



Missoula Food Bank's Kids' Hunger Survey 2015

Purpose

In 2014, Missoula Food Bank served 17,583 different individuals in our store alone. This is 1 in 6 Missoulians or 16% of Missoula County. Hunger is a severe problem in our community. Childhood hunger is even more severe as hunger impacts development physically, mentally, and emotionally and 1 in 3 of our clients served are children.

We know how people we are serving. We do not know however how many households and children are struggling with food security who are NOT accessing our services.

The most recent data on food insecurity in Montana is from Kids Count Data Center, measuring that 21%, or 1 in 5, children in Montana lived in a food insecure household some point in 2012⁵.

This survey was conducted to gather more data on childhood food insecurity in Missoula.

Research Methods

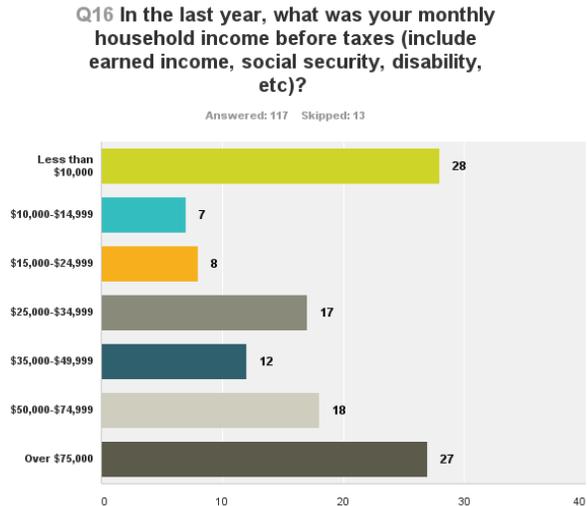
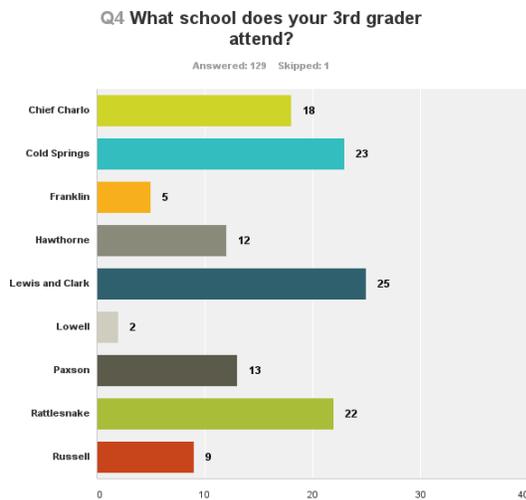
- Online survey for elementary school parents
- 16 questions maximum (not all questions were applicable to all) about family size, being able to eat healthy, hunger, and community resources
- Received 130 responses, not a random sample, but from all schools and income levels

Distribution of parents from each school:

- Lewis and Clark (25) 19%
- Cold Springs (23) 18%
- Rattlesnake (22) 17%
- Chief Charlo (18) 14%
- Paxson (13) 10%
- Hawthorne (12) 9%
- Russell (9) 7%
- Franklin (5) 4%
- Lowell (2) 2%

Distribution of income:

- Less than \$9,999 (28) 24%
- \$10,000-\$14,999 (7) 6%
- \$15,000-\$24,999 (8) 7%
- \$25,000-\$34,999 (17) 15%
- \$35,000-\$49,999 (12) 10%
- \$50,000-\$74,999 (18) 15%
- Over \$75,000 (27) 23%



