



Community Organizing and Activism: Confronting Injustice in Public Spaces



➤ Food Security

“My interest is in grassroots. My strong belief is that people know best what's best for themselves. So, every project I get involved in is one where it's starting with people coming together.”

– Liz Seymour, Community Organizer

OVERVIEW

More than 37 million people – and 11 million children – lacked adequate nutrition in the United States in 2019. Households that are considered “food insecure” have limited or uncertain access to quality food that can support a healthy lifestyle. Children are more likely to face food insecurity than any other group in the United States. About half (56%) of food-insecure households participate in some form of federal food-assistance program such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/ formerly “Food Stamps”), the National School Lunch Program or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (often called WIC), yet healthy food options remain limited for many.

Rather than asking an outside group to come into her neighborhood to address food insecurity, Liz Seymour helped start a neighborhood market by asking her neighbors to share the food they were already accustomed to growing and making. Today the weekly People’s Market, one of the most eclectic markets in North Carolina, has a matching SNAP program that allows recipients to double their benefits, offers locally produced vegetables and foods, and features neighborhood specific cuisine. She says, “One thing that I’ve found in organizing is that it helps a lot to only grow as fast as your own capacity—and understand who you are accountable to. Too often a project will start with a big grant and you forget that you’ll still have to sustain after the grant is gone, and that your real accountability is the community you’re in, not to the funders.” See more on food insecurity at feedingamerica.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What barriers exist in your community to accessing healthy food?
2. How would you rate the nutritional value of the food in your neighborhood?
3. How does a lack of nutritious food impact people’s capacity to function in other areas of their lives?
4. Who owns the grocery stores closest to where you live?
5. Do you think the food that is available for purchase in your neighborhood comes from your neighborhood?
6. What would it mean if your neighbors and you participated in choosing what food was available in your neighborhood?
7. Does the food that is available in your neighborhood reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of your neighborhood?