



**FLORIDA  
IMPACT**  
TO END HUNGER

# Family Dinner Table Project

## 2023 REPORT



Children's Board  
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

[www.ChildrensBoard.org](http://www.ChildrensBoard.org)

Since 1979, Florida Impact to End Hunger has helped community leaders secure more responsive public programs and policies to address hunger.

# About Florida Impact

Florida Impact to End Hunger is dedicated to advancing health equity by ending hunger for all Floridians. We mobilize communities to maximize access to federal, state, and local food and nutrition programs with a focus on Florida's most vulnerable populations.



# Abstract

This report serves as a comprehensive overview of the achievements and milestones of the Family Dinner Table Project (FDTP) during the period of November 2022 to April 2023. It highlights the project's success in meeting its objectives and making a positive impact on the community. The report focuses on identifying affordable, accessible, reliable, and culturally appropriate solutions to address food insecurity in underserved areas of Hillsborough County.

The project examines the barriers to food access and proposes solutions to increase access to healthy and affordable food options. The barriers to food access include high prices, transportation, limited availability at local stores, a lack of trust, lack of knowledge regarding how to obtain resources and services, and stigma associated with receiving food and other assistance. Additionally, the lack of awareness of programs like Fresh Access Bucks further hinder healthy food accessibility.

We were able to have honest and authentic conversations about food insecurity, food access, federal nutrition programs, food pantries, history of stores that once were in the community but left, and what organizations are making an impact in the community.



# Project Overview

The Family Dinner Table Project (FDTP) is a community initiative that aims to address food insecurity by promoting the health and wellbeing of individuals who are struggling to access nutritious meals. Through its partnerships with the local government, the faith-based community, the school district, food banks, non-profit organizations and community leaders, the FDTP seeks to connect individuals with necessary resources to help them achieve self-sufficiency.

In November 2022, Florida Impact to End Hunger collaborated with the project stakeholders (see page 4) to launch the Family Dinner Table Project. Over a period of six months, the project engaged community members and leaders to understand the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the target area through data collection, listening sessions and focus groups.

The ultimate goal of the Family Dinner Table Project is to improve food security levels among residents in Hillsborough County. By leveraging community knowledge and expertise, the FDTP aims to create recommendations for City and County leaders to address the root causes of food insecurity and promote sustainable solutions. The success of the project will be measured by the impact of food security levels and the overall health and wellbeing of the community.

**This initiative is designed to develop and sustain food security through increasing awareness of:**

- Federal Nutrition Programs
- Meal delivery programs
- Food pantries
- And other resources



# Project Goals

The following objectives were identified to improve food security in the target areas:

1. Conduct a Community Foods Needs Assessment to evaluate the availability of healthy food options in low-income neighborhoods.
2. Increase awareness of free meal programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, WIC, and Summer Break Spot.
3. Increase information about how to enroll in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to expand access to healthy food options.
4. Enhance awareness of community resources through participation in community outreach events.

These objectives reflect the project's commitment to addressing food insecurity through a multi-faceted approach that leverages community knowledge and resources to promote sustainable solutions. The project seeks to empower individuals and foster a sense of community ownership over food security by increasing access to nutritious meals and enhancing awareness of available resources.



## ***A DEFINITION OF FOOD INSECURITY:***

*The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough healthy food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life. This can be a temporary situation for a family or can last a long time. Food insecurity is one way we measure how many people can't afford food.*



# Family Dinner Table Project Stakeholders

Our collaborative approach emphasizes the development of resident leaders, alignment of existing resources and creation of new resources to promote sustainable food security. Through the collective efforts of its stakeholders, the project seeks to foster a community-driven approach to addressing food insecurity, empowering residents to take ownership of their food systems and ensuring that everyone has access to healthy and affordable food.



# Background on Federal Nutrition Programs

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works to end hunger and obesity through the administration of 16 federal nutrition assistance programs including WIC, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and school meals.

The mission of FNS is to increase food and nutrition security and reduce hunger by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet and nutrition education in a way that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

The agency was established on Aug. 8, 1969, a few months before the first White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health. Many of the programs and activities FNS administers today were formed or expanded due to recommendations from the 1969 Conference. Most notably, this includes:

- Significant expansions to Food Stamps (now known as SNAP), increasing the number of Americans served from 2 million in 1968 to 11 million by 1971.
- Increasing the reach of the National School Lunch Program, which served 2 million children before the Conference and expanded to serving 8 million by 1971.
- Permanent authorization of the National School Breakfast Program in 1975, which was also inspired by the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for School Children Program, started in 1969.