Key Findings

Food insecure Families

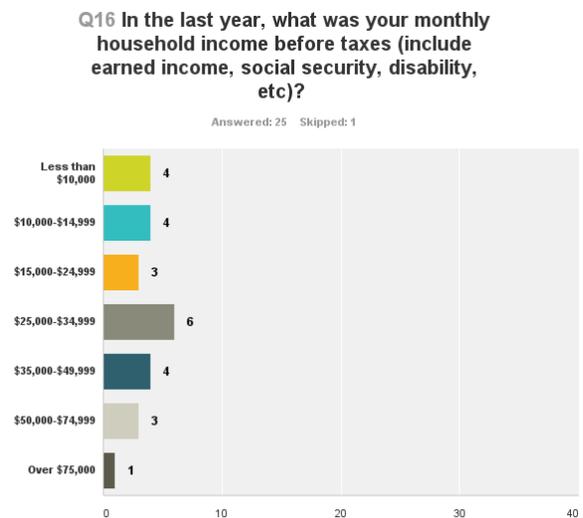
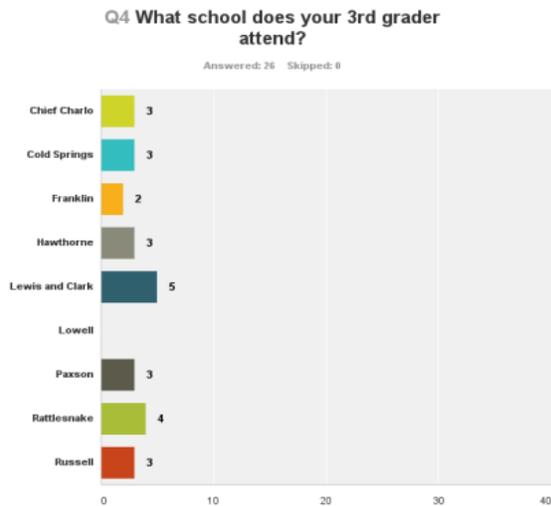
- 26/130 families in Missoula said:
 “Yes, there was a time in the last 12 months where I could not afford to buy all the food my family and I needed.”
 These families were food insecure sometime in the last year.
- Families that were food insecure in this last year had an average household size of 4.3 people with 2.6 kids in the house under 18 years of age.
- Of those taking the survey:

Food insecurity at each school

- Lewis and Clark (5)
- Cold Springs (3)
- Rattlesnake (4)
- Chief Charlo (3)
- Paxson (3)
- Hawthorne (3)
- Russell (3)
- Franklin (2)
- Lowell (0)

Food insecurity from every income bracket

- Less than \$9,999 (4)
- \$10,000-\$14,999 (4)
- \$15,000-\$24,999 (3)
- \$25,000-\$34,999 (6)
- \$35,000-\$49,999 (4)
- \$50,000-\$74,999 (3)
- Over \$75,000 (1)



Household Hunger

- 62% (16) said they or someone else in the household had to skip a meal or eat a smaller meal than they felt they needed because there was not enough food
- How long was it, until they were able to buy all the food they needed
 - 48% (12) said a week or less
 - 48% (12) said 2-3 weeks
 - 4% (1) said 3+weeks to 2 months
- 85% (22) said they did not pay a bill sometime in the last year in order to pay for food
- How long was it, until they were able to pay all of their bills
 - 36% (8) said 2-3 weeks
 - 27% (6) said 3+ weeks to 2 months
 - 18% (4) said 2-6 months
 - 9% (2) said 6-9 months
 - 9% (2) said 9+ months

Healthy Eating

- On average, their children ate 2.7 fruits and vegetables a day (the recommended amount for elementary school children)
- 76% (20) said their children don't eat as healthy as they would like. Of this 76%, the reasons why their children weren't able to eat as healthy as they would like
 - 52% (11) said don't have enough time
 - 52% (11) said healthy food is too expensive
 - 38% (8) said fruits and vegetables are too expensive
 - 33% (7) said my child won't eat the healthy food I fix or pack for them
 - 19% (4) said I don't know how to cook/prepare the food I'd like them to eat

Resources

- Of the households that were food insecure, 17/26 have used at least one community resource in the last year
 - 82% (14) have used SNAP
 - 76% (13) have kids enrolled in Free/Reduced Lunch or Breakfast
 - 35% (6) has used Missoula Food Bank
 - 24% (4) have used WIC
 - 18% (3) have used the Summer Feeding Program
 - 6% (1) have used Unemployment
 - 6% (1) has used TANF
- 61% (11) said that after using any number of these resources, that yes, there was still a time that they or another member of their household did not have enough to eat.

Food Secure Families

- 103/130 families in Missoula said:
“No, there was NOT a time in the last 12 months where I could not afford to buy all the food my family and I needed.”
These families were food secure this last year, being able to afford all the food their family and they needed.

Healthy Eating

- Of the parents that were food secure, only 39% said their children don't eat as healthy as they would like. Of this 39%:
 - 63% said my child won't eat the healthy food I fix or pack for them
 - 33% said I don't have enough time to cook or fix the food I would like them to eat
 - 7% said fruits and vegetables are too expensive
 - Comments:
 - “Wish my budget was a little bigger to offer more varieties throughout the whole week and month”
 - “My child eats pretty healthy but I would like to reduce her sugar intake from candy and sugary drinks she consumes.”

