

Giving Done Right Season 5, Episode 2 - How Federal Cuts are Impacting Local Food Banks, and what Donors Can Do With Julie Butner

Julie Butner If you're in that predicament, what's the easiest thing to let go of? You can't let go of your gas for your car. You have to get to work. You're working. You can't let go if your rent. You need a roof over your head for yourself and your family. You can't let go view your utilities because then you don't have any electricity. So the easiest thing to forego is, well, I'll live on one meal a day.

Grace Nicolette Welcome to Giving Done Right! I'm Grace Nicolette.

Phil Buchanan And I'm Phil Buchanan.

Grace Nicolette Today, our guest is Julie Butner, President and CEO of the Tarrant Area Food Bank in Fort Worth, Texas. We wanted to have Julie on the show because we're interested in learning more about the impact of the U.S. Government's funding cuts on local food banks so that we can help educate our listeners on what's happening and how they can best respond to help their local communities who are impacted by those cuts. Welcome, Julie.

Julie Butner Thank you. Glad to be here.

Phil Buchanan Julie, it's so good to meet you and we really appreciate you spending this time with us. I have seen data that suggests that Texas is now the most food insecure state. Obviously, as a result, the work at the Tarrant Area Food Bank is really vital. Can you start by telling us a little bit about what you do? I know you do more than just provide food. You have community gardens and locally grown food, but love to understand what you do and, and who it is you're serving.

Julie Butner I'll start with the data point that you mentioned, Phil. Texas is now the hungriest state in the nation, and Dallas-Fort Worth is the third hungriest metropolitan area in the United States. And so as people are moving from other areas of the country into this fast-growing Dallas- Fort Worth area, there is a subset of that population that's moving in that is working in jobs that do not pay a living wage. And so folks that are not making a living wage are the folks that we are seeing that need support from the Tarrant Area Food Bank and our network of over 500 nonprofit partner agencies. They are working, so it is surprising. But they're just not earning a living wage. We have a housing shortage. We have a childcare shortage. And when you have shortages, as you well know, supply and demand, those prices go up and it becomes unaffordable. There is a publication that the United Way puts out by area every two years called the ALICE report and within that report they provide information on what is a living wage and so when I talk about living wage I'm talking about four basic necessities: rent, utilities, gasoline for your car and food. Just those four things. And In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, you need to make \$31 an hour to cover those very basic necessities. Now you think about all the people you come across in your day to day, whether that is the waitress at your favorite restaurant or your dry cleaner, the cashier who's ringing up your groceries, they're not making \$31 an hour. And so they're either having to work multiple jobs or they need something to help fill the gap from paycheck to paycheck and are often reliant on the charitable food network.

Phil Buchanan So where do they go? I mean, you have a physical facility, but you also just mentioned 500 nonprofits you partner with. So tell us a little bit more just about the nitty gritty operationally of how this works.

Julie Butner Yeah, oftentimes the public is confused about the difference between a food bank and what we call a partner agency or a pantry. And so if you think of a food bank like Tarrant Area Food Bank, it resembles a distribution center. So U.S. Food Service, Cisco, you know, these large distributors that have big warehouses. So at my main campus, I have an 80,000 square foot warehouse that receives food six days a week from just about every retailer, distributor, manufacturer that you can think of in the Fort Worth area. So anything from HEB, Tom Thumb, Hello Fresh, just anybody that is producing food in this area that is bringing good food to the Tarrant Area Food Bank, we scan it in, we process it, and we immediately put it on a grocery list. It's an online grocery list that our partner agencies, these 500 nonprofits, can access and place an order. And then we use the wonderful support of volunteers, over 80,000 volunteer hours a year, without which we simply could not do this work. Corporations, people, churches, individuals come in and help us process, sort and send that food right back out to the non-profit. So I mean, you think about, we get a truckload of bananas or a truck load of soup and we check it into our warehouse and then we have to break it down into smaller quantities and in variety packs that our partner agencies can handle. And then we ship it back out to the partner agencies.

Phil Buchanan Julie, one more question just to understand how the organization works. Can you say a little bit about size and scope, how many people you serve, budget, staff, volunteers?

