



## Episode 3: Interview with Ann Do on the Impact of Service

### *Audio Transcript*

Sarah Kuhns 00:00:20 Hi, everyone. Welcome back to Just a Bite. Today's episode is a really interesting one. I interviewed Ann Do who is our AmeriCorps member who had her last week, about two weeks ago. Um, we really get into her reflections from her service and even some discussion about starting a career in nonprofits and advocacy, which you may find really interesting. So there was a few things I wanted to note before getting into the meat of the episode. We recorded this episode a few days after Labor Day weekend, because unfortunately we had to say goodbye to Ann a little bit earlier so that she could start, um, her new job at the Westerville Area Resource Ministry. Um, and so when she's talking about the end of the unemployment benefits, what she's really talking about is that end of the unemployment pandemic benefits, so that extra boost, that's what she's referring to and that ended Labor Day weekend. Um, and so it was sort of timely in the moment, but I wanted to clarify that I've linked an article about the end of the pandemic unemployment benefits, um, in the show notes, just so that you can do some additional reading around that. We also talked about a lot of acronyms that we sorta throw around here at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. And we didn't clarify one of them, which is the Summer Food Service Program, which is SFSP. Um, and that is essentially the summer food program that many kids go to during the summertime to get their meals each day, if they qualify for free or reduced price lunches during the school year. So just wanted to, to clarify those things and yeah, let's get onto the episode. Um, I really hope that you'll enjoy my discussion with Ann Do.

Sarah 00:02:54 We're introducing Ann Do who was our AmeriCorps member at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. Um, she's been working on a few things for us, including child nutrition. And so we can't wait to have a discussion with her on this podcast. So, Ann, please introduce yourself.

Ann Do 00:03:15 Hi, and, um, thank you Sarah, for allowing me to be on this podcast. So I have been at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks for about 11 months now. I started in October of 2020, um, first job right out of college. I graduated from the University of Cincinnati, August, 2020, and I've been here since then. I've been loving it.

Sarah 00:03:40 Both Ann and I are starting out our careers. So that's kind of exciting. Why don't you tell the listeners what the ShareCorps initiative is, what the program is and what you've been doing for us?

Ann 00:03:57 Okay. ShareCorps is, um, a part of the AmeriCorps VISTA program and it's run by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, and they have sites all over Ohio with, um, different non-profits and they stationed VISTAs all over. And, um, we do a number of initiatives, mostly with hunger and health. And my position at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks has been part of the COVID 19 pilot. And mostly I've been working on documenting COVID and its effects on the community. And just how COVID has affected food insecurity and also working on the summer foods, meals program, and

working with different sites all over Ohio to provide meals for kids over the summer when they're out of school.

Sarah 00:04:46 So COVID has definitely shaped, you know, what you've done with us at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. I did want you to know that Ann is working internally at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, but we have members placed all across our network and food pantries, soup kitchens at our foodbanks too. And they work on a variety of projects and, and is, you know, working on COVID and especially the summer meals sites, obviously you've seen a change with COVID and everything. What are those changes? Do you know, have you kind of picked up on how things have changed, especially at the summer meals sites?

Ann 00:05:33 Uh, when I first started in October, that was like when COVID was almost at its peak, but I was traveling to different foodbanks and food pantries across Ohio and talking to the staff there and volunteers, well, mostly there weren't that many volunteers because a lot of food sites told them not to volunteer currently because a lot of volunteers are usually older and, um, because of social distancing, and like COVID-19 precautions, they weren't really allowed to like volunteer there. So they had the National Guard stand in their place to distribute food, but that was a big difference was, you know, not being able to have volunteers at the sites and not being able to just interact with the community. Um, we also saw a higher number of people asking for food assistance. No, COVID hit people hard. Like there, a lot of people lost their jobs. You know, I feel like everyone kind of went through a hard time during COVID and it made people, you know, kind of look towards, you know, government assistance more and just trying to look for resources out there in the community to help provide for their families. Especially when you see kids who they have to do online schooling, they weren't able to get, uh, school lunches usually, or sometimes during their years. So they were, have to rely on school lunches that the school districts would provide like offsite or even like with the foodbanks.

Sarah 00:07:07 Yeah. We definitely saw a shift in the summer meals site, particularly like kids not being there. They typically were grabbing go lunches from what I understand. Right.

Ann 00:07:20 Mostly they were just, um, non congregated at most sites, they weren't really used to that they had remodeled their whole, you know, distributions and just try to figure out a way to still interact with the community, but still make it so that, you know, precautions are taken and, you know, COVID-19 is still, you know, a big priority and just making sure kids even like, know that food is available to them.

Sarah 00:07:47 Right. Definitely. It's kind of hard to figure that out when it's not so present within the community or you're not going or leaving your house, how was it traveling across the state, especially like during the height of COVID almost like right when you started it was, it started to get really bad. So were you nervous to be traveling? Um, I know that they put precautions in place, but of course you never know.

