

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Number 68

February 2017

Hunger in Louisiana

The SNAP Story Bank Project

by Sakeenah Shabazz, Emerson National Hunger Fellow

JSRI Future Activities

February 21

Fr. Kammer will make a presentation on the work of JSRI to the board of the Loyola Alumni Association.

March 31-April 1

JSRI Advisory Board will meet on Loyola's Campus.

JSRI Recent Activities

February 9

Emerson National Hunger Fellow, Sakeenah Shabazz, presented the [SNAP Story Bank Project](#) to Loyola students, faculty, staff, and community members.

February 6

Fr. Kammer participated in a board meeting in New York City of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

January 28

Ms. Donovan and Dr. Weishar helped organize a press conference on the deadly consequences of repealing the Affordable Care Act in Lafayette Cemetery #1. Fr. Kammer emceed the event.

January 27

Dr. Weishar and Ms. Baudouin organized a meeting of faith-based prison reform advocates in Nashville, Tennessee.

January 26

Dr. Weishar was interviewed by Fox 8 News about President Trump's Executive Order to lengthen the border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

January 24

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of the Board of Directors of Seashore Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi.

I am a visiting [Emerson National Hunger Fellow](#) who has been working at JSRI for the last six months. While here, I was tasked with highlighting the impact of SNAP in Louisiana through a written analysis and by gathering and sharing the real experiences of people who use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As the project comes to a close, I would like to reflect on the importance of collecting stories and how they can be used to create change.

The SNAP Story Bank Project, at its core, is an attempt to understand the current state of hunger and food insecurity in Louisiana through both data and personal stories. It's not difficult to see that hunger and food insecurity are major problems in the state. In 2016, Louisiana ranked 49th in overall household food insecurity, with 18.4% of all households having low or very low food security. Even worse, the child food insecurity rate in Louisiana reached 24.5% in 2014. SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was designed to combat hunger and food insecurity and 855,000 Louisiana residents rely on the program to purchase food each month.

Before I conducted my first interview for the story bank, I felt nervous. What do I know about Louisiana and who am I to tell someone else's story? This was a question I asked myself through spells of anxiety; but, much to my surprise, no one asked me this. From early October to late January, I interviewed 47 people across five cities in Louisiana, each person with a different story to share. Writing and story collecting required a balancing act that wasn't always so balanced. I would spend hours transcribing interviews; and, when it was time write, the succinct, policy-oriented language required for the report did not come easily.



In the end, the tailored language of the report and unfiltered stories are all part of a messaging framework geared toward stakeholders and advocates. We need them to see that SNAP and the overall issue of hunger are worth their attention and action. As the story bank and report grew, the findings of my research and the stories began to overlap. The seniors we interviewed in Grand Coteau struggled with transportation; and that is a barrier for seniors who use SNAP that is also widely documented by researchers. Residents of Galliano struggled with unemployment, and SNAP was designed to provide food assistance in exactly those situations. The stories and the data refuted the stereotype of SNAP recipients being unworthy of assistance. They illustrated the reality that SNAP is temporary and effective, and its recipients deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Last week, JSRI hosted an event to share the [story bank](#) and [research findings](#) with the community, and it brought the experience full circle. To see story bank participants and advocates exchanging resources made me realize that the solution to hunger and food insecurity will come from collaboration and action at all levels. Aside from sharing the findings of the report, people left the event with tangible ways to get involved. This project will continue to be a resource to anyone who wants to learn more about SNAP, food insecurity, or the human experiences that make it worth your attention and action.

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Published by the Jesuit Social Research Institute
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