Julie Butner Sure. Tarrant Area Food Bank is one of the largest food banks in the United States, and we are part of a network of Feeding America food banks. There are 200 food banks across the United States. We cover every city, every county, every zip code in the United States with food support. The Tarrant Area Food Bank represents 13 counties. In those 13 counties, we have about 2.9 million people. And of the 2.9 million people, approximately 580,000 people are food insecure. And what that means is they are not receiving three meals a day, seven days a week. And unfortunately, and very sadly, about 25% of the 580 thousand are children in our area. We have an operating budget of around 22 million dollars, 150 million dollars if you count the food which we have to inventory and account for with the IRS that is donated to us, 150 million with that food, 125 staff members that are devoted to this work and to this mission, and about 80,000 volunteer hours a year. I have four buildings that are part of the Tarrant Area Food Bank, I have an administrative building, a distribution center, that 80,000 square feet that I mentioned, an agricultural hub where we're processing fresh produce that is coming to us from The Valley of Texas as well as Nogales, Arizona. So we're mixing fresh produce so that our neighbors are receiving nutritious food. And then I have a satellite facility that supports our seven most rural counties.

Grace Nicolette Julie, we've been seeing the federal funding cuts across the nonprofit sector, and in March a billion dollars in federal funding to food banks was cut, which I believe was half of the total federal support. As you mentioned when we met, you experienced unexpected cuts in your federal funding. Now we also see that there are cuts to SNAP, or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, and other USDA programs. So with this dwindling support, shifting more of the cost to fight hunger to the state and local level. Can you share how these cuts have affected the food bank's operations and the counties that you work in?

Julie Butner Well, I'll start with a program called LFPA. It's a Local Farmers And Producers program that was started in the Biden administration as an economic engine to support our local growers and farmers, and also support food banks. So food banks were given money to spend and buy, at retail prices, fresh produce from these local farmers. We were in the third year of a three-year grant cycle. When the administration changed and the Trump administration decided that they did not want to fund that program, that was about a million dollars for this food bank. And certainly a program that we were sorry to see leave because it really facilitated relationships with smaller growers in our local community. Fortunately, because of the Tarrant Area Food Bank's agricultural hub, we have been able to establish new relationships with growers and producers and are continuing to host farmers markets and to purchase produce from these local farmers and growers. And so it really did facilitate a relationship that is continuing today, even though the funding is no longer there.

Grace Nicolette So you all actually are an important source of income for local farmers as well. I think maybe that's something that folks don't necessarily think about. There's really like a whole supply chain here that was impacted.

Julie Butner It's a great point, the supply chain component, because I think many people don't understand. So of the budget that I mentioned, about five million of our budget goes towards purchasing food. And so the food that we receive that is donated is not always complete. I call it the two P's. The two products that we rarely get donated are fresh produce and protein. And the two P's, produce and protein, are also the most expensive things to buy at the grocery store. You know this, you go to the grocery store yourself. To buy protein, to buy produce, are the most nutritious things for a well-rounded diet, and they're also the most expensive thing. So we allocate some of the public support that we receive toward the purchase of those products so that we can offer a variety in a full and complete nutritious diet. We have plenty of food in this country to feed every single person who lives here. There is no excuse, no reason, to have hungry people. We have plenty of food. It's the logistics and making sure that we get enough food to everybody who lives in our country.

Grace Nicolette And I'm curious, did the cuts come as a surprise to you and your fellow food bank leaders? Like, did you see this coming?

Julie Butner You know, when I planned for my fiscal year budget, I had LFPA funding included, but then I also had it excluded on the cost side because with any administration, of course, new administrations want to bring their ideas and their changes and their policies forward. And so I didn't really count on that. I think we were all very surprised about the cuts that have been made to SNAP education, which has been zeroed out. It has completely been eliminated as a program across the country. No more SNAP education.

Grace Nicolette What is SNAP Education?

