

Could You Take The SNAP Challenge?

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : September 19, 2011 at 7:32 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Feeding yourself on a few dollars a day in Washington is no easy task, and in September, during Hunger Action Month, one way to confirm that is to take the "SNAP Challenge." Millions of low- or no-income Americans depend on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, that works out to about \$120 a month to buy food.

Writer Clay Holtzman of Seattle tried living on a SNAP food budget for one week. He says his diet lacked nutrition and variety, and he was often still hungry.

"My deepest, darkest period was Tuesday night, when I was just very hungry. I also had headaches for a couple of days and didn't sleep very well. The pain of hunger is very real, and it's not fun."

Holtzman says he missed beer and ice cream during that week, but also fresh vegetables and the ability to afford a more varied diet.

Last week, food bank managers from across the state met in Wenatchee to strategize for getting through what could be a tough winter. From 2008 to 2010, the number of Washington families facing food insecurity almost doubled.

Linda Stone, food policy director with *The Children's Alliance*, says food banks used to see people for short time periods, often between jobs. Now they have regular clients, of many months' duration.

"There's just no recovery for the households that have come to rely on the food bank. So, if you've got a lot of people coming and they're coming more frequently, they're going to start giving them less food, in order to be able to meet the needs of more people."

Stone says hunger in Washington is on the upswing, which is opposite the national trend.

Holtzman says he was prompted to take the SNAP challenge to better relate to a homeless man in his neighborhood. He hopes hearing about his experience spurs other people into action to fight hunger.

"The most important part of a social experience like this is to not only experience and understand the challenge and the issue that people in our community face, but then to actually do something about it."

Stone used the SNAP Challenge to spread the word about hunger, writing a series of columns about his experience this spring in the Puget Sound Business Journal.