Facing Hunger
in Manhattan, KS

An affiliate of
The Facing Project
It is a tentative balance between self-sufficiency and need. One item on the scale gets tipped and the balance is lost. The loss of a job, unforeseen illness in the family, physical disability, divorce or domestic violence can lead to financial strain enough to cause new dependence on not for profit food assistance programs. Whatever the cause of food insecurity, thankfully there are resources like the Flint Hills Breadbasket food bank in Manhattan, Kansas to help many in need.

The stories of some of the patrons of the Breadbasket are chronicled in this book, as told to students of the Kansas State University Staley School of Leadership Studies. The stories of those in need, accessing food resources for the first time or for the 100th time, are poignant and very representative. College educated, currently in school, U.S. citizen or not, veteran, young or old, people tell their stories and we learn from their words. The Breadbasket is more than a food dispensary—although that is critically important.

The food bank is a resource center, with committed staff to offer help and comfort at a time patrons are feeling embarrassed, humbled, depressed, and with little control. Patrons tell stories expressing hope for the future. All express thanks for a service they need and was made available to them, and how they look forward to when their dependence on the Breadbasket is over.

The stories in this book show how close any of us are to a tipped balance, how much like us the storytellers are and how we can all help right the balance. My sincere thanks to our students who have taken time to talk with patrons, learn their stories, and share them. There are thousands of reasons an individual may need to access food at a food pantry, soup kitchen or food bank. No one story is the same as another. No assumptions can be made, no judgment should be given. We all need to face hunger, address its many causes, and take action, as the effects of hunger are profound and long lasting.
Manhattan, Kansas is home of Kansas State University, the Fort Riley Army Post, and a relatively stable economy. There is no shortage of community pride with steady employment growth and easy access to the arts, sporting events, and the beautiful Flint Hills. I frequently interact with families who are thriving, but there is also a demographic I work with every day for whom our average citizen has a blind spot.

I am a community outreach pastor at a local church and I partner with a network of organizations, including Manhattan’s mental health clinic, free medical clinic, emergency shelter, food pantry network and dozens of other charitable social services whose employees are working at or over capacity providing direct services. They constantly navigate political, economic, and social institutions to meet the needs of the poor. Still, there is a 100-person waiting list for subsidized housing, a shelter that occasionally overflows, a growing number of working, but undocumented families, and over 250 children’s families self-identifying and taking on the stigma of homelessness.

We create a false dualism of two Manhattans when we willfully remain in disbelief or are too busy to recognize that being poor is not all about choice and bad decisions. People in this demographic are living with disabilities, the effects of generational poverty, and many still contribute through their services in jobs to help make this community thrive.

The people in the stories you are about to read are real survivors; with their voices we introduce you to the very real and complex nature of hunger and poverty that affect not only the poor, but everyone in our community. In this book, you will read not about strangers, but about your neighbor’s faith and failure, pride and humiliation, generosity and need. Our hope is that in these parallels, in the impossible decisions these individuals make every day to survive, you will see your neighbor and yourself in a new light.

Our society is quick to tell and dissociate with a narrative of takers and abusers of the system. When recast as potentially thriving contributors and neighbors, we believe there is an unprecedented opportunity to develop the internal and external resources necessary to actually see all of our neighbors thrive. Ultimately, our hope is that the “two Manhattans,” the false dualism, the story of us and them, will be transformed. There is great opportunity to rewrite a new and true narrative of ONE Manhattan where we celebrate our abundance to the extent that it would be impossible to abuse, and unnecessary to turn away any neighbor who says: “I am hungry,” “I am homeless,” or “I am sick.”
Editor's Preface
Lori Kniffin & Kara Cavalli

Over the last decade, the issue of hunger has been capturing the attention of students and faculty in throughout the Staley School of Leadership Studies. Our introduction course mobilizes over 900 students each fall to collect canned goods for the Flint Hills Breadbasket, HandsOn Kansas State collaborates with Harvesters on mobile food distributions, and our nonprofit class delivers meals to seniors in the area through our local Friendship Meals program. The Facing Project has presented the opportunity to go beyond service and learning to contribute to the conversation in Manhattan.

Over the course of a year, two junior level leadership courses worked with the community to plan and facilitate this project. The project was filled with uncertainty. How many stories should there be? What are the best questions to ask? How do we encourage people to share their stories? And what does any of this have to do with leadership?

Students in the second course visited with individuals utilizing the Flint Hills Breadbasket in March 2014. This was the turning point in the entire process. After visiting with these mothers, fighters, caretakers, lifelong learners and others, the students realized these individuals wanted to tell their stories, and they wanted people to listen. The students recorded the stories and translated them into writing. These are the stories you are about to read; these are the faces of hunger in Manhattan, Kansas.

Although these stories will tug at your heartstrings and spin the wheels in your mind, they should also spark curiosity. What else have these storytellers experienced since March? Whose stories are untold? What happens now?

When we first started this project, publishing this book was our final goal. Now we understand it is just the beginning of a lifelong commitment to listening and learning from those around us, and this has everything to do with leadership! Once you read these stories we hope you will share in the responsibility of continuing this conversation to strengthen our community.
The Facing Project connects people through stories to strengthen communities.