Julie Butner SNAP Education is a compliment to SNAP. It provides education to those community members who are eligible and receive SNAP benefits. It complements, so it's education on how to make your dollar stretch, how to use leftovers, what's the most nutritious thing to buy. And so it complements and helps to educate recipients of SNAP on how to be helpful and how to really stretch that dollar in the grocery store. And then the cuts with SNAP, the counterpart to SNAP Education, really center on additional restrictions so not as many people will be eligible to receive SNAP that previously received the SNAP

benefit. And that's really hard to quantify. And that's the real worry for food banks, because if people are dependent upon a benefit, they no longer receive it, and there's no other source of income to offset it, then naturally they're going to turn to the charitable food industry to support them and nobody really understands exactly how to quantify how many more people are going to be coming to food banks and our partner agencies, our pantries out in the community, for support.

Phil Buchanan We don't know you that well, Julie, I just met you. So you come across to me as a very steady, calm person. So I can't tell how worried you are about what's coming potentially with these snap reductions. Is this keeping you up at night? How are you thinking about it and how worried are you?

Julie Butner Very worried, will we have enough food to feed everybody who needs to be fed? So you just, you have to, you know, plan as best you can and do as much as you can and hope for the best. You know, maybe the Trump administration has ideas on other supplemental programs that they will be introducing to the country that will help offset some of the losses that we're seeing with SNAP and SNAP Education.

Grace Nicolette Can you sort of play out... I mean, I feel like some listeners, and myself included, there might be a lot of distance between sort of the communities that you serve and some of these issues that you're talking about. So can you spell out, like, what are the implications? So, someone is food insecure, their food bank doesn't have enough food for them. I can see someone really cynical saying, well, they're not going to starve, as you said, this is America. But what's your perspective on that?

Julie Butner Well, the families that we see are making trade-offs. So maybe they don't get three meals seven days a week, but maybe they have one meal seven days a week. And what's sad about that is there are long-term implications, particularly if these households have children. Children cannot learn without proper nutrition. And so if a mom or a dad is making a decision to not have a meal, that means they're making that same decision for their household. We see this a lot. We celebrated last year the installation of our 100th in-school market where we have choice markets that are inside of schools so that parents who are dropping or picking up their children can also pick up groceries if they're in need of food. And I hear frequently from those teachers and those administrators about the issues that they experience when children don't have good nutrition. They can't learn, they have a shorter attention span. They're sleeping in the classroom, and teachers who are stuffing their drawers full of snacks so that if somebody comes to them and is hungry, they have something, they're paying, the teacher's paying for it out of their own pocket. It certainly hurts the community. The other area where I see it really pronounced, and we've been working in this space, I'm a registered dietician by education, and so nutrition is something that's personal for me, not just as part of the mission. So we've been working, and in fact, we changed our mission statement to include a statement about improving the health of the community. And we've been working with healthcare providers and payers about how can we fund intervention for community members who have chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease. So if you have a chronic disease, you have healthcare costs. When you have health care costs and you're on a lower income, that's another disruptor to your ability to purchase healthy food. I tell this anecdotal story: When I first started at the food bank, I met the new CEO of the Moncrief Cancer Institute, which is a cancer treatment center here in Fort Worth. I said, we ought to do some work together because oftentimes cancer patients aren't getting the right kind of nutrition. And he said, we absolutely should. He said 36% of the people that we support with cancer treatment are food insecure. I said, 36%. Wow, I had no idea and how do you know this? And he said,

well, we asked the food insecurity question and what's interesting about this Julie is they don't present as food insecure. But once they come in and they're getting treatment, they become food insecure because now they are having to make decisions about do I pay for my treatment? Or do I pay for my food? And so we set up an intervention with the Cancer Institute here in Fort Worth for that reason, and we've been working with healthcare providers and payers to find ways for folks who have chronic diseases that are paying for medicine or paying for doctor visits or treatments to have access to medically tailored meals. And we make those medically tailored meals in our kitchen on our main campus.

