

-serving the hungry



Bringing Teens to the Table:

A Focus on Food Insecurity in America

Across America, more than 13 million children are food insecure, including 13,360 here in west central Indiana.

This means that many of our most vulnerable citizens do not have regular access to the healthy, nutritious food that they need to learn and thrive. The impact of hunger on children is well-documented. There is significant literature on this topic; however, a majority of it focuses on younger children. Less is known about the teens facing hunger.

A new study released, "Bringing Teens to the Table: A Focus on Food Insecurity in America," exposes the plight of teenagers facing hunger. The study was conducted by Feeding America, a national network of 200 food banks – of which Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank is a member, and the Urban Institute. It reveals the challenges faced and

coping strategies employed by some teens struggling with hunger.

Among the key findings is the fact that teen food insecurity is widespread. Teenagers often have to help their families figure out how everyone in the household has enough to eat. A teen who participated in one focus group put it this way, "If you don't have enough money to get the healthy stuff [that] you need, you're going to go to the other side, to the junk food, and that affects your health."

The study also addresses how teens facing hunger are forced to take on adult responsibilities. Many are tasked with determining how to make food last longer for the whole family and often sacrifice their own meals in order to feed younger siblings. As another teen states, "They're higher in the order [of who should get to eat], so the older kids make sure they give to the younger kids first."

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web

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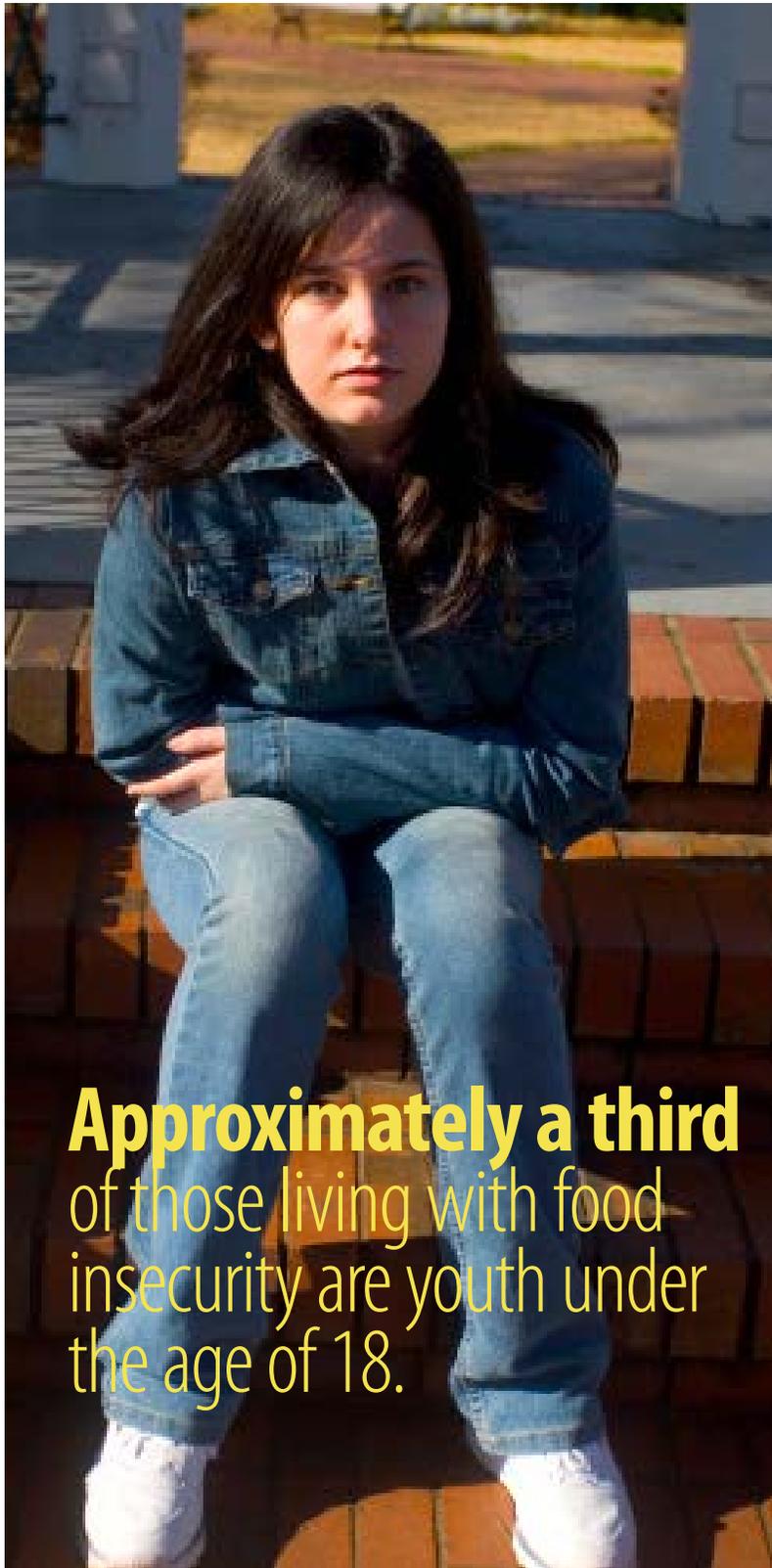
social

