

# SNAP Challenge: Day #8

September 21, 2013



Over the past seven days, I've been blogging frequently about my experience in the SNAP Challenge. Early next week, I will wrap up this series of blogs with some reflections. To close out the week, I wanted to share something that one of my colleagues wrote in which she detailed her experience in the SNAP Challenge. Marianne Graziadei is a vice president in our Panera Cares Operations. I hope you find her summary as moving as I do.

*From Marianne Graziadei, Vice President, Panera Cares Operations*

Once a month, I do the shopping for a couple of senior citizens in my neighborhood who are unable to shop for themselves. A friend and I also prepare a Sunday dinner, package small microwavable meals and deliver these home-cooked meals to the same seniors. Since this is a population that I'm familiar with, I decided to do my SNAP Challenge based on the budget and resources that many senior citizens have available to them.

The senior population is one that I worry about a great deal. I have much empathy for younger people who are on public assistance, but, in my opinion, it only gets harder as you get older. Senior citizens don't have the luxury of shopping around various grocery stores for deals. They are at the mercy of whatever is the nearest source of food (be that a market, convenience store or neighbor). Those are the fortunate seniors – at least they are able to get food into their home. The

ones that I worry about are those who are riddled with arthritis or other physical ailments. Sometimes they can't even get to a microwave to heat the ramen noodles or whatever other nutritionally deprived food they're able to purchase on their limited budget. One senior that I help forgot how to use a microwave. Too proud to ask, I discovered that she had simply been eating my meals cold. Now when we cook the meals, we assume that many other seniors may be doing the same thing, so we adjust our recipes so they taste just as good cold.

This week, I tried to stick to an extremely limited budget, but I also tried doing it all without a car. I wanted to make foods that were simple to prepare, since that's what I observe those in need eating most often. I put myself in the position of a senior on a fixed budget – no car, no help, limited choices. Let me tell you – it was near impossible for me to eat healthy this week. I also had very little variety. I picked up a few cans of garbanzo beans and black beans with intentions of putting them in a salad, but I couldn't find a head of lettuce within walking distance. So instead, I made some black bean soup that lasted me about three meals. I made some hummus with the garbanzo beans, but didn't include tahini like I normally would. (I couldn't find that at the dollar store and I'm guessing it was out of my budget anyway.) The rest of my meals were made up of the following ingredients: crackers, eggs, pasta, chicken (on sale), onions, garlic. All of these items were purchased by walking to three different stores, which obviously would be challenging for a senior citizen (especially if they had to carry the bags home).

I could go on and on about the situation in my town in upstate New York. Currently, our town is without a grocery store. Our grocery store was torn down in January so that a new grocery store chain can come in. Due to flooding in early June, the project has been put on hold. People without cars are at the mercy of shopping at gas stations, convenience stores and the Dollar General. I notice such establishments often carry canned, shelf-stable foods that are unfortunately high in sodium and not too great for you. Fortunately, the manager of the Dollar General stepped up and brought in staples such as bread and milk. There is such a disparity in my town – a population of people who have food and other resources in abundance living next door to those who have very little. I often worry that our town is a microcosm of what our nation will become.