Grace Nicolette I think, you know, your answer just helped me make two connections in my head that I don't think I realized before. Number one is my kid's public school does have the market where folks who need the food can come in. And I don't think I ever realized that that was probably like a food bank program. So that's really helpful to make that connection. And then the second thing I think I realize is right, like we always think, or at least this is my perhaps faulty thinking is that food banks are on the front lines, of course, and so there's sort of this tension of like, well, are you meeting immediate needs or are you treating root causes? And what I hear you saying is, look, you may not give to food banks right now, but if you give to education or if you care about healthcare, care about public health, this is an upstream issue. And so there is this real way in which you all are meeting immediate, felt needs, but also those felt needs are actually upstream of so many other things. Like, can you have kids who are succeeding academically if they're only getting one meal a day? And so that's a very interesting perspective, I think, that I didn't have before.

Julie Butner Yeah, you know, I think food banking at its origin was really about distributing emergency food for people who were experiencing some sort of crisis. They lost a job, they lost a spouse, they're not making a living wage. And I think that's where food banking really originated. And over the years, you know, as food bankers, we've come to recognize that that's not enough, that we need to be doing more than just distributing food. We need to be thinking about those root causes. And COVID, if there is a silver lining for food banking, and COVID really taught us about the importance of partnerships across the community. So we don't need to duplicate or replicate a service or a program that somebody else in the community is providing, but we do need to compliment it and work together at the solutions. And in this community in particular, our judge at the time of COVID and our mayor were both very instrumental in pulling us together. And I would say that of Denton, which is one of our northern cities, and Weatherford, one of our Western cities. Our elected officials really brought the nonprofits together to say, we're in a time of crisis. How can you work together to reach more people and have even greater impact? And then, of course, our public was incredible. And I'm very proud to say that in this community, we have historically had approximately 80% of all of our support comes from the public, not from government entities. And with the changes in SNAP, SNAP Education and LFPA, our government support is reduced to 5%. So 95% of our funding comes from people like you and me that say, hey, I'm gonna give \$5 to the food bank. And it's interesting, and we have corporations and foundations too, but it's really, really strongly weighted on individuals who decide that this is a cause that is important to them and they want to get involved.

Phil Buchanan More after the break.

BREAK

Phil Buchanan I don't expect you to comment on this, Julie, because this is not a show about politics and you're in Texas and I'm sure donors come in every, you know, ideological stripe. But it's hard for me to get my head around the idea that we would be cutting, you know, federal aid to folks for food. And to your point, so often it is children who suffer. And I care about the adults, too. And the connections that both you and Grace have made here like to issues of health care. And the idea that somebody getting cancer treatment would have to make those kinds of choices. And we tend to think of these issues in silos. And if we just have better teachers or a core curriculum, that's gonna drive the shifts we need, but you can't learn if you're hungry. And there's so many deep questions about what kind of society are we that we think this is okay. And you know, I think it's also hard because it's wonderful that donors will step up, but also our politics seems to be ruled by, I don't know, indifference to others who might need a helping hand. And it's just a sad, it's a sad state of affairs.

Julie Butner I mean, I would comment that I think people who are not supportive are just simply not educated about the issue. I have had elected officials from both sides of the aisle, as far left and as far right as you can get, that come to visit that had absolutely no idea about this operation and how it functioned. In fact, I'll tell you this anecdotal story. You know, I started at the food bank in, I think it was January 7th, 2020, and our first COVID case was March 10th, 2020, and so I'm brand new, and a few months, you know, like maybe in May, I get wind of and invited to a call. And the call was, all the nonprofits were on the call, and I came in late, and I saw I was just listening, and they were talking about, well, who has money to buy food, and the most important thing is we need to feed people, and I can get this and I can't get that. And so I interjected and I said, are you talking about buying food for folks who are losing their jobs right now? Is that what I'm hearing? Yeah. Do you realize that you have this resource in this community that has an 80,000 square foot facility chock full of food because at that time the government was directing food that was intended to go outside of our country's borders back into because we didn't know how this thing spread. And we couldn't do that interchange across the borders. And so they were giving the food to the food banks and asking them to use the food to help people who were suffering. And we had unbelievable food. Let me just tell you, it was the best of the best food. I would go into my warehouse and think, there is not a grocery store in my community that has food that looks this good. It was just really first-class food. And I invited the big nonprofits on that call. I said, you need to come to the distribution center and see what we're sitting on over here. This is a community resource that is paid for by the community. And nobody should be buying food. The food is here. So I say that all, Phil, to say, I think people who really, the passion that you expressed, like nobody can believe that we have people who are food insecure in our country. And it's not just elected officials, corporate executives and all kinds of people who come in here for the first time that have no idea about the issue, the misconception that, oh, these are people who are homeless or they don't have a job and they're not working. You know, okay, yes, we feed those people too. That is a fraction of the community members that utilize our service. We are supporting working people who simply are not making enough to pay for all the basic necessities. And so think about that. If you're in that predicament, what's the easiest thing to let go of? You can't let go of gas for your car. You have to get to work, you're working. You can let go of your rent. You need a roof over your head for yourself and your family. You can't let go of your utilities because then you don't have any electricity, although sometimes they do make that decision, we know. So the easiest thing to forego is, well, I'll live on one meal a day.