Ann 00:08:16 This definitely was my first time traveling for a job. And, um, I precautions have definitely taken, I would always wear a mask and, you know, social distancing was, um, a major priority. I would say it was a little bit harder to talk to clients at the foodbanks and food pantries, just because, you know, we were, they you'd mostly use, uh, uh, uh, drive in a distribution model where they would have their cars and, you know, just, they would pick up the food like through a line instead, sometimes they usually have like a choice pantry or choice distribution where clients be able to, you know, just walk in and like grocery shop from the pantry and try to get and get their stuff. But, um, this time it was harder to talk to clients because you wanna still be six feet away and talking

through them through a car is not as easy to like connect with people. And sometimes people wouldn't really want to talk, which is totally understandable. Especially in the winter months when it was like snowing and like 30 degrees, no one wants to put down their car window. And I wouldn't either if I was them, but I think just trying to gather stories was a little bit difficult just because we want to be safe and we don't want people to feel pressured to tell the story if they don't want to.

Sarah 00:09:43 Right. That can definitely be a struggle because I think we pride ourselves on being, you know, taking into consideration the privacy of our clients. And so that can be really difficult to gather stories when stories are so important to make sure that folks continue to get the funding and food that they need. So, yeah, I completely understand that. I went to a food distribution up in Cleveland with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. And that was the last week that the National Guard was there. And this was my first ever food distribution. I'd worked in soup kitchens through high school and things like that, but this is my first experience and food distributions really kind of show you the variety of folks that, you know, seek help and seek food assistance. Can you talk a little bit more about, you know, has your viewpoint changed or has this experience sort of solidified your, your beliefs about, uh, food insecurity and poverty?

Ann 00:10:55 This is my first time really working in food insecurity. And what I've noticed is that it is so ingrained into society and, you know, during COVID, it definitely exasperated that where, you know, people were losing their jobs and there was, um, a discussion about minimum wage and how much is a living wage. And you really see that with food insecurity because the core of it is poverty. Because when we're talking about poverty, we're talking about people who, you know, they don't make enough to feed themselves or feed their children, or it's hard to find jobs. Um, so I think food insecurity has really just opened my eyes to seeing that there is a lot wrong. And, you know, I feel like the point of food and at least our jobs is not only to just alleviate hunger, but to completely eliminate it, which is why I think advocacy is just so important now, you know, especially like, I feel like in a perfect world, you know, maybe our jobs wouldn't exist or foodbanks wouldn't even exist because everyone has enough to eat. And we have a sign right here in our office that says food is a right, which is completely true. And you know, you see these kids and I mean, children are like the most vulnerable group in America, especially, you know, Black and brown kids who are low income, you know, they can't always advocate for themselves to, you know, get what they need. And especially with their parents and legal guardians, it's hard. Like it's hard to, you know, provide for your family, especially if your job isn't paying up or you're worried about housing, you have all these different bills and you're worried about COVID because you want to, you know, show up to work. But also you're scared of getting COVID and getting sick. So it's just, I feel like this has just been a tough year for everyone, but my experience has shown me how bad of a problem food insecurity is right now and how much advocacy and how much we need to like work on it.

Sarah 00:13:11 Yeah, definitely. I think, um, this pandemic has exacerbated a lot of issues that we've already had, and I think you're right, although I'm biased that advocacy is really needed to make sure that folks, you know, get the food that they need, especially because we know foodbanks really aren't serving the most people or, um, giving the most meals to folks, but really it's government policy that's doing that. And without that government policy, um, it would be really difficult for foodbanks to meet that demand. So, yeah, I definitely agree. And, you know, to your point about children, I think that, you know, people talk about welfare queens, you know, folks that are just within the system just to cheat.

Ann 00:14:13 It's always just like such a small percentage of that, barely anything. And, you know, there, there is this huge stigma around food assistance and, you know, SNAP and government

assistance where, you know, there is, there is a big stigma around it. And I feel like that's has led people to not get help or feel like they can't get help or feel like they will get judgment from other people when we have the resources to help people. And it's sad to see the media or other people's perception of low-income people. And it's just, it's hard to see that, you know, in one of the richest countries in the world that we are like this.

Sarah 00:15:04 Yeah. I think that at least the pandemic has sort of brought those things to light to the general public. And I think too, there may be some sort of political appetite to fix these problems to a certain extent, of course. And so at least I'm hopeful that maybe we could, you know, get a bigger dent in this, this huge problem this year. Um, especially like, you know, within the next couple months with, you know, federal recovery legislation and the child nutrition reauthorization process and things like that, that there's an appetite to kind of do more than what the status quo is, you know?

