

# Addressing Food Insecurity Through Community Meal Support

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### Understanding the Problem: What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is a major public health issue that affects many individuals and families in our community. Food insecurity occurs when people do not have consistent access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life. As nursing students at California Northstate University in Rancho Cordova, we explored this issue through our service-learning project by volunteering at a Community Meal night-a program created by Alchemists' Community Development Corporation-where we helped serve meals and package food for students and families experiencing food insecurity.

While statistics can show how widespread food insecurity is, personal experiences help us understand its real impact. For our project, we spoke with Erica Emerson Oresky, a behavior and lifestyle coach, who shared her experiences growing up in a household where food was scarce.

Key studies			
Study	Sample/population	Study design	Key findings
Abene et al. (14)	Meta-analysis of adults from 13 articles	Cross-sectional	Adults with food insecurity were 1.66 times more likely to have binge eating and 2.70 more likely to have binge eating disorder compared to adults without food insecurity.
Barry et al. (8)	Children aged 8-10 years from households with incomes ≤ 200% of the federal poverty line in southeastern Michigan, U.S. (N = 194)	Cross-sectional	Children with food insecurity had higher average Children's Eating Attitudes Test total scores relative to children without food insecurity. Child food insecurity was also associated with greater preoccupation with food and weight, and more

Table summarizes key studies examining the relationship between food insecurities and eating disorders. Source: Davis et al.. 2026

### A Personal Perspective: Interview with Erica O.

Erica explained that she grew up in the Bay Area with her single mother, who worked hard to provide for the family but still struggled financially. As a result, food options were often limited. She shared, *"We didn't have a lot of options for food. My mom tried to work but ended up on food stamps and welfare."*

As a child, Erica remembers times when the fear of not having enough food affected her behavior. She recalled finding money in her home and using it to buy junk food. Looking back, she explained that the behavior stemmed from a deeper emotional place. *"I was so excited about finding the money that I didn't think about my mother losing it... but when I look back, the motivation to purchase and sneak food stemmed from scarcity."*

Erica also talked about how growing up between two very different food circumstances shaped her relationship with food. At her grandmother's house there was always plenty of, treats and snacks, while at home food was very scarce. These differences eventually affected her eating behaviors later in life. She said, *"At my grandmother's house, I would get all the junk food that I wanted and I would stuff myself. Then when I was home, I felt deprived."*

Listening to Erica's story helped us understand that food insecurity can affect people far beyond childhood. It can also shape emotional wellbeing, self perception, and long term habits around food.

### *Community Meals*

As part of our service-learning experience, we volunteered at a Community Meal night for families facing food insecurity. We serve meals to children and families who do not always have consistent access to nutritious meals. Community Meal events provide more than just a meal, they create spaces where individuals feel welcomed and supported. The event is set up in a banquet style, which encourages families to interact and talk with each other.

### *Community Food Packaging*

We also worked with Alchemist' Community Food Connections to help package food for students and families going through difficult times. These food packages are delivered so that families can prepare meals at home.

Erica pointed out that food insecurity affects individuals emotionally as well as physically. She said that many of her behaviors were connected to food insecurity stemming from deeper feelings. *"The emotion that's usually tied to it is lack of self-worth, not good enough, scarcity, insecurity."*

### *Conclusion: Learning Social Determinants of Health*

Through this service-learning experience, we learned that solving food insecurity takes both compassion and support from the community. As future nurses, we know that understanding social factors such as access to food is an important part in giving effective and caring support.

## Resources

Davis, H. A., Myers, E., Serrano, E., & Misyak, S. (2026, March 6). *Detecting and addressing eating disorders among individuals experiencing food insecurity: Considerations for Dietetic Practice*. Frontiers.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/nutrition/articles/10.3389/fnut.2025.1668349/full>

*Home - alchemist CDC*. Alchemist CDC - Connecting Sacramento communities to land, food, and opportunity. (n.d.). <https://alchemistcdc.org/>

Oresky, E. (2026, January). Implications of Food Insecurity on Eating Habits. personal.