The project inspires communities to organize and share the stories of citizens through the talent of local writers and actors, and provides the tools necessary to develop projects so that community organizers can easily showcase the stories to bring attention to, and create dialogue around, issues and topic areas within a community.

Founded in 2012 in Muncie, Indiana, by J.R. Jamison and Kelsey Timmerman—and hailed by The Huffington Post as one of three oral history projects to watch—The Facing Project is in communities across the U.S. facing issues from human trafficking, to homelessness, to hunger, and more.

To learn more about The Facing Project or to start a project in your community, visit: www.facingproject.com
The Story of a MOTHER

I woke up this morning with a feeling in my gut. I know today is going to be hard. I go into the kitchen to open up my fridge knowing I won’t find anything in there. The emptiness that looks back at me is almost too much. We have no food, no milk, just one lonely piece of chicken. I have nothing to give my son before he goes to school. Days like this I don’t know what to do. I have $0.18 in my bank account and I don’t get paid for three more days. I can go with little food until then, but my son doesn’t deserve that. No child deserves that.

I drop my son off at school and drive to the food pantry. As I check in and sit down I have to fight the tears that have come to my eyes. I am so thankful for the help they give. They have always helped me when I needed it, but I have tried very hard to stay up on my own feet. I never thought it would be like this. I have worked hard to make a better life for my son. I went to school to earn a degree. I drove miles daily to get the education I knew I needed to provide for my child. I struggled while going to school but knew that in the end this would help me keep food on the table.

No one prepared me to expect the unexpected. No one told me that one day my full time job may be reduced to 26 hours a week. No one mentioned that the car brakes may go out one week and I will have no choice but to replace them. No one told me that one day I would have $0.18 to my name and a young growing child to provide for. I never knew that it would be this hard.

I know that without the food I am getting today I would not be able to feed my son for the next week. I could eat Ramen the rest of my life and not worry about this money issue, but I cannot create that life for my son. He is the most important thing in my life, and I will do anything to make sure he has a good life. This is why I am sitting in this waiting room, still on the verge of tears. I am here today to get food just so I can make it by. I am here so tomorrow I can feed my son before I send him off to school.

I sit here thankful yet still full of hope. One day I know that I will not need this help. Instead of coming to sit in the waiting room for food, I will be the one volunteering to give out food. I sit here today, because I have hope that tomorrow I will be able to come here and help others. For right now that is all I need. That is enough for me to wipe the tears from my eyes and sit confidently that life will not always be a series of struggles. One day my son will feel satisfied after every meal he eats, and I will continue working until we get to that point.

As told to Autumn Snesrud
The gas station just cut my hours, and the hospital my wife was a nurse at became a physically violent place, so I’ve had to go back to the food bank. Since we’re only working part time, I don’t make enough money with Social Security to feed us, really. We eat pretty simply. We don’t eat out at all, but that’s okay because I like to cook.

It’s not just about having money to buy food. It’s about having money to buy the right kind of food. My wife and I try to eat fruits and vegetables, you know, a balanced diet. We don’t eat a lot of meat. My wife is not a vegetarian, not a vegan, but she’s pretty darn close, I guess you could say.

We have two neighbors on either side of us about our age. When I’m cooking breakfast for two of us, it’s just easier to cook for four, you know? So I do that and I help my neighbors out. One of our neighbors is diabetic and he went into a coma. I had to call 911 on him three times in two weeks. He’s in assisted living now. He can’t taste and he’s got diabetes, so it’s really hard on him. He got down to like 90 pounds and that’s really why I started taking him food. The guy was wasting away.

I don’t know if it’s winter related, but my wife and I have both been going through some depression kind of stuff, so your appetite kind of changes, you know? One of the problems I have had is that I’m hungry a lot, but I can’t think of anything that sounds good. I’m really hungry, but sometimes I just can’t eat, which is not good. But we eat pretty simply.

It’s kind of humiliating for me to come to the food bank. But a person has to eat.

As told to Hannah Gordon
The Story of a 
FUTURE EDUCATOR

Most people don’t think college students struggle with hunger. And most college students are good at hiding their hunger. But for me hunger has become a prevalent issue. I go to K-State and this opportunity to go to college is the dream my dad has for all of his children. It’s why he moved us here from Mexico. With parents that have done nothing but give, it is impossible to feel comfortable asking for more. After some time at K-State, I left my job at the bank and returned home because college had become too expensive. When I came back to school I knew I had to find help.

I am the first generation from my family to go to college. Because I am not a citizen of this country, I am not eligible for scholarships, grants, or certain loans. My parents are paying for all of my college, as well as the rest of my siblings’ education. I have a younger brother who is a freshman in high school. He has trips and activities that cost money. I want him to have these experiences and to be able to have enough money to go. Knowing my parents’ large financial burden, I try to not ask too much of them because they already do so much for me.

Returning to K-State I have not been able to find another job because I do not have a work visa. Still, I have a lot of expenses. I am an education major and weekly travel from Manhattan to Ft. Riley for field experience and the gas costs add up. I have been running behind on my electric payments, while still needing to keep fueling my car, and my responsibilities have been starting to add up.