Phil Buchanan I hear that and I think it's so important that people understand working people are food insecure. I also wish we cared about people who aren't working for

whatever struggles they're experiencing, including addiction and mental illness. And, you know, I think you're so generous in your interpretation of human behavior and to say it's about ignorance. I think there's, you know, I worry that there's a cruelty in our society as well. As sort of selfishness that, that we've lost sight of the moral imperative to care for people regardless of their circumstances and without judgment and with love and understanding. And I do think it is important for you to make the point that many folks are working and I think that's important to counter some of those who want to say, well, essentially what they're really saying is it's your fault. But I also think it's important to just extend that help to anyone who needs it, you know, and, and I feel like our country is moving away from that ethic.

Grace Nicolette I really resonate with that, Phil. And I guess I want to stay on this point for a minute. Julie, I feel like over the years, I've talked to many donors who, if I want put it the most charitably, which I think you are also, as Phil said, you're very gracious about this, is I do feel like there can be, with some donors, an over belief in the power of markets. So one might say, well, maybe cuts to food assistance will incentivize these folks to work harder and get higher paying jobs? Or isn't it a good thing that you are now less reliant on the government and more reliant on the community? Doesn't this actually force those people to make decisions that would then land their families in a better place with higher paying jobs and all of that? Can you just talk about that? Because unfortunately, I do feel like, we hear this a lot, right? Folks who are again, not close to the issue who think, you know, hard work is the answer to everything. Some of that thinking is actually what's behind some of these cuts, right? Like the market will just fix everything.

Julie Butner Good golly, we saw this firsthand during COVID, right? Like, people are one paycheck away from being completely without any reserve and could lose their house, could lose their job. And that's part of the fear of these cuts that are coming up. You know, we saw the jobs report recently. What happens when we start having an economic downturn and those who are most vulnerable among us are most impacted by these downturns. I always try to liken it, Grace, to crisis. How do you help people emotionally tie to this issue? Life is crisis. Maybe you are Pollyanna, and you don't have a crisis in your life until you're 50 years old. But life presents crisis, whether that's a job loss. ALICE, we talk about ALICE. Asset limited income constrained employed. It's a female. That's our number one client, a working mom who doesn't have a husband or a spouse or somebody else in the household also working. They have children, asset limited. They don't own the house. They don't have any assets. Asset limited. Income constrained. They're working, but it's just not enough, employed. That's are number one, our number-one client. And Phil, we of course take care of people who are without a home. People who are on a fixed income, are elderly, that can't handle inflation and double-digit rise in food costs that we've seen in this country the last three or four years. Drug addicted, of course. We are partnered with a lot of organizations that are addressing those root causes. Night shelters, the homeless coalition that are helping bring community members into houses. We provide food to all those entities as well. It's a partnership. When I'm talking to community members and elected officials, like nobody is exempt from possibly having this experience. You assume automatically, Phil, that the homeless or the drug addicted are in this predicament, and they are. What you don't realize, oftentimes, is that it could be your neighbor

Phil Buchanan Absolutely.