 @ CatholicCharitiesTerreHaute

mission

To feed hungry individuals in Clay, Greene, Knox, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo counties through a network of emergency food distribution member agencies and engage our community in the fight to end hunger.

A Word from the Agency Director



Approximately a third of those living with food insecurity are youth under the age of 18.

What can be done to improve the plight of food-insecure teenagers?

“When I was a teenager I had a part-time job working at the local grocery store. You really get to see what people have to go through when times are tough and they are trying to put food on the table; they take more time making their food choices,” says Sam, a successful small business owner now living in southern California. “I remember one situation like it was yesterday. Someone in my high school class actually got caught shoplifting some food, and the store owner wanted to press charges until he heard this kid’s story. The family was completely out of food without any other resources or place to turn, and this kid was hungry. It shouldn’t be a crime to be hungry.”

Throughout this country, and more locally here in west central Indiana, approximately a third of those living with food insecurity are youth under the age of 18. Clinical research will tell you that during a child’s most formative and developmental ages that proper nutrition is critical to how a child learns and maintains an active lifestyle.

Meaghan, a young and vibrant 13-year-old participates in several activities at Ryves Youth Center. She has been coming to Ryves for almost three years since the time her family moved into the neighborhood. “I started coming here because some of the kids in my school talked about how much fun it was to be here, but now I come here because I get to eat. We don’t always have food to eat at home, and the food we get at school is only for lunch. At night I get hungry, and they have food here for me. I don’t like it when my stomach hurts because I’m hungry.”

Besides having access to an evening meal, there are more than 5,000 youth in our local community that receive a weekend backpack to help them meet their nutrition requirement when schools and feeding sites are not open. Schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels have



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each tried to help identify children at risk for food insecurity, but it is still met with some resistance. For example, a child must get a parent to sign a permission slip in order for the child to receive a backpack or participate in the free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs. While this may seem difficult to understand, a sense of shame often overcomes those having to ask for assistance.

Psychologically, most of us want to be independent and self-sufficient, and asking for help takes away from our own self-image of what it means to be successful. This is especially the case when we have always been able to meet those needs through our own efforts and working situation.

Youth-focused strategies to help reduce hunger as well as prevent high-risk behavior have to include making nutrition assistance programs more available to teens, offering after school opportunities, youth job options and resources for teens to find their own path toward empowerment. Community solutions are the basis for including teens within the framework of our neighborhoods and are a good start to helping alleviate the root causes of hunger. We believe our educators and community youth service providers should be better trained to recognize the trauma experienced by teens and to help provide or refer them to the counseling they need.

