



## Food Access & Literacy Work Group Meeting Notes

Fairfax Food Council

September 25, 2024

10:30 – 11:30 am

### **SNAP in Fairfax County**

**Wes Garit, Fairfax County Department of Family Services**

**Outreach Coordinator for Public Assistance and Employment Services**

Wes discussed the county statistics regarding SNAP enrollment, as well as shared the ongoing outreach efforts being made in his department. Some key points from his presentation include:

- In the most recent Hunger Report from the Capital Area Food Bank, 27% of Fairfax County residents are food insecure, nearly 8,000 of whom are children.
- Over 60,000 people are receiving SNAP benefits in Fairfax County, which is about 5% of the population.
- To qualify for SNAP, a family of four must have a gross income below \$40,560. This is a benefits cliff because most families facing food insecurity have incomes above this threshold due to the region's high cost of living.
- The Public Assistance and Employment Services Division (PAES) has one dedicated outreach coordinator, Nancy Cordova. Despite the small staff, PAES engages with many community partners to host/participate in outreach sessions.

[Click here to view Wes' presentation.](#)

### **Outreach Regarding SNAP Eligibility**

**Mary Porter, Real Food for Kids**

**Director of Programs**

Mary discussed Real Food for Kids' (RFFK) SNAP Ambassador Program. Here's how their program works:



## HOW IT WORKS

### COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

- 60-minute online training
- Equips volunteer to engage in public settings, providing information, addressing myths and guiding residents to enrollment options
- Outreach typically at food distributions, diaper banks, co-located events (i.e., animal care clinics, wellness fairs)

### SCHOOL STAFF

- Bilingual Family Specialists & Social Workers
- 90-minute training covers application assistance, outreach practices, and reporting
- Equips staff member to guide and support resident through enrollment as needed
- Outreach takes many forms: parent meetings, presentations, one-on-one, etc.

### IMPACT

- 15% month-over-month increase in SNAP enrollment
- Arlington DHS acknowledges the SNAP Ambassador program has contributed to this increase

RFFK is always looking for touchpoints to expand its outreach efforts. Their goal is to normalize conversations about SNAP and help remove the stigma associated with it. Currently, RFFK is proposing a pilot in the West Potomac High School pyramid in which they will train school staff as SNAP ambassadors. [Click here to view Mary's presentation.](#)

### SNAP Enrollment Assistance

**Cassie Edner, Virginia Poverty Law Center Staff Attorney; Director of Virginia Hunger Solutions**

Cassie shared this [SNAP Benefits Calculator](#), which helps people determine their eligibility for SNAP. If people are eligible but need help with the application process, they can either leave their contact information or call 866-753-SNAP to talk to a trained representative who can help navigate the SNAP application process.

Cassie also shared that a major challenge for applicants is receiving mail. If applicants do not provide the requested information within 10 days of the request being mailed to them, they may miss out on the first month of benefits. In an effort to give applicants more notice, the Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) provides this [checklist of documents the applicant will need to provide](#). If you have questions or would like more info about VPLC, feel free to email Cassie at [cassie@vplc.org](mailto:cassie@vplc.org).

### Streamlining Assistance Program Applications

**Patricia Araujo, Fairfax County Department of Family Services**

**Quality Improvement Manager**

Patricia discussed how Virginia's CommonHelp site streamlines applications for multiple assistance programs. Normally, applications for Medicaid, SNAP, and other programs would require separate applications. CommonHelp combines these applications into one. CommonHelp applications are available in Spanish and English. However, as these are just two of the **many** languages spoken in Fairfax County, translation services can be accessed over the phone at 833-5CALLVA (833-522-5582). Even if language is not a barrier, but, say, access to a computer or Wi-Fi is, people can also call that number to apply over the phone. Use this link to explore the many resources and application assistance options:

<https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/>.

### **FFC Food Access & Literacy Work Group Members' Announcements**

- The Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) recently released its [2024 Hunger Report](#). While the data in the report covers the DMV region, there will be a special presentation with a focus on Fairfax County Data. Email [alisa.brooks@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:alisa.brooks@fairfaxcounty.gov) to join the Emergency Food Strategy Team on **October 16 at 3:00 p.m.** and hear Sabrina Tadele of CAFB discuss the county data.
- To support the storage and/or distribution of healthy food while also helping to reduce food waste, the Morningstar Foundation's Food Gap Project is providing grants for cold storage infrastructure. To apply for a \$5,000 to \$75,000 grant, email [alexandra@fruitful.online](mailto:alexandra@fruitful.online) by **October 1** a three-page or less Word Document containing:
  - Name/Organization
  - About the organization
  - Cold Storage/Infrastructure needs and rationale for these needs
  - List of top 10 largest funders
  - Budget breakdown - specifics on equipment needs + make/model
  - Who the organization serves
- Neighborhood and Community Services' "Head Start" and "Early Head Start" programs provide free meals to enrolled infants, toddlers, and children following USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns. Use this link to learn more about these programs: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/neighborhood-community-services/head-start>.
- On October 23, from 10:00-11:30 a.m., the Urban Agriculture Work Group will combine with the Food Access & Literacy Work Group for A Cross-Pollination Meeting—Food Waste Diversion: Food Waste Reduction, Food Rescue, and Composting. More info to come! Save the date and keep an eye out for the calendar invite.

**Next Food Access & Literacy Work Group Meeting: October 23, 2024, from 10:00 -11:30 a.m.**