Julie Butner who lost their job and suddenly they can't do it. Or it could be your friend you play tennis with who just is going through a divorce and has three kids at home and hasn't

worked in 10 years and now suddenly can't afford to feed her children, you know, three times a day, seven days a week.

Phil Buchanan Can we go back to this point, it's all related, but that Grace was making about the skepticism that some donors have about, well, you're not affecting the root cause. You're just putting a Bandaid on. And I remember, I remember like 15 years ago, there's this guy who was a head of evaluation at a big foundation. And he and I spent most of our interactions just like yelling at each other, arguing because we had different views of the world. I remember he, smart guy, and I remember he wrote this piece and he said, and he was very critical of philanthropy, you know, because all we're doing is just perpetuating these broken systems. And his piece literally opened with the argument that if you feed a hungry person, it's pointless because you haven't changed anything. And, I wrote something taking him on, which he didn't like very much, but I said, well, you know what you have changed something because the person not hungry anymore. And it may be that you bridged a gap that was really important. And, and I think Grace made the point about all the connections to things like learning and so on, but I guess, what would you say to donors? Like, how would you convince them that supporting food banks is really important when they say, Oh no, I want to change systems. I want to affect root causes. What, what would be your best argument that you would marshal back to that person?

Julie Butner Well, I mean, you can't do those things, the advanced things, if you don't have the basic things. I mean somebody who's hungry isn't going to have the energy to go out and move the mountain and get the better job and, you know, all those other things. It's so basic. Holy cow, just like having a house. If you don't a roof over your head, how can I expect you to show up for work every day? So, I mean, you gotta take care of the basics, and it's just, it's a terrible thing that this country has people living in it that don't just have the basic provisions. There is just no reason for it. There's no excuse. It's just so basic and elementary. So I mean, my best argument, Phil, is just if you don't have nutrition, it's a basic fundamental and I believe truly a right of every person in this country to have access to the food they need to be healthy and to thrive and go seek education and go seek jobs. But if you have those basic necessities, it's the foundation. The rest of the blocks can't be built.

Grace Nicolette It's so interesting because I feel like donors often say to us, oh, I want to make sure I'm having an impact. Well, listening to you, I can't help but reflect, there's guaranteed impact if you give to a food bank. And so sometimes I wonder, what is keeping us, I think, from being more generous in that area? And I think my second thought is, I do wonder whether we just want things to fit in these very convenient little containers. We don't really understand exactly how the world works. And we read into things like our own money scripts, like growing up, or if we were raised by folks who were very much up by the bootstraps kind of people, we may be unfamiliar with just how important providing food is and what a difference it can make. And it is not about sort of laziness or being allowed to be stuck in a certain kind of pattern or rut economically. And so it's just interesting. I do find that like we often cast our own kind of overlay of how we view money and how we view hard work onto this work. But actually, like, it seems like this is a really easy way for donors to make sure they're making an impact in their community.

Phil Buchanan There's another angle to this too, Grace, which is like, it also goes to how people think about the structure of society. So we also hear from what I'll call more sort of left politically donors, right? This sense of, well, this should be the government's responsibility. Why would I give to a food bank? There should be taxation at a level that allows for the things that you just said, Julie, should be a right, to be literally a right. You're

born in this country. You will not be hungry. You will have access to healthcare. You will have a roof over your head. And there's a lot of folks who would say, this should be government's responsibility and who will go so far as to say, therefore, I don't wanna philanthropically support this because I'm then enabling a broken system in which the government isn't providing that sort of basic safety net. I'm curious if you have a reaction to that.