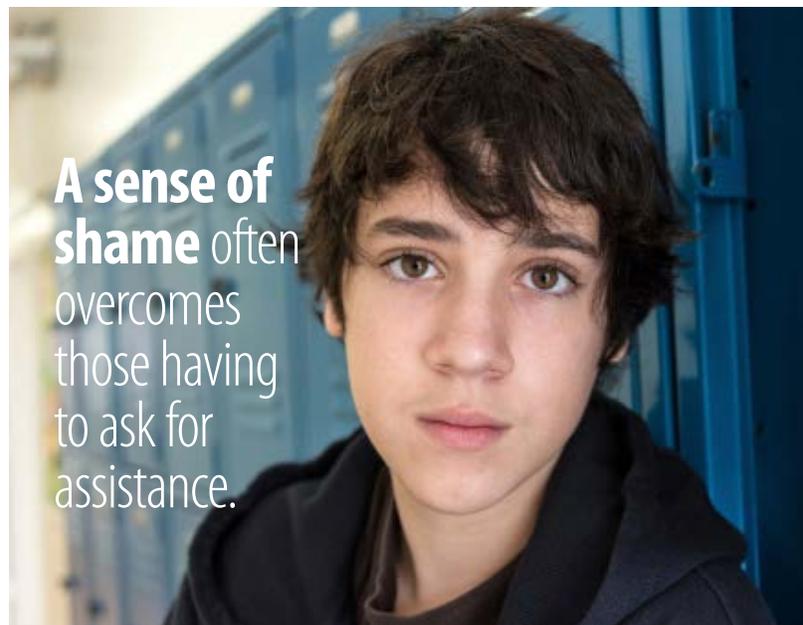
Over the long term, the only way to end teenage food insecurity is to address its root cause—family poverty—by increasing the value we all place on education, improving access to jobs, providing better access to quality opportunities within our neighborhoods and strengthening the safety net when parents cannot earn enough to cover basic needs.

If we, as a community, want teens to grow into healthy, productive adults, we must expand our efforts to reach them. I urge you to join us in the fight to end teen hunger. You can help by raising awareness about the issue of hunger in our community. **Together we can create a hunger-free America for the next generation.**

Sincerely,



John C. Etling
Agency Director



I started coming here because some of the kids in my school talked about how much fun it was to be here, **but now I come here because I get to eat.**

Each year, the Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank serves approximately **13,000 youth who face hunger.**



Bringing Teens to the Table:

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Finally, the study found that teens feel a deep sense of stigma around the subject of hunger. They actively hide the fact that they don't have enough to eat. Many said they avoided accepting food assistance delivered in public places, as some were bullied for doing so. When her family received food aid, a teen told us, "I got made fun of. It was terrible."

These findings are heartbreaking. No teen should have to experience such shame or hardship. Each year, the Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank serves approximately 13,000 youth who face hunger. In addition to providing food through traditional food pantries and soup kitchens, Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank provides BackPacks full of kid-friendly, nutritious food to approximately 1,000 youth every Friday to provide the nutrition needed for to get through the weekend. But, we recognize that there is more work to do.

To read the full report, please visit www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/teen-hunger-research. To get involved, please check out our website www.ccthin.org.

Hunger at Home

Larry, JB and Steve are regular teenage visitors to Ryves Youth Center. They come for the gym, the scout program and to hang out with their friends over a meal. It's great that they have a place to come. More importantly, they are coming to a place where they are welcomed, supported and sometimes challenged to "reach higher."

Programmers of activities often say, "Offer food and people will come." Food service providers often say, "Give me a program, and I'll provide the food." For these young men, each one is strongly drawn to the combination of three things at Ryves: food, fellowship and fun.

Thankfully, food, fellowship and fun are in abundance at Ryves, in an area where those things are not always found. Teens are hungry for food, of course, but they're also hungry for support and affirmation. Thank God for the many helping hands that work to fill empty stomachs and hearts."

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Need Help Finding Food?

If you need help finding food or know someone who does, call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY (1-866-348-6479). The Hunger Hotline is available Monday – Friday from 9am – 6pm. All calls are free and confidential. Help someone you know receive the nutrition they need to remain healthy and productive.