Food has fallen farther down on my priority list. It has been difficult to swallow my pride and actually admit that I need help, let alone actually ask for it. At the Breadbasket they not only help me with food once a week but have also connected me with a company that sets up payment plans for my bills. I am now working part time and doing the best I can financially. Without the Breadbasket and other resources I wouldn’t be making the progress that I am now. I can’t wait to graduate and teach on the East Coast knowing that my determination brought me to that place.

As told to Brady Heidrick
My mother had an eleventh grade education. She got married because she got pregnant, but she had a love of education so she always had us reading. I have five degrees. I have my Master’s in social work, psychology, counseling, administration of justice, and a Bachelor and Master’s in education. I have always been one of those people who like to explore, always on the go, never satisfied. I was working on my doctoral degree and volunteering in Africa when I had a brain aneurism. I guess God decided to sit me down, and now I’m searching for what I was meant to do.

My brain aneurism changed my life. I was in a nursing home for about nine to ten months, paralyzed on one side of my body. When I came out of my coma I called my niece who lives here in Kansas. I do not have any children of my own. I don’t know how I knew my niece’s number, but I called and she answered. The next day my niece was in Pennsylvania to get me. For not knowing her well beforehand, she has been there through it all with me.

Now I am healthy, I feel good, but I still have short-term memory issues. I can lay something down, walk away, and forget all about it. I have a good income and could take care of myself if I did not have these mental health issues. All of the medical expenses with my aneurism have put me in a financial bind and my niece doesn’t know I come to the Breadbasket. She would be upset. I come here because I am independent. I don’t like to ask her for everything; it would be too psychologically devastating.

But I feel blessed. I feel blessed that I am alive and that I know how to find resources. I do not believe in being hungry and the Breadbasket allows me to focus on things that I have to buy.

As told to Lauren Fahsholtz
The Story of a

My adopted mother made me who I am. I watched my mother be killed right in front of my face. Duct taped and thrown into a closet. I was severely abused as a child. Born with fetal alcohol syndrome. I'm very easily addicted to drugs and alcohol. I've been addicted to pain pills.

I was a drug dealer in Junction City. I used to sell marijuana, crack, cocaine. Got busted in '03. Did my time, got out. So I'm all clear. I was lucky enough to have the strength to fight it.

My adopted dad was in the Marine Corps. He taught me some survival skills. If you’re not going to fight for your own right and your own life you might as well just bury yourself. If you say you’re going to give up you might as well bury yourself. I don’t believe in giving up. The day I give up you might as well bury me.

I'm a fighter. As much abuse as I went through I had to teach myself survival. I lived under a bridge in Louisiana. I lived there for 10-11 months doing odd jobs. Then someone started giving me money and I had to get out. I didn’t want no one feeling sorry for me, you know? I wasn’t asking for handouts.

I tried to work my way through life. I’ve been a truck driver, paramedic, nurse. I took different college courses. I went to Nashville University online, but I just wasn’t happy with it, so I quit. If I haven’t tried it, I’m going to. If I don’t know something, I'll ask. I can watch you do something and pick it up easy. I’m not saying I’m better than anyone else because I’ll be doggone if I am. I’m as equal as anyone else. We may have had all different lifestyles or parents. We have had all different growing up or teaching. It doesn’t matter, you know. We’re all individuals. We all have talents.
Me, I want to help people.
Helping other people is my thing.
I try to give back; I donate clothes that don’t
fit me no more.
I help people find resources for bills, housing,
schools, whatever.
Someone needs help?
Call me.
They need a volunteer?
Here’s my number.

I’m disabled. I am really messed up pretty bad
in my physical parts.
But I can still sit or stand for a little bit and I can help
with answering phones.
Some of the richer people, they kind of think,
“Oh they can do it, get a job.”
I don’t like that attitude.
You show me that attitude I’ll tell you to hit the door.
I said, “God put us all on this earth for a reason.”
My reason, I’ve always known this,
was to help other people.

As told to Allyssa Barrios
The Story of a Librarian

Hunger can happen to anyone, from any background. You never know how quickly things can change. Growing up, my life was safe, comfortable, and full. I had no idea any of this would happen.

I used to live in Kansas City and had a good job at Johnson County Libraries. Starting at an entry level, checking in books, I worked up to the position of assistant librarian. Eventually, I was placed in charge of all the Johnson County Library branches. I had done everything right.

One day, I was violently raped.

Shortly after, I met my future husband. He was a body builder and he made me feel safe. I didn’t think anyone could hurt me when I was with him. We got married and moved to Wamego to help run my family’s business. There we did what married people do, bought a house and opened joint bank accounts. I worked at the business and put him through school because I believed in him and believed in us.

But then he started getting violent with me.

I came home from work one day and there was a note on the refrigerator saying that he had left me for someone he met online. It said he had sold our home, taken the car, and cleared out all of our accounts. Later, I found out he was caught cooking and selling meth out of our car. The car and all of the money he had taken were seized by the state of Missouri.

He took everything. I had nothing. I had to sleep in a friend’s garage and had no transportation.

Then, I developed a rare form of arthritis. It took many years, but I am now on disability. I have good days and bad days and because of that I can’t work. On my goods days I am able to get up, take a shower, and get dressed. But on the bad days I have to crawl to get to the bathroom. I can’t even get to my mailbox. I have no support or help from my family. They disowned me.

I never imagined this would happen to me, but this is my story. Everything can change in a second. Hunger can happen to anyone.