- Authorization of the pilot for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children in 1972, which later became the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC Program) we know today.
- Setting the stage for the development of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which serve as the cornerstone for federal nutrition assistance programs and the basis of MyPlate.

FNS works in partnership with states, U.S. territories, and Tribal organizations that operate federal nutrition programs.



# Who struggles with food insecurity?

When the pandemic began in the United States in early 2020, the public health emergency caused communities to close and unemployment to soar. Many were left not knowing how they were going to pay bills and have access to food. Three years later those same families and others are still struggling to put food on their tables.

“According to a 2021 report by Feeding America, the national network of food banks, Florida has the second-highest rate of food insecurity in the country. In Hillsborough County more than 124,000 people face food insecurity, with nearly 37,000 of them being children.

In a state with enormous wealth and abundant agricultural resources, no child should go hungry. There are many organizations working hard every day so that no child goes to bed hungry. Florida Impact believes that working together is one solution as to how we can end childhood hunger.

Our research in Hillsborough County revealed that families utilize resources provided by schools, food banks, food pantries, and other emergency food providers to alleviate hunger. We have to acknowledge the hard work of Hillsborough County Schools that even with staffing shortages and supply challenges, they deliver 190,000 meals to students every day.. According to FRAC (Food Research and Action Center) every meal provided by the emergency food programs, the federal nutrition programs--such as SNAP provides 9.

A more sustainable response to helping to end hunger is to get more children and adults enrolled in federally funded nutrition programs.



# Methods

To gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing these communities, Florida Impact issued out surveys, conducted interviews, focus groups, and stake holder meetings. Participants were made up of concerned citizens, representatives from local businesses, nonprofits, churches, and community leaders. These methods were also utilized to evaluate the impact of the project.

## **The Community Needs Assessment collected information to help identify gaps and needs:**



1. Focus groups and parent/caregiver sessions brought 6-8 people from the community to discuss and answer questions about food insecurity issues, food access, and other concerns and feedback using the focus group questions.
2. Listening sessions brought 10 or more people from the community to discuss and answer questions about food insecurity, food access and other concerns or feedback using the focus group questions
3. Stakeholder meetings brought together a collaboration of local people representing church leaders, service providers, government officials, and other community leaders to discuss food insecurity, food access and who's doing what in the community.
4. Staff participated in Community Events to share resources about FAB, SNAP and other federal nutrition programs

# Community Needs Assessment

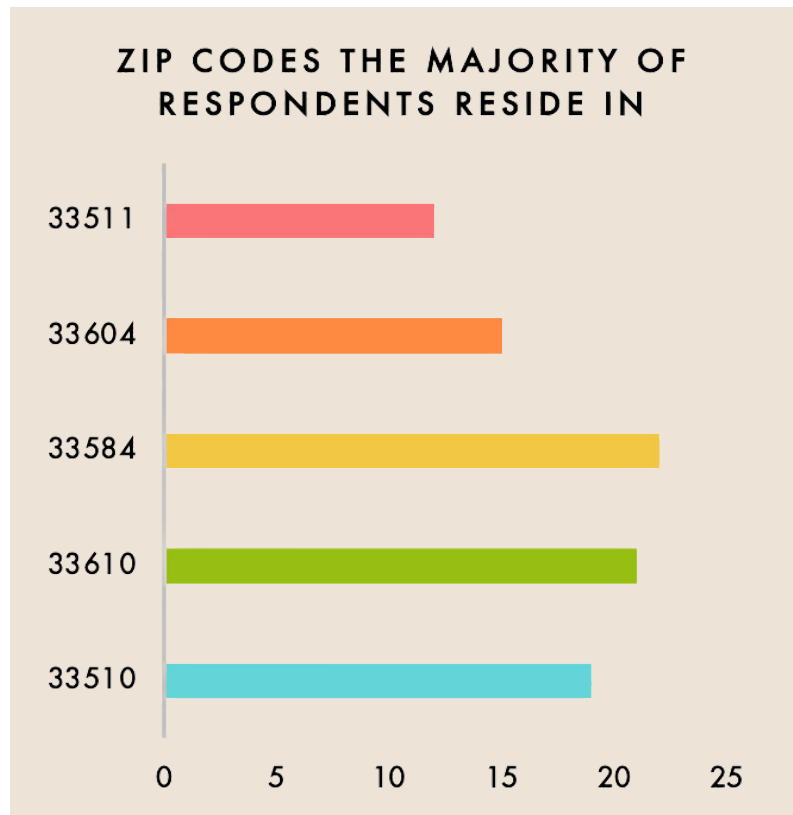
The survey developed by the Florida Project consisted of a total of 12 questions. (See Appendix 1.) A comprehensive overview of the Family Dinner Table Project during the period of November of 2022 until April of 2023, we were able to gather 186 responses from Hillsborough County residents gathered in 11 meetings and 6 community events.

## COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESPONDENTS:

The demographic and other household information include response from various communities by zip codes, age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, and household size. Surveyed participants self-identified as white included those who disclosed as Hispanic, descendants of India, Native Americans, Cuban Americans, and Italian Americans. Other self-identifying nations included many of those described as Black, self-disclosed as Haitians, Nigerians, Hispanic or those of Latin descendants.

Among the respondents, 38% have lived in Hillsborough County for more than 20 years, while 22% have resided there for 1-5 years. 15% of respondents reported living in Hillsborough County for 5-10 years, while 10-20 years was reported by another 15%.

Only 10 % of the respondents reported having lived in the county for less than a year. These findings provided valuable insight into the demographics of the target area and can inform the development of targeted solutions to address food insecurity.

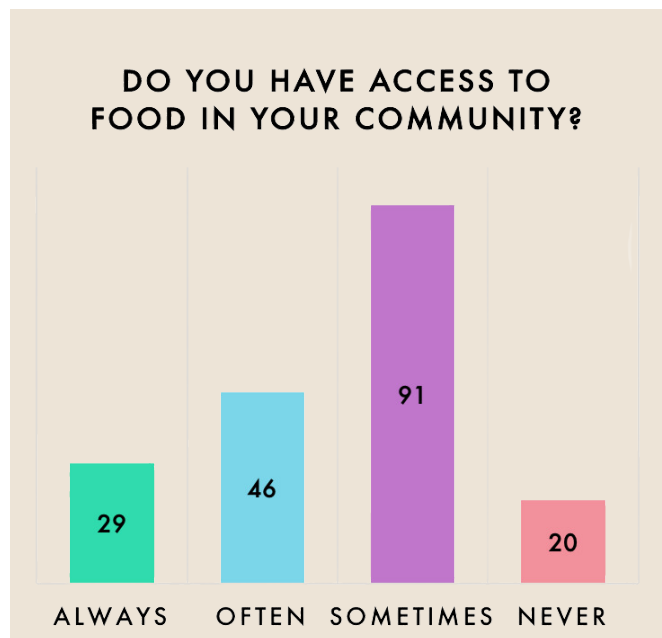
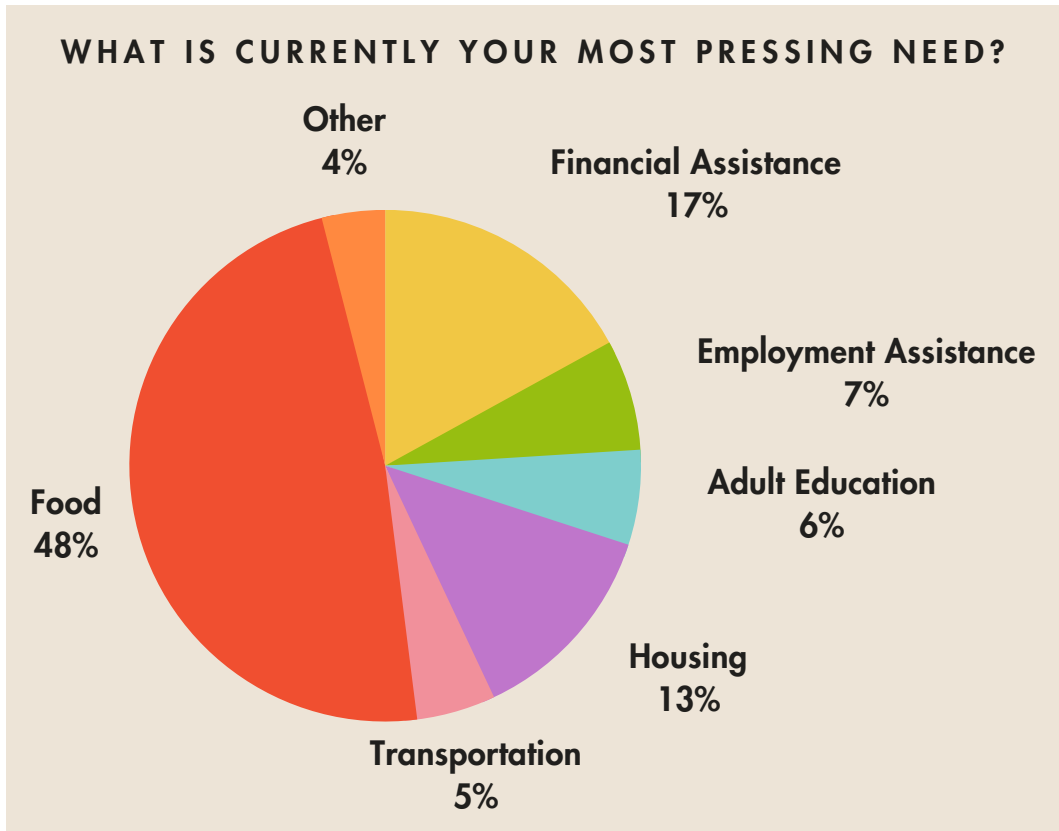


# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS:

Based on surveys conducted within the target communities, the most pressing need identified was access to food. Approximately 90% of respondents reported inconsistent access to food and many indicated that they only had enough funds to purchase food for their families some of the time.

These findings highlight the urgent need for sustainable solutions to address food insecurity and ensure that all members of the community have access to nutritious and affordable food options.

**Please see the these charts for more key findings.**





## COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT VOICES:



Here is some of the summarized feedback provided by families and community members we met at community events, focus groups, parent/caregiver meetings, and listening sessions, and stakeholder meetings.

"The community is having issues with finding food and resources that can sustain them month to month because of food allergies, disabilities, various health ailments".

"Many people in the community are growing their own fruits and vegetables in their yard. Others are complaining that they do not have that sort of expertise and the community garden seems to be off limits to them to help combat the family food insufficiency."

"Food apartheid and food deserts is a serious issue".

"Many people in the community rather have fresh fruits and veggies and easy to serve preparations for their family's needs rather than fast food and processed food. They want cooking classes and more nutritional information such as, what the stickers on the fruits and vegetables represent or what does GMO (genetically modified organism) mean. They also want this info to pass on to others."

"Programs like Fresh Access Bucks, SNAP program and Summer programs are not enough food or they believe they only serve certain populations rather than everyone. They get denied for snap many times."

"Many people have a hard time getting to food banks if they don't have reliable transportation or if the food banks are only operating during work hours."

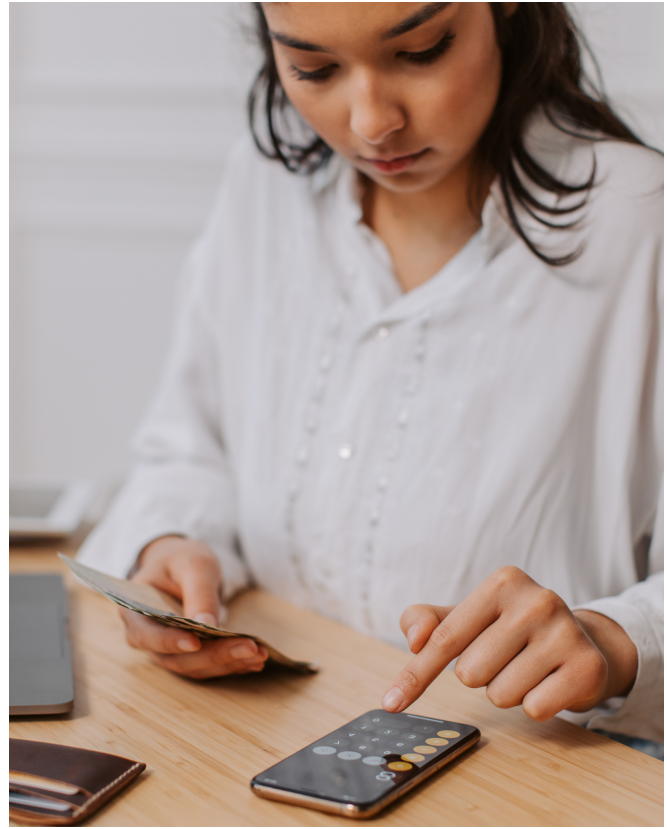


## COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT VOICES:

“Getting to food banks is sometimes difficult. Like it when programs come to the community. Metropolitan Ministries comes into the community.”

“Many people are operating on a shoestring budget and everything in society is competing for that paycheck such as high price of gas food is too expensive medical bills transportation and many other expenses are increasing food stamps do not increase with this increase in inflation.”

“Feeding Tampa Bay helps my family when my money is tight. It was good to learn about Fresh Access Bucks and that there are locations near where I live.”



