witnesses
to Hunger CT
1 in 7 Connecticut Residents Struggle with Hunger.

Connecticut. One of the wealthiest states in the nation and one with the highest degrees of income inequality. There are many among us who struggle, everyday, to meet their basic needs, including having enough to eat for their families and themselves.

This is the story of our friends, neighbors, and families who live in our large cities, suburbs, and the most rural areas in our state. It is a story of daily battles that include severe and chronic medical conditions, the high cost of childcare, and losing homes. It is the story of constant trade-offs like paying bills vs buying nutritious food or choosing to pay rent vs medication.

In late 2015, nine organization/agencies throughout the state joined forces to organize Witnesses to Hunger CT, a photovoice project to support the sharing of stories through the photographs of residents to bring visibility to the everyday struggles many encounter trying to make ends meet. In total 15 witnesses were recruited and generously shared their lives, the results of which are highlighted in the following pages.

The photos and corresponding quotes are divided into the overarching themes that resonated from the Witnesses; the need for increased supports for food and nutrition, health and wellness, for adequate and respectful shelter, affordable and accessible transportation and a path to advocacy. It is our hope that these powerful images and words will reinforce the need for substantial policy change to ensure health, success, and hope for our all of our neighbors.

Witnesses to Hunger is a project of the Center for Hunger-Free Communities at the Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health. Witnesses is working to build a movement where people with first-hand experience of hunger and poverty can share their expertise and find strategies to address those struggles, through policy-level change.

Connecticut communities represented in this project include: Amston, Bridgeport, Hartford, Hebron, Manchester, New Haven, New London, Westport, & Woodbridge.
FOOD & NUTRITION:

14.3% of Connecticut families simply do not have adequate resources - from wages, Social Security and other retirement benefits, income supports, SNAP and WIC - to purchase enough food. -Food Research and Action Center.

“Sometimes after a hot lunch at the soup kitchen, I pick up a bag of groceries from the food pantry. I wish they had more fresh produce or chicken or beef, but I am always grateful for the foods that are available.”

— randy b
“This captures what my struggle is at the end of the month. He wishes he had meat. There’s no smile, but he’s grateful - he knows there are others who have it worse.”

— Kimberly H

“During the last two weeks of the month, and especially during school vacations and holidays, my family won’t be hungry.”

— Karen J
ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION:

According to United States Department of Agriculture, “vehicle access is perhaps the most important determinant of whether or not a family can access affordable and nutritious food.”

“I live just off Farmington Ave and Woodland Street. I use the bus system to shop with my travel basket. I cannot stand for very long and need to sit to wait. However, in 2014 the bus seating was removed and the new seating and shelters have not been installed yet. Please bring back the street bus seating!”

— Cynthia H
“We begin our trek at 6a.m. every morning (5:30a.m. if it’s snowing) in order to reach the soup kitchen by 7a.m. The roads in Connecticut are slippery during the winter and many days we don’t get there in time to get breakfast. We have to walk across town because we can’t afford the handicap bus fare of $60 per month.”

— Francis S with service dog Lady

“I roll around and make my own meals. As for shopping, I must ride a motor scooter in the store. I could never get to the grocery store by myself. I have to be picked up and load my wheelchair.”

— Donna B
HEALTH & WELLNESS:

68% of food pantry and soup kitchen clients in Connecticut at one point had to choose between food or medical care. - Feeding America

“I have struggled for over 20 years with several immune deficiency diseases and my diet has to work around my prescription pills and symptoms of my conditions. I have been working for years to get disability and still waiting. My budget is so tight that I have to visit many pantries just to get my basic needs.”

— Cynthia H
“In 2009, I became disabled with lymphedema and food insecure. I have to wear compression garments so that my lymph system functions properly to remove harmful toxins. SNAP benefits stretched my budget while I waited for years for new knees and healing to return to work.”

— Jody W

“On my table you will see that I eat a lot of PB and Jelly...which is not really good for my kidney illness, but I’d rather eat PB and Jelly at the end of the month than be hungry!”

— Donna B
ADEQUATE SHELTER:

Across CT, 50% of renters and 35% of owners spend more than 30% of their income on housing...[and] may have little left over for necessities such as transportation, food, health care, etc.

-Partnership for Strong Communities

“After exhausting my Retirement Annuity to live and being 6-months behind on my mortgage, I was served papers for possible foreclosure. This has been extremely stressful for me, taking a toll on my health along with several head concussions I’ve endured this year and being unable to work! This was my own home of 20 years which I paid for by myself and where I raised my son!”

— Victoria D
“Heat or Christmas? I applied for Energy Assistance and was denied because my only heating source is pellets. This picture shows the last bag of pellets in the stove - still unsure how I will heat my home for my daughter and myself this winter. Even though I applied for assistance in September, I did not hear I was denied until three days before Christmas.”

— heather k

“We have landlords who don’t care. We live in lower Woodbridge, known as ‘The Flats.’ I shouldn’t feel bad to show this because I didn’t ask for this. It’s not my fault my landlord neglects this property.”

— debbie k
“I want to be the change I want to see.”

— Kimberly H

Witnesses to Hunger CT raises awareness of the damaging effects hunger can have on an individual, a family, and the community at large. Hunger also costs society in future medical costs due to the consequences of poor nutrition and lost economic productivity when residents are unable to work or perform at their potential.

WE CAN END HUNGER; BUT IT WILL TAKE ALL OF US WORKING TOGETHER.

Many of the Witnesses are involved in other advocacy efforts to better their lives and the lives of those who surround them; whether that be by participating in a food policy council, growing food for neighbors, or speaking out at the State Capitol. They cannot do this alone. We all have a role to play in ensuring no one in Connecticut has to worry about where their next meal will come from.

WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS THE INJUSTICE OF HUNGER IN CONNECTICUT?
PARTNERS

Advocacy Unlimited

CT Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN)

Center for Hunger-Free Communities at the Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health

Connecticut State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Connecticut Food Bank

End Hunger Connecticut!

Foodshare

Immanuel Congregational Church, UCC

Hispanic Health Council

New Haven Food Policy Council

Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health

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