As told to Allie Miller
The Story of a Veteran

I am a thirty six year old Army Veteran. I served thirteen years in the military and during that time I was deployed three times. I joined the military to be able to do something amazing like serve my country and found out that I would be able to go to college during my time in the army. Nobody in my family had ever gone to college before, so I was excited to have the opportunity to do so. While I was in the army, I earned my associate degree as well as a bachelor’s degree. I do love to go to school and learn. I am actually in the process of working on my second bachelor’s degree in biology! I guess you could say I'm kind of a nerd!

The second and third time I was overseas, I was injured multiple times. Not only did I have to have constructive knee surgery, I also had back and neck injuries, was diagnosed with PTSD, and was exposed to some kind of chemical that gave me internal injuries. As you can imagine, this has made everyday living a struggle.

After I got back to the United States, I was stationed here in Manhattan. I am having a hard time finding a job because of all of my injuries. Since I am retired I am able to get pension from the military but that money doesn't go far. Sometimes I look back and ask myself if joining the military was a good choice for myself. I have a couple of degrees but I can't even find a job because of the injuries I got when I was deployed to serve my country.

I am now a single father of two beautiful children. Unfortunately, the mother of my children and I could not make things work so we got a divorce. I am lucky to have half custody and be very involved in my kids’ lives. But it is hard. It's hard to have to watch your kids go without things that they want or need. It’s hard to not be able to do anything about it but promise them that one day everything will be better. Some days I am just happy that my kids have full bellies even if I don't have anything to eat myself.

Every month is a stretch but I always find a way to make ends meet although it's slim pickings. I come to the Breadbasket twice a month and I must say that this has been such a huge help to my little family. I have seen other people worse off and I can't imagine being in their position. I hope and pray that this is only a temporary situation.

As told to Alyssa Casanova
The Story of a Caretaker

I grew up in Wyoming. When I lived there with my family I had a good job and we were well off. We were not super wealthy or anything but there was always food on the table and we lived comfortably. My two children had the things that they needed and we lived in a pretty decent house in a good neighborhood. Fourteen months ago that all changed.

My daughter developed a severe medical condition. I lost my job because I had to take too much time off trying to care for her. We traveled around the country trying to find different medical facilities. We needed to find a doctor who could figure out what the issue was and how to help her get better. Unfortunately, we did not have much luck. Seeing all of these different doctors and traveling around began to get quite expensive. I quickly depleted the majority of my savings account and did not have a consistent source of income.

Trying to help my daughter is how we ended up in Manhattan, Kansas. She is currently at Via Christi being treated. My son and I have an apartment together near the hospital. He is trying to get a job but so far he has been unsuccessful. If my son finds a job then maybe we will be able to afford food again. Currently I am living off of Social Security, but between medical bills for my daughter and rent, there is rarely much left over for food or other expenses. Every day we have to make the decision, do we want to buy food or pay rent? I go to the Flint Hills Breadbasket at least once a week. If I am in the area, then I will sometimes stop by more than that. Without the Breadbasket, I do not think we would ever be able to eat.

Hunger is very frightening. We never know exactly how much food we will have or where it will come from. We have to plan out our day really well and be very careful. We have to watch what we do very closely. Now that I have established where to get assistance from it has become doable. Still, hunger is humiliating. I do not like having to ask for food or other basic necessities. It is embarrassing. I am sixty-two years old and I have never had to ask for help before.

As told to Andrew Knott
The Story of a
GARDENER

I'm addicted.
Addicted to daylilies.
I'm in three daylily clubs.
One in Salina, Topeka, and Manhattan.

Have you ever heard of ditch lilies?
They are orange and yellow, so beautiful.
Gardening has been my everything.
My hobby, my job, and my love.

Gardening has taken me to many places.
From Waterloo, Iowa, to Southern Minnesota.
I also spent time in the Navy.
Traveled all the way to Scotland.

Now I'm in a mobile home park.
I garden in five other yards.
My heart attack forced me to retire
Had a double-bypass a few years after.

This program has really saved my life.
I still owe $100,000 for my surgery.
I run out of money by the fifth of the month.
Anything I can get here is great, a luxury.

I go to Wal-Mart a lot.
Take my time looking at their plants.
My friend from the daylily club works there.
She’s my sunshine.

My daylily club will have a sale at the mall.
We bring flowers to the sale.
Can you come by in July, or maybe September?
I'd love to show you.

As told to Lori Kniffin
I have always considered myself to be an independent woman. I don’t like to have to depend on nobody. I may ask for something and if you don’t want to give it to me then I’m not going to debate about it. I have always prided myself upon being an independent working woman, but sometimes life throws you curve balls.

Most days I wake up in pain. I have arthritis all over my body and that makes getting around extremely difficult. It also makes me feel tired. Life has made me tired. I gave my time. I got my first job when I was only 14 years old. I have worked ever since that point. At some points I was even working three jobs at a time because I had six kids to provide for and raise. I worked my whole life until I reached the point where I physically couldn’t work. I did my time.

Sometimes people treat me like I am stupid or dumb because I am hungry. But I did my time. I sometimes hear people say, “Why should I help you?” If I could help myself I wouldn’t ask others. I did my time. I am a stubbornly independent woman and don’t want to have to depend on others, but right now I do. I would much rather help myself. But right now I can’t. I can’t provide all of the things I need.

