tax Credit helps low income earners, both those with children or not, reduce the amount of taxes they owe. They usually claim this credit during the tax season as well. For 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act also expanded their Earned Income Tax Credit to include more childless workers, earning more wages than before. We hope that the upcoming federal recovery legislation will also make this expansion permanent. Of course, we have other priorities that reduce poverty and stabilize workers and families, because we know that poverty is complex. We support expanding housing vouchers, which would make it easier for eligible families to receive rental assistance in a timely and efficient manner. Housing vouchers also allow families more choices for housing than what they would normally be able to afford so that they are able to live closer to work in school. The reality is that some families who apply for rental assistance wait months, or even years to receive the help that they need. We're also asking for additional TEFAP funding, which is the funding that helps direct agriculture products and surplus to adequately feed the folks we serve. It is an important program to help stabilize farmers, growers, producers, and the food chain, especially as we recover from the pandemic.

Joree Novotny 00:13:23 Yeah, absolutely. You know, we talk about this a lot in the food security world, that when we talk about food security, we don't just mean ability to afford enough food. We mean ability to get to where you're going to buy that food. The time to plan what you're going to cook and prepare at home. The time to actually prepare it, the chance to introduce new foods, especially to kids who need to see them 7, 8, 9, 10 times before they're comfortable with them, the ability to have a reliable source for that food. And also knowing that the supply chain is stable, that our growers and farmers can count on a stable climate that allows them to produce a sustainable, healthy, balanced array of foods for us all to benefit from. So even in terms of food security, we know even if you have the ability to go into your local grocery store, to drive there or take transportation there, shop for the foods you prefer that meet your cultural and dietary preferences and needs, take them home and prepare them and enjoy them, have access to all the equipment you need to do.

Joree Novotny 00:14:45 So you are still depending on a stable food supply chain, agricultural community, and you're depending on people in your neighborhood also being able to shop at their local grocery store, right. If I'm the only one going to my local store to buy food, they're not going to be able to supply me with the array of food that I've come to expect. Um, so similarly, when we're talking about these larger scale investments in families and in communities, we're really talking about it at a macro level, it's going to be life-changing for individuals, for parents who are working hard to afford the exorbitant costs of raising children in a healthy and supportive way where they have all their needs met. Uh, and, but it's also going to mean more stability and wellness for our communities and our country as a whole. So, you know, we couldn't be more excited about the moment.

Joree Novotny 00:15:47 And I, I think important to address that there are some, some objections that these investments cost too much. And, you know, we know that that's a really short-sighted view. I'll just give you one example. Um, there was a study a couple of years ago by the CDC that traced the costs of food insecurity and tied them to additional healthcare costs driven by that food insecurity. And it found that food insecurity alone increases healthcare costs by more than \$53 billion annually. So it costs more than \$1,800 a year more per food insecure adult, just to treat them in our healthcare system compared to their food secure peers. That's just, as it applies to those chronic diet related diseases that we're working hard in our network to help address like diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and other contributing factors. So imagine, just imagine the long-term savings and the ripple effects of investing in equity, across socioeconomic lines, those investments upfront and upstream and household and community security mean improved wellness and reduce costs later on downstream. We also know that the very wealthiest corporations and individuals in our country can afford to pay their fair share. In fact, they've benefited from the past year and a half of the pandemic and gained more wealth in most cases, while many of the people that we've served have been struggling. So we know that balancing budgets on the backs of people with low incomes has never worked, not in Ohio and not in America.

Sarah Kuhns 00:17:46 Yeah, Joree you're exactly right. Um, this moment is so exciting and it's great that it's just in reach. The timeline is actually moving quite quickly. So the Senate has already passed that budget resolution. And then once the House returned from August recess, they then went ahead and passed that too, and then their committees will sort of work internally to figure out what exactly they are going to include in that bill, along with how much funding those priorities will receive. And so that whole process will go through the whole month of September. And they're hoping to pass that in October, if you're wondering what you can do to help us express our priorities to our congressional delegation. We have a few things that you can do. We have a federal recovery campaign that we are promoting and sharing where you can call and email your congressional members about our priorities, as well as yours. Your congressional delegation needs to hear from you in order to know and understand what they should support. And so we really encourage you to call your delegation and make sure that your voice is being heard. Especially during this month.

Joree Novotny 00:19:25 We talked earlier at the top of the episode about some of the work that we do outside of providing direct emergency hunger relief to connect the people we serve with the other supports that they need. One of those for example, is leading the state's SNAP outreach plan to help make sure that low-income families, seniors, and workers can get connected to that critical federal food assistance program. So we know intimately that it takes people in organizations on the ground to make sure that these public policies and publicly funded programs are implemented in the best way possible to reach the people that need them, and that are counting on them. And another way that you can help make sure that these relief programs and recovery efforts make the best and

most meaningful impact for vulnerable people in our state is to spread the word about the expanded Child Tax Credit.

Joree Novotny 00:20:26 There are certainly some families that normally don't file taxes because they may not have to because their incomes are low enough or they may not necessarily be connected to, uh, the IRS. And they have a mixed status household. They have other barriers, they're unbanked. And those non filers are eligible for these expanded Child Tax Credits during 2021. And we hope well beyond. So you can also help by making sure that those communities, that you're connected to know how to get hooked up with their expanded Child Tax Credit payments. And you can check out the link on our podcast page to get them started with that process.

Sarah Kuhns 00:21:12 Additionally, um, September is Hunger Action Month, which is the month where we recommit to our priorities, where you commit to the mission. And we hope that you will join us, can volunteer at your local food bank or food pantry as well as donate to them. And also probably the most fun thing that you can do is wear orange on Hunger Action Day, which is September 17th. So please join us in wearing orange and promoting Hunger Action Month, um, during the month of September. Well thank you for tuning into our first episode of Just a Bite. We're so glad that you're here. We'll be in your podcast feed every other week. We hope that you'll continue to listen in and for you to follow me on my journey as I continue to learn more about the food and nutrition space and for you to continue to learn with me, I'm so grateful for Joree for co-hosting. And I can't wait to see what this podcast has in store. So thank you everyone. Um, please follow us and make sure to check out our podcast page, to see all of the things that we have referenced here today. So thank you. Talk to you soon.