Hunger & Paying Bills

- Of the parents that were food secure, 7 households or 7% indicated that they did not pay a bill in the last year in order to pay for food
- 2 households said they had to skip or eat a smaller meal than they felt they needed

Resources

- Of the parents that were food secure- 27/103 households have used a community resource. Of these parents that have used at least one community resource:
 - 59% (16) have kids enrolled in Free/Reduced Lunch or Breakfast
 - 26% (7) have used SNAP
 - 26% (7) have eaten at summer feeding sites
 - 15% (4) have used WIC
 - 11% (3) have used unemployment
 - 4% (1) has used TANF
 - 4% (1) has used Missoula Food Bank
- Of who are food secure and have used a community resource in the last year, all of them said there was never a time after using this resources where they did not have enough to eat

Conclusions

Food Insecurity in Missoula

- There are children living in food insecure (or low food security) households at every school in Missoula. While no household indicated they were food insecure from Lowell, based off teachers' accounts, we know there are children living in food insecure households, but believe that because of survey fatigue at Lowell they did not respond to this survey.
- Over half, 62% or 16, of the families experiencing food insecurity have someone skipping meals or eating less than they feel they need because there is not enough food.
 - In Missoula, there is a very high prevalence of very low food security. (The national average for very low food security is only 5.6%).
- There is a far greater number of those experiencing food insecurity than utilizing Missoula Food Bank, or other resources
 - Only 6/26 or 23% of families who were food insecure indicated that they utilized Missoula Food Bank
 - A survey conducted in 2013 showed that many people who do use our resources do not use them every time they need them. 61% said there was a time when they needed emergency food, but did not visit Missoula Food Bank.
- Our community resources are not enough for many families experiencing food insecurity.
 - 61% (11) said that even after using any number of the community resources, that there was still a time that they or another member of their household did not have enough to eat.

Income and Rates of Food Insecurity

- The average family size for families that were food insecure was 4.3 people. The poverty line for four people is \$24,250. A much greater proportion of families earning \$25,000-\$34,999 indicated they were food insecure than those earning less than \$10,000 (6/17 families or 35% versus 4/28 families respectively). Looking at above and below the poverty line there are very similar rates of food insecurity. 11/43 families below the poverty line indicated they were food insecure (26%) versus 14/64 families above the poverty line indicated they were food insecure (22%).
 - Of those who took this survey, a greater proportion of families living just above the poverty line are food insecure than those in deep poverty. This could be because these families qualify for fewer resources.
 - Families are not food insecure because they have extremely large families. They have the same family size as the group as a whole (4.3 versus 4.0)

Healthy Eating

- Based off survey comments, conversations with parents at Missoula Food Bank, and the indication that children living in food insecure households are getting the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables:
 - Parents are going without fruits and vegetables or eating smaller or fewer meals in order to make sure their children have the nutrition they need.
 - School breakfast and lunch may also help reach this goal for fruits and vegetables.
 - The biggest indicated barriers to healthy nutrition of those living in food insecure households are not enough time and money much more so than lack of knowledge or skills.

Food Secure Families

- While households may be food secure (indicating they could afford all the food their family and they needed):
 - Some of these families do not have the selection they would like.
 - Some have to skip other bills to pay for food.
 - Some families may be food secure and able to afford all the food they need because of community resources, like Free/Reduced Breakfast and Lunch and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Survey Comments on Hunger in Missoula

Hunger shouldn't happen in Missoula/United States

- No one should be hungry, or forced to eat sub-par food. Nutritious food is a birthright, just like clean air and water...we need our future to look this way.
- Thank you Missoula Food Bank for all you do! No child in Missoula or anywhere else should go hungry!
- In the US there should be NO one that goes hungry.
- Having kids go hungry in Missoula sucks!
- It breaks my heart and I wish I knew more ways to help.

Thank you, Missoula Food Bank, Resources in Missoula

- Thank you Missoula Food Bank for all you do!
- I am not providing my contact info so that others with greater need can win the raffle. Thanks for doing this survey!
- Thank you for doing this survey. I really wish some of the backpack and after school programs were available at Paxson.
- Only used the food bank once, but found it to provide more than expected and the people were great!
- It is definitely a problem and I am glad we are looking for ways to help.
- I'm grateful that our family has not had to use the many resources available to help families meet their food needs in difficult times, but am so grateful for all Missoula has to offer in this area.
- I hear about the great need for healthy food for families who can't afford it and don't have enough food stamps.
- I feel the community works hard to help fill the gap. groceries are very expensive these days and the cost of living vs income is low
- Hunger is definitely a problem here! Fortunately, my family does not suffer from it. Not only is hunger an issue, but many children need school lunches to survive on and a lot of times these school lunches are not nutritional.