If I only had to think about taking care of me I might be fine, but I have an eight-year-old adopted daughter who needs much more. She is just a child who doesn’t deserve to be hungry. This is why I ask for help. You see, I did my time. I worked my whole life but in the end it wasn’t good enough. So I will continue to ask for help so that eight-year-old girl has enough food to live. I will continue because I am still doing my time, and this is life. Life is hard, but you have to learn to make the best of what you get.

As told to Autumn Snesrud
The Story of a Cosmetologist

I just got a job today so thank God for that. But that leaves me about a month without any money. I’m a single mom with four kids, three boys and one girl. We’re all spread out across the country. I haven’t even gotten to meet one of my grandkids yet because my kids and I live so far apart from each other. My youngest son is still livin’ with me.

I’ve always loved to do hair. I’ve been a cosmetologist for such a long time. It’s always been about quality over quantity, for me. If the customer isn’t happy with a haircut, I’m always the one who wants to fix it. I worked for Great Clips for about eight years. One day, a customer came in with a hairstyle she wasn’t happy with. I fixed the haircut for her and was fired the next day just because I fixed a bad haircut.

There was one point in time when I had my own salon. I gave one hundred and fifty percent all the time. Hair has just always been a natural thing I’m good at. It’s hard in job interviews because I’m not sure what else to talk about when they say, “Give me a time when you had to solve a problem and how you solved that problem,” because I’m only good at talking about things that happen at the salon.

There for a while, I didn’t have any income coming in, so I went to the Breadbasket pretty regularly. Every so often, I get a voucher for food at the Presbyterian church. I try to come by the Breadbasket as much as possible depending on if I have a job or not. Oh gosh, there have been times when I’ve come by about twice a week when I was really needing it. The people here have been so good to me. I don’t know what I would do without the Breadbasket, honestly. I don’t feel ashamed to walk in here. The people here have helped me so much. The Breadbasket has never made me feel like a moocher or someone just cheating the system. Thank God I know about the Breadbasket.

As told to Miranda Burns
Jobs are hard to come by; I’m still currently looking. I’ve worked at Wendy’s, a hotel, and have done some catering gigs, but nothing ever long term. It’s hard when nobody will hire you because you’re a liability to the company. It is difficult for me to work throughout the day when my body just constantly aches after the accident.

About ten years or so ago, I was hit by a car. I broke my body in four places and have had to undergo many surgeries. I’ve had to wear all kinds of braces and have been forced to take it easy when I wasn’t supposed to move. It was a hit-and-run and I have only received a partial insurance settlement. It’s a hard life when you can’t work.

With all my doctor bills, attorney bills, and everyday bills the money that I do have goes quickly. I have three boys, two grown and on their own, but I still have a boy that is in middle school. With no money coming in, it is hard to give him all he needs.

Food is an essential part of every human being’s life. Without food you feel an emptiness that can sometimes be painful. It is hard to concentrate and accomplish tasks because the only thing on your mind is how hungry you are.

With no money coming into my home, there is no money for food. It is an awful feeling knowing that you can’t provide for yourself or loved ones with something that is usually considered easy to get.

After I started receiving food stamps, things got a little better. I don’t come to the Breadbasket often, but I come here when I need it. Oh, what a generous and selfless place this is. Being able to have a food pantry in our community is a blessing. Without it, I might not be able to keep my son and I fed.

No matter what situation you are in, all you can do is keep going. I do what I can to find temporary jobs. What is nice about a community like ours is that everyone genuinely wants to help you. I clean some houses for friends and do little side jobs when they come up. It is a good feeling knowing that I can walk down a street or go to the bowling alley and see someone that I know every time. We all just have to help each other out. Without the help of others, I wouldn’t be doing as well as I am.

As told to Katie Omo
The Story of an International Student

In January, my wife, newborn son, and I came to Manhattan, Kansas from Mexico. We got here thinking we could survive on the money I had saved up, but that was a big mistake on my part. There is a guideline on the K-State website that shows the cost of living, but when I got here, wow! Let’s just say grad students’ tuition is ridiculous. We were able to live off of the little bit of savings for about a month and a half until it was completely gone. My family doesn’t have health insurance and it’s just really tough when you have to pay for a child and pediatrician out of pocket. Thankfully, the Riley County Health Department referred us to the Flint Hills Community Clinic.

I use the Breadbasket once a week to provide for my family. I receive a grad student stipend because I’m working in the Ph.D. program here at the vet school and I also have applied to several scholarships in Mexico. Unfortunately, I cannot apply for scholarships here because I would have to be a citizen. If you want to be depressed, just take a look at my pay stub. I’m living off of $1,800 a month with a wife, kid, electric bills, apartment rent, tuition, gas, and pediatrician emergencies.

Being an international student, I see things quite a bit different than the people who live here. I find it really incredible that this country has so much to offer, yet people in this country need this kind of help or don’t have a job. I understand that it is different for everybody and we all have our stories, but there are a lot of opportunities to get a job. I’ve been here for two months and I’ve already seen so many opportunities. I think that people either don’t quite realize it or they are just too comfortable where they are now that they don’t want to look anywhere else.

