

I want to tell you the story of a young woman from a small town on the Ohio River --the first generation in her family to go to college. As a Bonner Scholar During her freshman year, she volunteered several times a week at an after-school program where she saw how important the afterschool snacks were to the kids she worked with. In many ways, she felt more at home there than on campus where she was surrounded by students who had lived far more privileged lives than her.

She studied political science and journalism and soon learned from fellow students about the importance of internship experiences to securing a job after college. While attending a conference, she learned about an organization called the Congressional Hunger Center in Washington, D.C. seeking summer interns. She didn't realize that most nonprofit internships were unpaid or really think about how she might afford to live in Washington, D.C. for the summer – she just applied . And to her surprise, she got the internship!

But before she could accept it, she had to figure out how to afford it. Through the Bonner Foundation, she was able to access a scholarship to help cover her costs for the summer and found the cheapest housing she could, which was in College Park, MD. She had to structure the start and end date of her internship around the number of weeks that she could afford to pay rent.

But that summer opened her eyes up to see the problem of hunger no longer through a charity lens but a justice lens and realize the way that public policy can shape our lives positively or negatively. Organizing a food drive might provide a few meals to a few families but the right piece of legislation could help millions of people feed their families.

This intern would go on to be a Hunger Fellow through the Congressional Hunger Center, a transformational yearlong experience. She would join a network of other young leaders who shared an idealism for the hunger-free world they wanted to see and a commitment to gain the knowledge, skills, and leadership capabilities needed to change the status quo.

I was that young woman and today I'm the Executive Director of the organization that changed the course of my life and so many others. We pay our interns and fellows a "living wage" stipend, now, by the way so that anyone can afford to cover their basic living needs over the course of their fellowship (and not go into debt or have to apply for SNAP themselves). Our alum network represents more than 1,000 leaders – three out of four of us spend our careers fighting hunger and its root causes, in communities and Congress, across the nonprofit, government, and private sectors. Our strength is in our common commitments to:

- bridge the gap between community-based work and public policy, highlighting the ways that each sphere can inform and strengthen the other.
- We prioritize people with first-hand expertise. That's why we invest in developing leaders who have experienced hunger and poverty, and people of color—who are disproportionately affected by hunger. And we promote as a key leadership capability the ability to amplify the voices of people with lived experience and let them share their experiences themselves whenever possible. People with experience should be the designers, implementers, and evaluators of the solutions to ending hunger in this country.

The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship and Mickey Leland International Hunger Fellowship are unique among fellowships as they give participants the opportunity to get hands-on experience working

at the local level with nonprofits or municipalities and working in a national or global policy environment – with think tanks, government agencies, or the government relations or research department of national or global organizations.

**The Hunger Center's fellowships and internships make possible stories like mine and the fellows and alums who you will hear from shortly.** We've now trained more than 500 Emerson National Hunger Fellows, 120 Leland International Hunger Fellows, 48 Zero Hunger Interns, and now thousands through our online courses and resources housed in our learning hub Zero Hunger Academy.

More than 90 percent of fellowship alums say the program positively impacted their personal development, their ability to lead with others, and their ability to create change. And 96% would recommend their fellowship program to others.

Through the Emerson National Hunger Fellowship, we don't just develop leaders, we provide capacity and technical support to the local and national organizations who host our fellows during their fellowship rotations in direct service and policy focused organizations.

The work of our fellows and interns has expanded the capacity of 358 partner organizations working to end hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world, in 47 U.S. states plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. and 43 countries worldwide.

In my time at the Hunger Center, we've made a commitment to working with local host organizations in states and communities where there is persistent poverty and the highest rates of food insecurity including Appalachia (where I come from), tribal communities, and the Deep South.

- In Louisiana, **Fellow Sakeenah Shabazz** worked with Loyola's Jesuit Social Research Institute to create the SNAP Story Bank project and film a documentary that captured the personal stories of people who benefit from SNAP including seniors and caregivers.
- Numerous fellows have helped the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative at the University of Arkansas and the Native American Agriculture Fund to assist tribal communities across the country in building their own robust food economies.
- In Mississippi, fellows helped The Good Samaritan Center in Jackson develop a SNAP outreach toolkit for social service providers to help them connect their clients to the SNAP program.
- In Alabama, **Fellow Paige Milson** traveled to 28 food pantries in 11 counties and interviewed 200 households served by the **Community Food Bank of Central Alabama** to carry out its first Hunger Study to understand the needs of their clients and learn more about their health, employment status, living situation, SNAP enrollment, and experiences with hunger and food pantries.

The work our fellows complete over the course of their field and policy placements is truly remarkable, and they not only deliver great results for their host organizations but take the time to document their work, research, and lessons learned through reports and presentations that we make available on our website.

In closing, Hunger is not an inevitable fact of nature or an inescapable outcome of our society. Hunger is an enormous problem, but it is solvable. We have all the knowledge, resources, and talent we need—what we lack is leadership to build the public and political will to make sure it happens in our lifetime.

That's why we need bold leaders who understand the systems that contribute to food insecurity and hunger and are capable of developing solutions and leading change in our organizations, programs, and policies. That's why the Hunger Center's mission is to develop, inspire, and connect leaders in the movement to end hunger – leaders like the individuals we've brought together today to share their work and recommendations. Over the next hour, you'll hear from both current Emerson National Hunger Fellows and a group of distinguished alums working across the country and tackling hunger and poverty from different vantage points.