Julie Butner Well, I would say that the current government doesn't agree with you, Phil. And so it is all of our responsibilities to step up. This is our country. These are our communities. It is incumbent upon everybody who lives in this country to take action and step up and support. And so at the moment we have an administration who does not believe it is the government's role to provide this support at this level. And so that means the public has to step up and bridge the gap. And I will say this too, you know, food banking started in the 60s by the Catholic Church. Churches play a very, very important role in helping us with distributing food and addressing food insecurity. In fact, at the Terran Area Food Bank, more than 60% of our partner agencies are faith-based organizations, and we work very, very closely with them. And so you see that shift. Different administrations have different viewpoints. My opinion on that was, is, so be it. If an administration doesn't want to support it, then the public should. And if we're in a situation where the administration wants to get more involved in it, well, then that provides a different degree of support. But it is incumbent upon every single one of us to take action and be a part of the solution. It's so basic. Again, there's no excuse for people not having access to the food they need to thrive. And I will say this other piece, while we're very, very disappointed in what has happened with SNAP education and that we haven't yet seen a replacement for the LFPA program, the federal government does still play a very important role in other programs that they fund, the Emergency Food Assistance Program. I mean, we continue to receive great support. It's different, it's shifting, it is changing. I'm hopeful that new programs will come about, but I think we're all just very frustrated with the fact that we continue to have people in our country that don't have access to the food they need. This should not be.

Grace Nicolette How do you know that you're making an impact with sort of the better quality food? And I don't know why when you were talking earlier, I was thinking to myself, man does not live by Cheetos alone. You know what I mean? Like, I'm sure you get a lot of processed food, but how do you know that the healthy food is being consumed, I guess?

Julie Butner Well, we have a great inventory system, so we know exactly by product what kind of food we're receiving and what kind of food we're distributing. We also have healthy guidelines that we follow, and so we actually color categorize product, green being the most healthiest, then yellow and then red for the least frequency.

Phil Buchanan For the Cheetos.

Julie Butner I mean, she said Cheetos, I like Cheetos and wine.

Phil Buchanan Me too.

Julie Butner But we have a nutrition policy council that helps to establish nutrition policies and guidelines that we abide by as a food bank. But then beyond that, when we talk about food distribution, which is where food banks originated, and very important part of our work is providing emergency support to people in need of food. But the other side of the work that we do, which we call shortening the line or programs to help end hunger or reduce

food insecurity rates. We do a great deal of work in that area. The healthcare partnerships that I mentioned earlier do have health outcomes tied to them. Where we're measuring pre and post biometric data, as well as behavioral assessment of changes that are being made after receiving nutrition education. And we know those programs work. We've been doing that for a number of years now. We also have very strong gardening and education programs. Over a hundred garden, small garden, partnerships where we provide seeds for food, equipment to garden, to churches, to individuals, to other nonprofits, so that people can learn, even in an apartment, you can grow tomatoes and cucumbers. And for folks that are coming from other countries that maybe don't know about the produce that we grow here to learn how to prepare it, how to cook it, how to make it last. So we provide those types of educational supports, a lot of programming. We work very closely with the veterans. We have a large veteran community here in the Tarrant area. And so we're working with a lot of different veteran groups, a lot of ways of measuring besides just measuring what type of food are we receiving and what type a food are we distributing. We know that the nutrition is critical.

Grace Nicolette So it seems like there's just so many facets of the work. So if someone is listening and they're thinking to themselves, Ok, I'm sold. Where do I find my local food bank?

Julie Butner If they go to the Feeding America web page, you can enter in your state and it will list all of the food banks that are located in your state and you can find the one that's closest to you. And I always recommend if you have not been exposed to the work and you're now interested, maybe we've enlightened and sparked a flame with some folks and hopefully that's the case. Go visit; all of the food banks offer volunteer opportunities. We have volunteer opportunities in our kitchen, in our gardens, assisting with nutrition education, in addition to the very important work in the distribution center of repackaging product. Go volunteer. Call the food bank and ask for a tour and let them describe the work that they're doing. A lot of the work we're doing across the country is consistent and the same. But then there are pockets of food banks that are doing unique work, and that's how we learn from one another in the program area with measured outcomes and measured success. That's how all we learn and become more innovative and hopefully have an impact on food insecurity.

Grace Nicolette Could you say a little bit about whether food banks need cash or food directly from donors. You know, some of us as kids, we helped our moms round up the about to expire cans in our pantry and we donated them. And now that I'm an adult, I'm like, oh, I can't believe we did that. That's terrible. That's actually not what they need. And so can you tell us a little bit about how you think about that?

