

## **MANY MILITARY FAMILIES STRUGGLING WITH HUNGER**

*Largest, Most Comprehensive Analysis of Charitable Food Assistance in America Shows Many Veterans Among the Still High Number of Families Coming to Food Programs*

**CLEVELAND – November 11, 2014;** More than 1 in 5 local households seeking food assistance from the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio, and the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank's network in Northeast Ohio contain a veteran or an active member of the military. *Hunger in America 2014*, released in August, was conducted by these Northeast Ohio food banks in partnership with Feeding America, the nation's leading domestic hunger-relief organization. Nationally, *Hunger in America 2014* found that among the more than 46 million people who turn to agencies and programs of the Feeding America network of food banks every year were many veterans; nationally, as well as locally, 20% of families seeking assistance contained a member of the military. Here in Northeast Ohio, more than 574,000 people turn to hunger programs annually.

The study documents client household demographics and the challenges that our clients face. It is the first study that assesses the prevalence of food insecurity among past and active members of the U.S. Military.

"Many of my mentors and leaders I've known in our food bank network over the years are former military officers and veterans," said Dan Flowers, president & CEO of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. "Military expertise has left a significant imprint on our work and I hire veterans every chance I get. Today those vets have a new mission, taking care their brothers and sisters in arms that struggle to make ends meet in huge numbers every day."

"It is heartbreaking to realize that so many of the people we serve are current or former military members," said Shirley Stineman, Board Chair of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. "These men and women served their country, and here they are struggling to survive on the home front as well. We are proud to be here for them to help them meet this most basic need. As we look ahead to the holidays, it is important to remember the critical work our food banks do every day, and how much more we can do together to solve hunger in Northeast Ohio."

"Our veterans have sacrificed so much to keep us all safe, so it's troubling to know that they struggle with food insecurity," said Julie Chase-Morefield, Executive Director of Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio. "We owe it to them to shed light on the plight of veterans and do more to help those who proudly served our country."

Although the nation has recovered the number of jobs lost in the recession, Ohio is still more than 114,000 jobs behind. Moreover, most jobs lost during the recession were high wage or middle wage jobs, but most jobs added back have been low wage jobs.

Veteran Bill Hicks contacted the Greater Cleveland Food Bank in July for help with food. He was laid off from his job a year ago, and unemployment benefits had expired a couple of weeks before he called. Bill was told that he would probably be hired back, but he is actively looking for work through the Veteran's Service Commission and a temp agency. He is still hoping to be called back to work in 2015.

**Here's a summary:**

#### **CLIENTS STRUGGLING WITH HEALTH ISSUES**

- Four in five households report purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food because they could not afford healthier options.
- Two in three households report having to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.
- Nearly one in three households include a member with diabetes.

#### **MAKING TOUGH CHOICES AND TRADE-OFFS TO KEEP FOOD ON THE TABLE**

More than two in three households had income at or below the federal poverty level (\$19,530 for a household of three in 2013), forcing them to make sacrifices between one necessity and another.

Following are the choices client households reported making in the past 12 months:

- Two in three report choosing between paying for food and paying for utilities.
- Two in three report making choices between paying for food and paying for transportation.
- Two in three report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine/medical care.
- More than half report choosing between paying for food and paying for housing.
- One in four report choosing between paying for food and paying for education expenses.

More than half of households reported using three or more coping strategies for getting enough food in the past 12 months. The frequency of these strategies among all households include:

- More than one in three report watering down food or drinks;
- Half report receiving help from friends or family.

*Hunger in America 2014* was conducted using rigorous academic research standards and was peer reviewed by a technical advisory team including researchers from American University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and the Urban Institute. Nationally, confidential responses were collected on electronic tablets by 6,000 trained data collectors, the majority of whom were volunteers.

The study was funded by The Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

The full national report is available on Feeding America's website at *Hunger in America 2014*.

With the increased need, food banks in Northeast Ohio continuously work to keep up with the need. Please consider making a donation to a food bank in your area. See below for additional contact information for food banks in Northeast Ohio.

#### **About Feeding America**

Feeding America is a nationwide network of 200 food banks that leads the fight against hunger in the United States. Together, we provide food to more than 46 million people through food pantries and meal programs in communities throughout America. Feeding America also supports programs that improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry. Individuals, charities, businesses and government all have a role in ending hunger. Donate. Volunteer. Advocate. Educate. Together we can solve hunger. Visit <http://www.feedingamerica.org/>. Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica](http://www.facebook.com/FeedingAmerica) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/FeedingAmerica](http://www.twitter.com/FeedingAmerica).

**About the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank**

The **Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank** is a non-profit organization with a mission to Feed People and Fight Hunger. This year, 1 in 7 people in our service territory will face hunger, and the Foodbank will be there to help. The Foodbank is the source of emergency food for 500 food pantries, hot meal sites shelters and other hunger-relief programs that directly serve individuals and families in Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas and Wayne counties.

The Foodbank, with its supporters and partners are leading the fight to end hunger in the communities they serve. In 2013, it distributed 24 million pounds of food, providing 20 million meals locally for people in need. To join the hunger-relief efforts, please visit [akroncantonfoodbank.org](http://akroncantonfoodbank.org) or [facebook.com/akroncantonfoodbank](https://facebook.com/akroncantonfoodbank).

**Contact:** Kat Pestian, 330-777-2317

**About the Greater Cleveland Food Bank**

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank is the largest hunger relief organization in Northeast Ohio, providing more than 45 million meals in 2014 to hungry people in Cuyahoga, Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake, Ashland and Richland counties. Our mission is to ensure that everyone in our communities has the nutritious food they need every day. We do this through both food distribution and SNAP outreach efforts. The best and easiest way to help is to go online: visit us at [www.GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org](http://www.GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org). The general public can help by making a monetary donation. For every dollar donated, the Food Bank can provide enough food for four nutritious meals.

**Contact:** Karen Pozna – 216-738-2132, cell 216-214-9436

**About the Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio**

As the area's largest hunger-relief organization for Lorain, Erie, Huron and Crawford counties, Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio plays an integral role in meeting the needs of families at-risk for hunger. Second Harvest secures and distributes 7.5 million pounds of food and grocery products annually; and works in partnership with 110 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, Farmers Markets, Mobile Pantries, Backpack Programs and Kids Cafes.

With nearly 1 out of 6 people in our region receiving emergency food assistance from one of Second Harvest's partner charities, the need for support has never been greater. Help bring the most basic of needs – food – to the table by visiting us online at [www.secondharvestfoodbank.org](http://www.secondharvestfoodbank.org).

**Contact:** Susan Bartosh – 440-960-2265 x 234

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