Participants liked how problems were discussed but solutions were encouraged and documented at every meeting. They felt respected.

One parent/care giver said after one of our meetings, “Thank you for including us in this much needed conversation. It feels good to be asked how we feel about what’s going on in the community”.

“I have a lot of allergies so many times I have to give my food away because I am allergic to many things that are in the box. I’m learning to grow things that I can eat.”



## COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT SPOTLIGHT:

Lack of grocery stores in the community providing healthy food was not always the case according to a local Hillsborough County resident.

She shared her thoughts as to when she saw food access change in her community. She shared stories that how as a young person and up until the late 90's she remembered seeing more stores in the neighborhood which she felt helped with food insecurity. She has seen a change over the last 25 years. Popular stores now look at economics before they chose to open up in neighborhoods.

"Salvatore Greco, an Italian immigrant who sold fruit and vegetables in the streets of Tampa back in 1914. He and his wife started a grocery store from his home in 1922 and built a proper store in 1947 in Plant City, Florida. Over the course of 20 years the store changed its name to Tampa Wholesale and expanded to nine stores. The chain changed hands three times once in 1979, again in 1980, and again in 1990, going bankrupt in 1994 when it filed for bankruptcy.

The store's name was Kash n' Karry and it was one of the three largest food retailers in west-central Florida, described as Florida's largest retail-food sales market, operating 98 supermarkets, 35 liquor stores, and 2 super warehouse stores. More than half of their locations in the Tampa-St. Petersburg area were neighborhoods such as those described in this report.



It was also shared that another neighborhood grocery store, Coal City Supermarket served the citizens of East Tampa on the northeast corner of 34th Street and Buffalo Avenue (presently named Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.) in Tampa, Florida.

Another forgotten grocery store that provided to families in East Hillsborough County was, Penny Saver Grocery Store which was located at 4915 N. 34th Street in Tampa, Florida. When it went away it was a loss for the community. It was soon replaced with the Walmart on East Hillsborough and the expansion of Save-A-Lot stores.

Food deserts exist in Hillsborough County and having fresh and healthy food for all is a challenge. It shouldn't be but it is.

The community knows why no new grocery stores have been committed to certain areas. They also understand that they have no control over that. But what they do control is what they can do.



# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT SOLUTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

The below solutions came from the discussions from the Family Dinner Table meetings. It was evident that all participants shared that they want programs in the community that aim to improve food security in Hillsborough County and ensure access to nutritious food.

**Pop up Farmers Markets** • Pop up farmers markets can provide food for purchase in areas where healthy food access is a challenge

**Cooking Classes** • Classes that can show people how to prepare healthy food on a budget. Classes will increase awareness about healthier foods and can also teach and provide learning opportunities for community members to grow their own food at home or in community gardens.

**Food Co-op** • Establishing a food co-op which is a grocery store owned by people in their community. Unlike corporate chains, food co-ops are totally independent and owned by the community members who shop there. So instead of focusing on investors, food co-ops focus on their community.

**Mobile Produce Trucks** • Mobile trucks that come to community and sell fresh fruit and vegetables at, apartment complexes, neighborhoods, and churches.

**Community Gardens** • Look at unused land that can be donated and be used to create Community gardens so that the community can come together and grow wholesome and healthy food for their families. Let's provide a places for new gardeners to get their hands dirty, and for seasoned gardeners to pass their knowledge on to newcomers. Community gardens are a great way for children to learn about how food is grown and to garner an appreciation for where their food comes from.

**Agricultural Trade Education** • Revive agriculture classes in community and rekindle trades focused on agriculture, and nutrition education. There are many local farmers who grow strawberries, blueberries, and oranges who can serve as speakers and share their stories of how their families got started in the business and perhaps serve as mentors for those who seek to expand and level-up as organic gardeners of the community.



# What's Next

- Development of Community Resource guide for Family Dinner Table Partners
- Produce FDT video
- Continuation of Family Dinner Table Project by hosting monthly meetings
- Look for funding to continue the program- Applied for funding from Florida Blue



## APPENDIX:

[www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)  
Bloom Tampa Bay - Brody Wooddell  
[www.snapfeeds.us](http://www.snapfeeds.us)  
[www.fns.usda.gov/programs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/programs)  
[www.fns.usda.gov/success-story/cn/hillsborough-county-fl](http://www.fns.usda.gov/success-story/cn/hillsborough-county-fl)

*Publication designed by Raffaella Susi*



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[www.floridaimpact.org/fdtp](http://www.floridaimpact.org/fdtp)



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