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Jackie's Story on Parenting and Food

I understand the shame and relief of dealing with hunger.

As a single parent and full time student, I struggled to ensure there was enough food. I lived on a student budget, yet I was also providing for a three-year-old. For a time, I felt ashamed of using SNAP, WIC and the food bank because of my upbringing. The first few times I used my SNAP or WIC card, I felt my face go red with shame. After some time, I realized that there was nothing to be ashamed of, and if someone judged me for using these resources, it showed more about their character than about mine.

The fear of stigma from my family or society finally went away and I realized I had to do what was best for me and for my daughter. I did not want her to see me struggling to feed her, and thankfully, she never saw what I offered as a failure on my part. I did take her to the food bank occasionally, so she was aware of the facilities, but I didn't explain to her why were there—she just knew we were there to grocery shop. Now she's old enough to understand there is hunger and that there are resources available to people regardless of their backgrounds. She understands there is no shame in using these resources.

When I was a student, I encountered other student parents who struggled to provide food for their children. Many were unaware of resources available to them or felt ashamed to utilize resources; they believed that they were for folks who struggled harder than we did. Because I could relate to this and because it was something I had overcome, I wanted to fight that stigma and to help spread the word. I talked about the resources during meetings and one-on-one mentoring sessions and I posted information on social media groups. Later, several folks sent me messages thanking me for the information.

I want to reach out to folks within the community who struggle with access to food. I specifically want to reach out to single parents, including those who are full time students and starting their careers. I understand many of the struggles they experience, and while their story may be different, my goal is to ensure that they are aware of resources available to them. Ultimately, I want them to have the ability to make informed choices that best serve them and their families.