Ann 00:15:54 No for sure. And I remember talking to Joree early in my service and Joree already has like a super hard job and you do too. But I asked her if she ever just would lose hope. It can be draining I feel like to be in her position or any position that contains advocacy because what we see right now, you know, they cut unemployment bonus benefits and you see like the reduction of, um, SNAP and, you know, just as much as other policies that Ohio has passed and, you know, it's cutting funds for government assistance. I feel like it's easy to like lose heart sometimes. And I was just talking to her about how do you keep hope? Like, how do you keep going? And she pretty much was just like, someone has to do it, which is completely true. Like if everyone just gave up, then you know what would happen.

Sarah 00:16:53 Right. Definitely. And I think, you know, all of us in this office, you have to have some sort of passion for this work or passion for the people that you're serving because if you don't like, it's going to be really hard to get out of bed every morning, right? Going back to your sort of personal experience, why did you decide to apply to be an AmeriCorps member and specifically, you know, working in food and nutrition?

Ann 00:17:23 So when I graduated from UC in August, 2020, I was trying to find a job and I feel like no one really talks about this, but post grad life is hard, you know, finding a job already, um, post-graduate is difficult, but trying to find a job during COVID and being a post-grad? 10 times worse. So, you know, it was, it was very hard in the beginning to try to look for opportunities around me. And I was a political science and communication major in college. So I knew I always wanted to do something around advocacy and around just helping people or just making a difference in my community. I went into college thinking that I was going to go into law and then I didn't really want to do that. So I got really into nonprofit work and I was like, I want to be in the nonprofit world. I want to work in nonprofits. I feel like this is what I want to do. And I had a few friends in college who did AmeriCorps and they really liked their experience. They told me that they really liked the fact that they felt like they made a difference in their communities. So I saw this job on LinkedIn applied to it, applied to AmeriCorps and been here ever since. And I truly would say it's probably one of the most impactful experiences so far in my life. I've learned so much, I've met so many different people. I found my new job from this experience. So I would say AmeriCorps has really led me to a different network of people and led me to learn a bunch of skills. I probably wouldn't have not learned in college. Like, I feel like there's some things that you can't really learn in class, but actually doing it and being out in the field is like an amazing experience to have.

Sarah 00:19:24 Yeah, definitely. I completely understand. Um, yeah, I think AmeriCorps is a really great starting point, especially, and I also looked into AmeriCorps when I was applying for jobs and

figuring out what I wanted to do. Um, post-grad and as an AmeriCorps member, you sort of work with capacity building instead of direct, directly serving clients, which is also really beneficial for the organization that you're working for. And I can definitely see that here, you know, you're, you're making an impact, um, and our office, which is really cool and your new job is going to be sort of a continuation of what you've been doing here. Um, so tell us a little bit more about your new job.

Ann 00:20:24 So, should I go into the whole story about...

Sarah 00:20:26 Yes. It's a cool story. You should.

Ann 00:20:29 So the reason I have my new job is because another coworker of mine, Carrie, she is the AmeriCorps coordinator for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. I went with her on a site visit to the Westerville Area Resource Ministry, and we were there to talk to another VISTA about her experience and, you know, ask her a few questions. And when I was there, her supervisor, who is, his name is Chad, he's the facility manager of WARM. He was like, let me give you guys a tour. And he, you know, gave us a tour of the site. And, you know, he told us that he was looking for a child nutrition coordinator and I was like, I am looking for a job. So he was like, I will email you everything. Let's talk. So I got to talk with him, applied ended up getting it, but you know, if, if I wasn't with Carrie and if I wasn't in this job, I would have never known about this position. And you know, it that's, I feel like that's the amazing thing about AmeriCorps is you meet so many different people. And, you know, I feel like networking is one of the most important things you can do at a job just to meet new people and meet new connections because they know people and they know different opportunities, but being able to continue my work in food insecurity is amazing. I never really thought that I was going to go into food security at all when I was applying for jobs. When I was applying for different AmeriCorps jobs, I applied to some in housing. I applied to some, um, in, uh, environmentalism, but I got this job in food insecurity and I didn't really know much about it at all. Like I never really knew about like the different programs, all the different acronyms, like you have the USDA, you got the SFSP there's so many different, it's like an alphabet soup of like different letters. And, you know, you have to like, sit there, study them, learn them all. But it's, I really love learning about food security because I feel like it is the basis of so many things. You know, it's so hard to do anything when you're hungry, you know, like when you go to school and you know, if you're going to school hungry, it's hard to learn and it's hard to take tests, it's hard to do homework. If you're going to work hungry, it's hard to do your job. If you're hungry, that affects your health. You know, I feel like it's the basis of so many things and there isn't that much attention on it, I feel like, but it's such a big core of how we live and how the community survives that we need to take more of a consideration about our health and how we view hunger and how we are able to obtain like nutritious and healthy foods that we want to eat.