Programs like the Breadbasket are truly amazing. If I could, I would want to thank every single person in the community who donates to help people like my family and I. If people are able to help in the future, I think they should. I know that I will be more than willing to help when I get the opportunity, because I have been in this position of need and it would be a great way to pay it forward and say thank you.

As told to Laton Heger
Hope is easy to find when you’re young. 
Open the door and walk on through. 
Place your hope in what you can achieve. 
Experience life, go to college, live your dreams.

Refuse to get sick. 
Evade the cancer that comes for your body at twenty-two. 
Medical bills will bury you. 
It, this disease, these circumstances will change everything. 
Swallow your dreams—forget about college, just 
Survive. 
Is it worth it? The life you are determined to fight for? 
On disability. Still smoking. Arms and legs that don’t work. 
No way to provide. No clue if and when you’ll eat.

Vow to find new life—even if it is in a pile of rust. 
A symbol of life—this van—beaten up, but 
Not defeated.

As told to Kara Cavalli

As a young guy it’s easy to find hope. College is an exciting time for young guys who are just now experiencing life. I never did get to go to college. After fighting two types of cancer and being buried in medical bills at the age of 22 it’s hard to keep pressing on. When I was fighting my cancer, remission was the goal, the hope I was aiming for. But I’m there now, I’m in remission, and life hasn’t gotten any easier. I still smoke, my arms and legs are often hard to use, and I’m hard of hearing. Now I am stuck on disability without life’s essentials.

When I was able-bodied, I worked the jobs no one wanted to work. Even though the work wasn’t glamorous, I knew it was what I was made to do and I was good at it. My body no longer allows me to do that type of work. Even if I could get another job I would have no way to get there or back. It is difficult for me to walk long distances and I have no form of transportation. It’s hard to keep faith in life when you cannot work to provide for yourself let alone others. Getting food is a question each and every day. I am so thankful for programs like the Breadbasket and food stamps. Without these programs I wouldn’t have any food to survive.

That takes a lot of time—the surviving, but sometimes I dream too. A few years back I purchased my final bit of hope for this life. I bought the original 101.5 K-Rock Van, a 1974 Chevrolet G30. She hasn’t run in over 20 years but as soon as I get the title processed I’ll have her back on these local streets. I have a special connection with her because I was born the same year she came out, 1974. It’s sad to have to find hope in a beat up, broken down van. But I feel like it’s a symbol of my life; beaten up but not defeated. Like the van I’m covered in rust, but life goes on and like the van I will someday run and have a brighter future.

As told to Alex Augustyniewicz
The Story of an Immigrant

Moving to America has brought about many changes in my life. I’ve had to leave a lot of things behind—a language, a fiancé, family and friends, and a career.

My English is adequate, but I still struggle with finding the correct word occasionally.

The only family I live with now are my daughter and my fiancé’s child. My fiancé lives in Mexico but I still take care of his daughter. The children are three and eight and both incredible. My fiancé and I will be getting married next year, hopefully in September. I go back to Mexico twice a year to visit him along with family and friends. I miss them a lot.

I was a nurse in Mexico; I earned a degree there in the medical field. Here I work two separate jobs throughout the week. When I’m not working I enjoy taking the kids to the park and playing with them. My daily schedule revolves around work and the children with not much room for anything else.

The violence is what caused me to move to Manhattan. Seeing people die in the hospital so often because of the drug wars was frightening. An area with such bloodshed is no place to raise a family. I was willing to leave my friends, family, and career, if it meant living in a place where I knew I was safe. Hopefully my family will be here in Manhattan with me soon.

My fiancé sends money from Mexico to help with bills, but sometimes it’s still not enough. The Breadbasket is a place I can go to feed my children and myself when money is scarce. I am incredibly grateful for that. I love Manhattan. It is a place where I can feel safe and once my family joins me here, it will be a place I call home.

As told to Donald Pepoon
The Story of a Helper

I never expected to end up in Manhattan, Kansas, especially coming from a place like New Jersey. My daughter was in her early twenties, married, with a beautiful baby and a brand new pit bull. Then, she found out her husband was going to be deployed. She was taking classes and set to start a new job and I knew I had to come help in any way I could. I came to Kansas and helped her move and get settled.

We moved her into a house in Manhattan. It was a terrible house... the “House From Hell” is what we called it. After a few months she decided to move to Ft. Riley so I went there with her and took a job in Junction City. When management was changed where I worked everyone was fired so I was out of a job. After that, I decided to move back to Manhattan but it’s been extra hard ever since, especially with all of the changes the government has made to unemployment insurance and benefits. Sadly, my son-in-law is scheduled to be deployed again soon but I will be around to help her out if she needs it again.

Now I am starting to take some classes in health education. It may help me to get a better job one day. If I could have any job in the world, I would want to work in the medical field or in law. I just want to do anything to help people. The Breadbasket has been a lifesaver for me, and I know it has been for so many others. One day I am going to get back on my feet. When that happens I am going to give back in any way I can.

As told to Steven Letourneau
My real parents were abusive, so when I was nine-months-old I was sent to foster care. We were there because my five-year-old sister was in a body cast because my dad tried to take a metal rod through her. During that time I was going in and out of foster care. I’ve had people touch me in inappropriate ways. Then I finally got a family. They adopted me and then stuff happened between my adopted dad where I had to put him in jail; fourteen and pregnant with his child. Abortion too.