Julie Butner Yeah, I think when food banks started, the idea of canned food drives and pulling things from your own cupboard and bringing them down was the thinking and that's just not the case anymore. When you're dealing with thousands and thousands of people, it's actually inefficient to have a bag of something that somebody brought from their home to try to bring that into the warehouse and process it. These are very, very large distribution centers that are processing thousands and thousands of pounds a day. And so the bulk is what we need. If you have smaller quantities, and I sometimes still get those phone calls and inquiries and I direct them to our partner agencies, which are much smaller organizations that could benefit from that. The other thing I would mention is we have a very large supply chain network. If the Tarrant Area Food Bank is spending \$5 million a year on purchasing food, protein and produce, that's hard to get from donations, you can imagine across the country, there are 200 of us, the amount of food that we're

purchasing to provide food into our communities. So we have a supply chain arm within the FANO network and we aggregate the volume of those purchases to negotiate the lowest prices possible because we're working on limited budgets. And so the best way for us to get food is through our own supply chain arm rather, you know, and the donations, of course, from big manufacturers and retailers rather than from individual community members. So the best thing an individual community member can do to support the mission of ensuring that everybody has access to nutritious food is one, to volunteer your time to help us with the food. Two, donate your dollars. All of us have websites. You can go online and provide a donation to your local food bank. Or three, advocate, as Phil has done so well today, about the issues and that this is a basic human right and people should have access, no matter who they are. If they live in this country, they should have access to nutritious food. And you can really get involved in advocacy and talking to your locally elected officials. And talking to other community members who are maybe not as knowledgeable about the issue and helping them better understand it.

Grace Nicolette Is volunteering at a food bank something that folks can bring their kids to do?

Julie Butner Yes, it's such a great opportunity. You can volunteer with your family. We have a lot of families that come in during the holiday season. They help us with big holiday distributions. You can volunteer in the summer when your kids are out of school at local gardens. So they're outside in the fresh air and they're helping to grow food. You can volunteer in community kitchens, making healthy food ready to eat so that community members who are working have access to nutritious food that's easy to prepare for their families. There are just endless possibilities in terms of volunteering. It's your family, your coworkers. I mean, we have, American Airlines comes out frequently and they bring everybody. In fact, it has become so popular at American Airlines, they tell me, that within 24 hours the volunteer signup sheet is completely full and they can't take any more volunteers. So corporations, it's great team building. We have birthday parties here. We've celebrated anniversaries. So people will bring their friends to have their birthday at the food bank and they work together in the volunteer center. So there's just wonderful ways to engage in volunteering at your local food bank.

Phil Buchanan Julie, before we wrap up, I mean, I would just say, listening to you, it's clear what a big complicated operation you run. So it takes a lot of executive skill and talent to be the CEO of a big, complicated organization, which makes me wanna know why you do this, as opposed to any number of other things you could do. What has drawn you to this work and why do you keep doing it?

Julie Butner Yeah, I think for me, it pulled a lot of the experiences that I had had in the for-profit world under one umbrella. I had worked in health care, I had worked in food systems management. I'm a dietician by education, so I saw a lot folks whose health was impacted by not having access to good nutrition. But for me another very significant draw was just feeling more a part of the community and trying to do something about the community being more stable and having a more healthful community for everybody living in the community. Not just those who are of means, but really lifting up people who need help and support. And again, if you're a Pollyanna and you've never had a crisis, it may be hard to associate the sense of responsibility if you see somebody who needs help, who is suffering. But if you've had any crisis in your life, you probably can connect the dots pretty quickly.

Grace Nicolette Thank you so much for all that you do Julie and thanks so much for joining us today.

Phil Buchanan Yeah, thank you, Julie.

Julie Butner Yeah, thank you both, I've enjoyed the conversation and I appreciate you having me on the show.

Phil: There are a slew of resources about effective giving on The Center for Effective Philanthropy's website, cep.org, as well as givingdoneright.org, where you'll find all of our episodes and show notes.

Grace: You can also send us a note at gdrpodcast@cep.org.

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