Sarah 00:23:38 Yeah, definitely. Um, I think it's very easy to, um, develop a passion for this sort of work, as you're getting to know, um, all the statistics and all the acronyms, everyone jokes about how there's so many acronyms in this sort of work.

Ann 00:24:00 Yeah. There's, there's way too many. I feel like there's some, now that I am like, what does that mean?

Sarah 00:24:06 Yeah, I know. I know. It's, it's still hard for me. I have some more time to figure that out, but I think some people, even years in still have trouble, but, um, you're so right about that point that you can't really do anything when you're hungry, it's really difficult to do, and it's such a foundational part of our lives. And of course, you know, it's a, it's a need that we, we all have. And yeah, I wish there was more appetite for, you know, fixing this huge issue. So you also have really

developed a passion about AmeriCorps as well. And so what will you take with you from that you've learned from this experience onto your next job and whatever you may do in the future?

Ann 00:25:04 I feel like one of the most important things I learned in my work, especially during COVID is to be empathetic towards people, especially during my AmeriCorps year. Like just today, I was calling people to see if they sent in their mail for SFSP. And, you know, I was talking to people who said that it was hard to turn stuff in because there was people in quarantine, people getting sick or a family member dying. And I feel like during this time, you have to learn to be empathetic towards everyone, especially, you know, during my service, you have to learn to treat people with dignity. That was the number one thing I learned, the way that we see lower income people or people who are somewhat different from us. I think some people have a hard time seeing it as like real people who just need some help. Um, so treating people with dignity and treating people with empathy is one of the most important things I learned from my service and taking it into my next job is just to, you know, just treating people with empathy, treating people with dignity and just knowing that everyone is just trying to survive in their own way.

Sarah 00:26:32 Yeah, exactly. And we all want the same things. We all want our kids to go to bed with a full stomach. With a roof over our head. We want to be able to pay our bills, you know, without needing assistance. But sometimes, you know, people do need that. And I think, especially with the pandemic, we have sort of seen that that could happen to people that never thought that that would ever happen to them.

Ann 00:27:09 No, for sure. I mean, a lot of people just live paycheck to paycheck and, you know, missing two paychecks can have a huge impact on your life. Where having just one medical emergency can change the way that you work and the way that your finances are. And I feel like a lot of people don't realize that like there's a lot closer to poverty than they think closer to that than like being a billionaire, but hopefully taking away from COVID and hopefully seeing the future, that there is more of the emphasis on championing the working people and putting more emphasis on eliminating poverty and how we address poverty in America.

Sarah 00:27:54 You're so right. And, and, um, we really hope that we could sort of lead that charge along with all of our other health and human service advocates and especially with you and your new role, which is in network, which is so exciting. So we'll still be together. Although working at different organizations we'll be working towards the same cause. So that's just so exciting. So thank you so much for coming on the podcast. I can't wait for this to air and for people to hear, you know, what you you've had to say today. So thank you.

Ann 00:28:31 Thank you for having me.

Sarah 00:28:37 So I hope you enjoy my episode with Ann, uh, you know, we talk a lot about the AmeriCorps program and her experiences with it. So just want to throw out there, if you want to apply for AmeriCorps, we have positions now open around the state for the 2022 cohort of the ShareCorps members. So that link will be in the show notes, and please, we encourage you to apply obviously, and can't say enough good things about it. So we wanted to definitely throw that in there, just in case anyone is now really interested in being an AmeriCorps member. Um, and then, you know, just like last time I am going to, um, sort of leave you with a quote as well as sort of the context for the quote. So it is the CNN BBC article that I have, it'll be linked in the show notes. Um, and it's around the Child Tax Credit. So it says almost 450 economists signed on to a letter in favor of extending the enhanced Child Tax Credit. This is from actually an assistant professor at Stanford Law, um, who specializes in tax policy and helped really organize this letter, his name's Jacob Golden. And he says, quote, it's

very rare to find an issue where so many economists agree on everything, but there is just very, very strong evidence that providing extra financial assistance to kids growing up in low income households, yields big benefits in their lives. We have some Ohio economists that have signed on to this letter. And so we can't be more thrilled that there is so much backing behind the enhanced Child Tax Credit. And this was a push to include this, um, enhancement into the reconciliation bill that is making its way through Congress. And so you can help contribute to that by calling and emailing your senators right now, as I'm recording the bill is still currently in the House. However, it is starting to make its way to a final vote and therefore passing the bill off to the Senate. And so please, please, please go ahead and encourage your senators to support the provisions in the bill that will really help Ohio families. And that is, you know, one of those is the Child Tax Credit. So that's all I got for you today. I really hope you enjoyed this episode. And if you did, please be sure to subscribe. Um, so you can see our episodes every other week and your feed, you know, feel free to share this episode on social media. It would help us a lot. So thanks again. See you soon.