At seventeen I was doing inappropriate things. I was stealing. I was going out, acting crazy. I went to rehab and that was when my mom got custody of me. When I turned eighteen I was just put on the streets. I got into more trouble and spent up to three years in county jail in Olathe. Then I was court ordered into Job Corps, which gave me the chance to get my high school diploma and get right into a career where you can get a job. I moved to Manhattan for the Flint Hills Job Corps where I got my culinary arts degree. I just got hired at Taco Bell.

I don’t always have the money to get everything I need at the grocery store. This makes it really hard when I don’t have a car and have to walk everywhere. I live on the opposite side of town so it’s an hour walk to and from work every day, no matter the weather. If it’s raining, snowing or fourteen degrees below, I am out there. After awhile, I can really feel my knees and ankles giving out and my overall health decreasing. The roads are a hazard for me because some of the areas in Manhattan where the sidewalk ends, you’re walking on the street at night. Some people don’t see me. It’s life.

I am very thankful for the Breadbasket allowing me to get extra food once a week. I also use some of the churches around town and the hot meals they provide. Sometimes it’s hard to keep faith, but my dream is to attend college and get a business degree so I can open up a bakery with my aunt who does wedding cakes and catering. I am thankful for the programs I have been given the opportunity to participate in. I would advise people not to get rid of the programs. Not everyone comes from parents who take care of them, but there are programs out there willing to help other people.

As told to Samone Givens
The Story of a GRANDMOTHER

My mom was a single parent. Toys were something we deserved, like the organ I always wanted. I wanted it so bad. I wanted one because my friends had them. My mom had seven kids and should have been on services. But her thing was if you're able-bodied, you should work. You work. All she did was work. She kept working to get us out of bad neighborhoods, which I didn’t understand because I had a ball. We moved around the Flint Hills area. People were always stopping by our place. My mom used to cook for everyone. The boys that lived around us always knew when it was time to eat. It was like six o’clock at night and my mom would always feed them. She would feed them before us because she said we would always have food to eat.

I can’t work. I had surgery in 2005. I was working twelve hour shifts right after my surgery, doing fine. I went to sleep one day in January and woke up and couldn’t walk for six months. I couldn’t walk because of a staff infection in my back from surgery. It took forever to get rid of that thing. I have a rod in my back now because my bones were weakened from the infection. The doctors keep saying they want to take it out but I tell them to leave me alone because I have had enough surgery. I go to Pawnee Mental Health now. I just thank God everyday I can walk.

I have a little bitty apartment. It’s too small. I told my family that lives with me to make it work. I have two nieces and their children and my grandkids that live with me. My nieces though, they are out of control. My sisters won’t take them, so I did. Some days I just can’t; I have to take the babies and leave for a little. A bunch of grown women “PMSing” isn’t good. My nieces never understand that they aren’t kids anymore because they have kids. Just teenagers being teenagers, I guess.

I usually come to the Breadbasket at the end of the month just to be able to make it. On food stamps, you never know when you’re running out. I’m the cook. I usually feed my neighbors that stop by on the weekends. I feel like if someone has given to me, it’s my job to try and feed them. It’s like a blessing thing my mom told me about, “If you’re blessed enough to give to someone, blessing will be given to you.” I’m trying to teach this to my grandkids. Their dad is in prison so I’m trying to show them to give more than they receive. My grandson, he takes apples and candy to his teacher and kids at school. I’m real proud of him because I know he is on the right track. And, well, he picks up after himself so I’m pretty happy about that. When the kids come to my house, I don’t pick up after them. I show them that we all make a mess here and we all have to pick up our mess.

As told to Natalie Johnston
The Story of a

MODERN DAY
ERIN BROCKOVICH

There is no such thing as a normal day at the Breadbasket. I get up in the morning, get my daughter ready, and bring her to daycare and then I come to work. I spend the first hour working with the intern, talking about what happened yesterday, what happened over the weekend, and what kind of policies changed. We then have our staff meeting. Things are constantly coming up and we have to address that issue. From there, we open up the front room where clients come to meet with me and receive food. You can help anywhere from five to twenty-five people. Five to twenty-five different situations.

The other day I was joking that I am like Erin Brockovich, portrayed by Julia Roberts in the Erin Brockovich movie. At one point in the movie, she gets fired up about her own knowledge of her clients and says, “Pick a file, any file, I can tell you their name address and phone number.” I am literally like that. Pick a file and I can tell you their address, their story, what the client’s needs are, how long they have been with us, who is in their family, what job they are looking for, and what I asked them to bring for the next time. I don’t know how I know it, but I do.

I invest in our clients, I listen, and I want to know their stories. It is so important. I feel like it makes clients more comfortable to come in here and get the help that they need. When they share their stories with me, I am then able to connect them to resources that they need. I create a friendship with them, but I am careful not to cross the line and to still be professional. Still, making the connection is part of my job.

