

COVID-19: Facing Food Insecurity in South Jersey

COVID-19 has created an even greater threat to the hunger crisis faced by food-insecure seniors. One of these seniors lives in Camden County, South Jersey. This is her story – one familiar to thousands of senior citizens in South Jersey today, and millions throughout the United States, struggling to manage food security during insecure times.

SHE LIVES IN SOUTH JERSEY. Rosario is 77. A widow for more than 12 years, Rosario and her husband had no children. Her nearest relatives live in New York – a sister and her family. Once a month, Rosario visits a food pantry in her town in South Jersey – Cherry Hill. She receives fresh produce, canned goods, chicken, tuna fish, fresh breads and muffins, crackers, cookies, soups, beans, rice, pasta, cereals – and more. Rosario counts the days each month as her visit to her local pantry comes closer. She views her pantry days as her grocery days – the days her kitchen gets filled with food. “I could not do without going to the food pantry,” Rosario shares. “I depend on the food I get – it’s important for my life. The food pantry is how I have enough food to make it from one month to the next – it is how I survive and stay as healthy as I can be at this time of my life.”



ROSARIO'S STORY IS FAMILIAR.

A senior citizen, living with low income, in need of support. A senior citizen in need of food. A person ... in need of help. Rosario is one of thousands of food-insecure senior citizens living in Camden County, New Jersey. She struggles to pay her bills, and keep herself nourished – a challenge she has faced with grace and resilience over the past decade. Still, this challenge was made more complicated due to the impact of COVID-19.

As the global pandemic took root in daily life in South Jersey, many low-income senior citizens, like Rosario, who lack easy access to healthy food and adequate nutrition on a daily basis, found themselves unable to stock up on food or supplies. Their reliance on food pantry resources became even more vital. Thankfully, for Rosario, her food supply during COVID-19 has been consistent and plentiful, thanks to her monthly food pantry visits.

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity refers to the USDA's measure of lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods. For many seniors living alone, or with family members, food insecurity in South Jersey is very real.

THE FOOD BANK OF SOUTH JERSEY, A FEEDING AMERICA FOOD BANK, IS COMMITTED TO HELPING ITS SENIOR POPULATION.

In the first 90 days of its response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Bank of South Jersey increased its capacity to serve a surging food-insecure population by distributing more than five million pounds of food, more than 22,000 emergency food boxes and feeding approximately 90,000 people during a three-month operational expansion. With a focus on low-to-no contact food distributions, including emergency food box drive-up food distributions at approximately 60 regional locations, the Food Bank focused on keeping the flow of food going to South Jersey seniors, like Rosario, in adherence of social distancing mandates.

“Everyone at the pantry is so nice,” Rosario shares. “I have my neighbor drive me to the pantry, we pull up and they put so much food in the car for me – there is so much food, I almost cry. Every month I think, thank God I have the food pantry to help me. Thank God I have the food pantry in my life.”

DO YOU KNOW A SENIOR CITIZEN IN SOUTH JERSEY WHO MAY BE FOOD INSECURE?

There are seniors suffering from hunger right now throughout South Jersey. For more information, to refer a senior citizen for hunger-relief resources or to FIND FOOD in your region, visit www.foodbanksj.org.