Personal Accounts of Hunger

- Groceries are getting more expensive and wages aren't going up. It would be wonderful to not have to rely on SNAP or WIC and for the entire family to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, but at this time, we give it all to the children.
- I was fortunate enough to be able to answer "no" to most of these questions, but my ex-husband and current partner both could have answered "yes" to them. My ex has shared custody with me and there were times I bought food for his house to be able to feed the kids. Missoula is very expensive, food-wise, and food banks, SNAP, etc. are absolutely, 100%, necessary for a lot of families living here.
- "SNAP is abused by many individuals and should not be offered to college students who are capable of working. It is a problem in Missoula county and schools do not offer healthy enough meals and place too many restrictions on what they can choose. Food pantries in high school are a

valuable resource because high school students are often neglected. We stopped using SNAP because of the poor treatment and discrimination we received in addition to repeatedly receiving notices that we did not turn documentation in on time which is inaccurate. The OPA of Missoula County outsources to other counties in Montana and needs a complete overhaul. The old ladies working the counter at the food bank are crabby and a turn off. I will go without to feed my family and avoid using Public assistance. I am grateful for the food bank for community members who are facing greater hardships than my family."

- It is just so hard and scary we receive 120 in food stamps and have a housing voucher and receive SSI and the majority of money goes to rent & utilities because housing and food stamp program consider it income so most of money left over goes to what food we can afford. We can't receive LIEAP for utilities because heat is included in the rent, but the electric bill itself is usually \$100-\$120 each month. we have no vehicle so are stuck going to a local expensive store instead of being able to go to multiple stores with sales. We are stuck in a cycle of poverty if I were to get a job even part time are rent would go up even more are food stamps would disappear and the entire SSI would go to food, rent, & utilities. It should be spent on my children's therapy and activities to thrive instead were surviving meal to meal I ration and hide things through the month to make sure things last. WE don't eat junk food or eat out. We depend on the food banks and loans from family members borrowing from friends' food items or making meals together with others. I know that personally 90% of people within my social circle in the community of Missoula survive the same way. They work full time, part-time, or are students and all the above. It's scary juggling and it hurts telling my kids when they can eat or scolding them for eating too much or between meals or patrolling the kitchen. I personally will go without to feed them or I let them have all the meat and veggies and I fill up with carbs. I try my best to keep them fed and don't go to bed too hungry. On weekends I let them sleep in if I know were running low so we only have to have two meals as is during the week I only make one meal because they eat two meals at school...even then they come home so hungry, so I try to always have bread peanut butter or milk an cereal for after school until I get home from work/school to cook. I am attending the University of Montana and I am a Social Work major, sorry for the bad spelling.

What causes hunger/ what should be done

- Groceries are getting more expensive and wages aren't going up. It would be wonderful to not have to rely on SNAP or WIC and for the entire family to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, but at this time, we give it all to the children.
- Increased wages, better jobs, less expensive housing= less hunger
- More needs to be done to address comparable wages, and access to chemical free (BGH, pesticides, etc) food for all people. Policies and funding should discourage "conventional" farming and encourage organic, fair trade and free range practices.
- More needs to be done to address comparable wages, and access to chemical free (BGH, pesticides, etc) food for all people. Policies and funding should discourage "conventional" farming and encourage organic, fair trade and free range practices.
- I feel the community works hard to help fill the gap. groceries are very expensive these days and the cost of living vs income is low

- There seems to be a lot of resources available for getting help with food in Missoula, however, it seems that many aren't aware of how to locate them.

SNAP/Food Stamps & School Lunch

- Food stamp program needs to change. I am a cashier and I see all the crap people buy. I see all the waste and theft. Adults are selfish when it comes to their children. Either feed kids at school and cut back food stamps or limit what they can buy.
- Our family is not concerned about lack of food or about our kids not eating healthily. We are concerned about the poor quality of food served for school lunch. We pack lunch as a result.
- Hunger is definitely a problem here! Fortunately, my family does not suffer from it. Not only is hunger an issue, but many children need school lunches to survive on and a lot of times these school lunches are not nutritional.

I feel fortunate

- I feel my family is fortunate & can afford groceries. I am interested in ways to help less fortunate families.
- I am very fortunate to have a good-paying job with benefits, and my ex-wife and I were raised and educated with the knowledge, skills, and attitude to provide healthy foods for ourselves and families. I realize not everyone is as fortunate.
- Hunger is definitely a problem here! Fortunately, my family does not suffer from it.

Comments to Address with Outreach

- Feeding the poor is not enough. It is time families and parents take responsibility about feeding their families and have to do something in return for getting fed. This is a major educational moment that is lost and we are not helping these children and their parents learn how to help themselves.
- Based on studies and observation, obesity is a far greater problem amongst Missoula's poor.