



# FOOD4THOUGHT

MARCH 2016



FIGHTING HUNGER  
**FEEDING HOPE**

## THIS CANNOT BE HAPPENING TO ME...

It was the loss of his job that put the last nail in his proverbial coffin. After a series of heartbreaking setbacks, Jerry was done. How did he get here? In just a short time, Jerry found himself in a broken marriage, fighting to keep his home, applying endlessly for jobs he knew he was qualified for without results, and trying to keep his two daughters from losing hope. For a while, it seemed like the difficulties of life would never end as waves of hardship and challenge pressed Jerry down further into despair, until he lost hope.

Enter the Valley Food Bank and all of our supporters, our heroes. Our mission is simple, “Fighting Hunger – Feeding Hope.” For us, these are more than words scribbled on a wall or in some operating manual, it is our mission and the driving force behind what we do and how we do it. Through this series of setbacks, Jerry found himself jobless and in despair. And, while he could barely keep it together, Jerry had to face the reality of choosing between keeping a roof over his head or food on the table. No one should have to make that choice. Yet, for many of the more than 4,000 clients we serve monthly, this is a sad but common event. Providentially, Jerry found his way to the Valley Food Bank and our director, who knows what distress looks like, knew what Jerry needed was a little “help” in finding Hope.

**Fighting Hunger:** With the generous support of our donors and a great network of community partners, our pantry network could meet the needs of Jerry and his family. In fact, despite having a very restrictive diet from past medical problems, we could help him through this rough time in his life. Over the next several weeks, we helped him by providing fresh fruits and vegetables, protein products, fresh dairy and deli, as well as hygiene items and toiletries.

**Feeding Hope:** Though it is always rewarding to be able to meet the needs of someone in such critical need, it is even more so when we can do it and feed hope along the way. For so many navigating joblessness, housing difficulties, and food insecurity, there are even more factors that weigh them down in those circumstances. As a positive relationship developed between us, it was wonderful to see the hope rising in Jerry. Soon enough, we began to see a change in his outlook and bearing when he would visit and receive help. Jerry continued to persevere and began to shine. Today we are happy to report that Jerry is soaring...he has secured a full-time job and is becoming self-sufficient again. But the greatest change we are so glad to have been a part of was his finding Hope.



*Jerry (who did not want to show his face).*

## GOING THROUGH A HARD TIME

Meet Angelica, “I’m not a single mom and we are not homeless... we are just going through a hard time!” Until recently, she and her husband, Alexander, were employed and doing well but at the end of the year, they fell on hard times. Alexander’s employer, like many in California, faced a double hit this year, rising minimum wages and rising health care premiums. As a result, his employer chose to cope the same way as many others, they cut back on staffing, reduced paid hours, and reduced benefits. Alexander soon found himself going from full-time to a part-time employee. Angelica found herself ending the year being exploited by a company that provided in home care for elderly clients. She was working but not being paid and, when she pressed for her pay, she was let go. She sought help from the Labor Board, but despite receiving a judgment in her



Many “typical” families struggle to find Hope.

favor, she found herself unable to collect because the company closed. What made it worse was discovering the same ownership and management opened a “new” company offering the same services to the same clients. But because this was a “different” company, she was unable to collect and found herself at the end of several weeks without work, without the pay owed, and with bills piling up. With three growing boys, one can imagine how stressful their circumstance was.

**Fighting Hunger:** Angelica and Alexander are not alone in this struggle, there are many individuals facing similar circumstances of not unemployed and not homeless, but hurting. For many, economic challenges have created a circumstance where food insecurity is a reality and they are in need of our help and support. People facing this situation can be found in every city throughout the Valley and in our own neighborhood today. Often these circumstances bring with them much stress and despair... for many of them even a loss of hope. The challenges these individuals face can be overwhelming and they are often forced to make difficult choices with the few resources they have. Like Angelica, many struggling individuals must contend with severe limits on housing, what they can wear, and often, the frequency and nutritional value of the meals she can offer her family. Sadly, these struggling individuals have to set priorities and stretch the few dollars they have so far that good nutritious meals are just too far out of reach. Many struggling individuals, like Angelica, are often forced to provide cheaper meals high in sodium, sugar, and fat with few fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins.

**Feeding Hope:** We view meeting these needs as our top priority and through the generous support of our donors and pantry network volunteers, we are thankful to be able to help many of our hurting friends and neighbors in our community. For Angelica, we were able to provide food to meet her immediate critical needs and helped set her up at one of our pantries for additional assistance as she navigates this difficult time. Most importantly, we were able to give her a little encouragement and reassurance there are better days ahead, as shown by the care we were able to provide her through your helping hands. When she left our facilities, there was a little smile starting on her face, we knew, beyond the much-needed foods and resources, she received a little dose of Hope. Thank you for allowing us to provide this support on your behalf.