The people I work with have taught me so much about being compassionate and caring for our clients and their stories. They really open my eyes and make me consider other things before I pass judgment. I think that sometimes the three of us who work here get really frustrated with some of the policies that are passed because we get to see firsthand how they affect people. We sit here every single day and realize that the policy makers’ perception of the problem is not one hundred percent accurate.
Working here has definitely changed my outlook. I would still say that I am a very conservative person. I work really hard and most of my and my husband’s money goes to daycare. But you know I wish more than anything I could stay home with my daughter. That is not reality, so I have to get up and come to work every day. I still have some of those core beliefs, but now I understand that sometimes you can’t get a job because you are only getting paid $7.25 and you can’t afford day care. It’s not like that person can get up and go find a job because they have two kids to take care of and they can’t do that if they are working and not getting paid enough for childcare. So this job has really opened my eyes to reality.

I didn’t always know that this is what I wanted to do. I graduated from K-State with a degree in both history and family studies. At different points in my life I wanted to work in a museum or be a sex therapist. My first job out of college was working with the foster care system and family preservation. I did not feel like I had adequate training or experience and it was an incredibly hard job. At that point I was so turned off by social services, but I am so glad that I found it here.

This job is so wonderful. Because I am working here, I am now getting my Master’s degree in Public Administration. I eventually want to do more managerial type work, like what my boss does, and if I have my Master’s it will allow me to do that later on. You know working in a museum or being a sex therapist those were jobs I thought I wanted to do, but I feel like this job is something that I was called to do. Being here working with people who have low income and need help, this is what I am meant to do.

As told to Magen Witcher

To the staff at the Flint Hills Breadbasket, we continue to be thankful for your willingness to partner with the Staley School of Leadership Studies as co-learners and co-teachers. Thanks for your commitment to educating our community.

To the men and women who were willing to meet with our students to be interviewed, thank you. Thank you for your voice and contribution to this community.

Together you showed us the power of a story.
Hunger.

Poverty.

Words that strike up emotions, instill fear, and set forth stereotypes. Yet, one third of American society is one paycheck away from facing desperate hunger and poverty.

Perhaps it’s the words. When we allow ourselves to equate people to a word, we package all of the stereotypes we’ve learned over time into syllables and forget about the person. Doing so makes it easy to draw conclusions from statistics we’ve read in a paper or heard from a friend, but what if we actually learned the story behind the person? How might we move beyond a series of letters strategically placed together to understanding the lives of our neighbors? Our neighbors living in hunger.

You just took one of the first steps.

Combined, the mosaic of stories featured in this book weaves the fabric of the Manhattan community: Those who are food insecure and those who are not; nonprofit leaders and educators; caring neighbors and neighbors who need a friend. This is a snapshot of the lives of those who live within miles of you. This is your community’s story.

As you are Facing Hunger in Manhattan, 16 other communities are on their own journeys through The Facing Project. From coast-to-coast, LA to Atlanta, from homelessness to human trafficking, communities are coming together through the talents of local writers and storytellers to re-start the conversation with stories rather than starting with statistics.

The common thread is each city is using grassroots efforts to tell the stories of their neighbors through the arts. From this, the goal should be a better understanding of the community’s story—including creating different approaches to solutions, bringing new people to the table, and wiping away those statistics and stereotypes.

Ultimately, our hope is that these stories within this book challenged your perceptions.

Every community has a story to face, but it’s what comes after these stories that is critical. What will be the next chapter in Facing Hunger in Manhattan, Kansas?

Perhaps you’ll be part of the story.

J.R. Jamison & Kelsey Timmerman
Co-Founders, The Facing Project

www.facingproject.com
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And all of the other Staley School of Leadership Studies faculty, staff, and students who supported the development of this project.
Resource Guide

**Manhattan Community Meals** *Sack Lunch Available*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday*</td>
<td>5:15pm</td>
<td>700 Poyntz-1st Congregational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday*</td>
<td>7-8:30am</td>
<td>601 Poyntz-St. Paul’s Episcopal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>6-7pm</td>
<td>801 Leavenworth-1st Presbyterian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:30-8:15am</td>
<td>801 Leavenworth-1st Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday*</td>
<td>6-7pm</td>
<td>612 Poyntz-1st United Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>6-7pm</td>
<td>930 Poyntz Ave-1st Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7-9am</td>
<td>601 Poyntz-St. Paul’s Episcopal</td>
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**Harvesters Mobile Food Pantries**—Drive through for food with no qualifications

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Friday</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>615 Gillespie Dr.—Manhattan Westview Community Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Thursday</td>
<td>10-11am</td>
<td>303 Grant St.—Saint George United Methodist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:30am-1pm</td>
<td>Hwy 24 and Balderson Rd.—Wamego Sports Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd Tuesday</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>1710 Avery Ave.—Manhattan CICO Park (west Kimball Ave)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th Tuesday</td>
<td>10am</td>
<td>229 Willow St.—Ogden Community Center</td>
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**Additional Food Assistance**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Food Basket, Serving Northern Riley County</td>
<td>785-485-2697</td>
<td>115 S Broadway Riley, KS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint Hills Breadbasket</td>
<td>785-537-0730</td>
<td>905 Yuma Street Manhattan, Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogden Friendship House of Hope</td>
<td>785-537-5116</td>
<td>226 Riley Avenue Ogden, Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Land Foods</td>
<td>785-537-0378</td>
<td>621 Humboldt Street Manhattan, Kansas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Developing knowledgeable, ethical, caring, inclusive leaders for a diverse and changing world.”