

FOOD ASSISTANCE AS A LIFELINE

SNAP Helps Family Fill in the Gaps During Difficult Times

BREAD FOR THE WORLD'S 2018

OFFERING OF LETTERS:

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Stephanie Rice, the mother of four boys ages 3 to 10 in Ohio, knows a thing or two about juggling multiple jobs.

Aside from being a full-time mom, she also home-schools her sons, and this fall returned to college for the first time since having her children. It's a feat of time management, to be sure. But Stephanie and her husband have always had to employ sharp planning skills as they raised their family on modest wages.

Early in their marriage, James worked at Babies R Us and made \$7.25 an hour; Stephanie earned \$9 an hour as a cashier at Wal-Mart. The Rice's were raising James' daughter from a previous marriage and had a baby on the way. There just wasn't enough money to put food on the table. They applied for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to fill in the gaps.

"If that had not been there, I wouldn't have been able to pay the bills," Stephanie said. "It was a situation where every penny had to be accounted for. Even the slightest interruption in food stamps would have completely upset the balance."

SNAP is just one of many anti-poverty programs funded by the federal government. Other programs include the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, Children (WIC) and school meals.

These food assistance and child nutrition programs are a lifeline to millions of Americans every year. Without them, more families would find themselves living in poverty. How the federal government decides to spend taxpayer money has real-life consequences.

SNAP reached 43 million low-income Americans and moved an estimated 2.1 million adults and 1.5 million children out of poverty in 2016. About two-thirds of SNAP recipients are children, elderly, or disabled.

In 2016, the average SNAP recipient in Ohio received approximately \$124 a month, or \$1.38 per meal. The Rice family never collected that much because James had full-time jobs after Stephanie left the workforce to take care of the children.

It's not uncommon for families receiving food assistance to have one or more adults earning a paycheck. "The assumption

is that these benefits are for people not working, who are 'lazy,'" said Tiffany Scruggs, director of benefits outreach at the Cleveland Food Bank. "That's not true. Most benefits go to the working poor."

Today, James earns \$35,000 a year as the manager of a storage facility, only slightly above the federal poverty level of \$32,960 for a family of six. On a recent day at the family's tidy bungalow in Euclid, Stephanie noted the current cash on hand: \$40 in the family savings account and \$200 in checking.

"The only reason we've been able to get to this point is that we had food assistance."

—Stephanie Rice

Still, it's a far cry from the hardest times. The winters of 2008 and 2009 when the gas

company shut off the heat because they couldn't pay the bill. The years the couple took out title loans on their cars when James' paycheck didn't last the month. The \$1,000 blow when thieves stole their Chrysler Town & Country, found up on blocks, stripped of its battery, tires and rims and with the ignition bashed in.

"It took almost a solid year to recover from that," Stephanie said, of the theft of the van.

These days the family's need for food assistance has tapered off. However, Stephanie is worried about potential cuts to food stamps for others who could go hungry. She's majoring in political and social science at Cleveland State University, "to learn how the government works and how to effectively change things."

Stephanie has a goal of one day running a nonprofit for homeless people, giving back to those in need—just as she received help when she needed it the most.

In the meantime, on her to-do list these days is calling her members of Congress. Her senators and representative are "on speed dial," so she can tell them what it's like to have a hungry family and receive temporary help to put food on the table.

Without the safety net of SNAP, she said, "We would have been sunk. The only reason we've been able to get to this point is that we had food assistance."

To access the full toolkit, visit bread.org/ol



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.