

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 14: Resilience in Action: Fighting Food Insecurity in Rural Oklahoma

April 30, 2021

Summary: Food insecurity in Oklahoma was higher than the national average before the pandemic. Since then, the need for food access has only increased, especially in rural areas and smaller cities in Oklahoma. This episode highlights a few inspiring stories from recipients of the 2020 TSET Food Systems Impact Grants. These projects make a little go a long way:

- RSVP of Enid, a multifaceted food and services resource center for seniors, expanded their operation to provide necessary assistance to local seniors as they age in place.
- In Laverne, Oklahoma, Collective Roots formed as a food security cooperative to connect local farmers and food producers with consumers in a rural area with limited food access.
- The Boys & Girls Clubs of Ottawa County tripled the number of meals they serve to meet the needs of children and families during the pandemic.

Learn about the resilience of rural Oklahoma in this month's episode of the TSET Better Health Podcast.

Full music licenses and attributions follow the transcript.

[Theme music]

[0:15]

James Tyree: Hello and welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is James Tyree, health communication consultant at TSET.

Cate Howell: And this is Cate Howell, health communication intern and podcast producer.

We've got a really special show for you today. We've talked about food insecurity before, but today, we wanted to check in with some of our friends outside of metro areas to see how they've been coping with the pandemic and how they've utilized the 2020 TSET Food Systems Impact Grants in their communities. And wow – we were absolutely blown away by what these small counties and towns have accomplished under the most difficult circumstances.

J. Tyree: Absolutely. You know, in Enid, for example, Christy Baker and the volunteers and staff of RSVP of Enid are dedicated to providing food and compassion to their local seniors and homebound residents. Last year, they were able to expand their operation and address the needs of those most vulnerable in their communities. The positive impact RSVP of Enid has been able to provide is, as Christy says, immeasurable.

[01:25]

[Soft piano music (“[Lovely Morning](#)” by Immersive Music)]

Christy Baker: My name is Christy Baker and I am the Executive Director of RSVP Enid.

J. Tyree: Formerly known as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Enid and North Central Oklahoma, this non-profit has evolved to become a one-of-a-kind program that’s all-encompassing with an impressive output as they have gone local.

C. Baker: What we like to consider ourselves is basically the whole care program for a senior. We service 12 counties in north central and northwest Oklahoma. Currently we have 423 active volunteers who make these projects run. And it started from a government program that allows seniors 55 and over to reintegrate themselves into the world after they’ve retired, so primarily as a volunteer position. In 2016, we quit taking that federal funding and just became RSVP of Enid so we could grow our program more towards the needs centrally located with our local Oklahomans. And so what that means is that we were able to minimize some of the red tape and the paperwork and really get feet on the ground and help people in the way that they need to be helped. That really meant making the Enid Mobile Meals program the hub of our project.

The mobile meals program itself – right now we serve 135 hot, nutritious lunches to homebound seniors each weekday. But the program – it’s more than just the meal. It’s a lifeline to our seniors. So from the initial contact and bringing a meal to someone who is identified as being alone or unable to stand and cook or have trouble with daily basic needs, it’s just nice to see a friendly-faced volunteer with their arms outstretched with a meal in front of them. It’s a lifeline into their house, into their homes, into their needs.

We realized that hot daily lunch, that one-time meet that we have in the day, really wasn’t all that they needed. And it came from a woman – I personally delivered her meal on a Monday morning and she said, “Oh, you know, the weekends are so long living on just bread and water, and I just can’t wait for Mobile Meals to get here. Thank you, bless you, I just – we so look forward to Mondays.” And I thought to myself, as a working parent, you know, weekends – weekends are not long; they’re not long for anybody. But when you take that and you try to imagine yourself living on bread and water for a weekend. That was something I couldn’t stomach and not help address.

So we have an additional project, and we then collaborated, almost immediately with the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, and with that program, we have the CSFP boxes, which are the commodity boxes for seniors. And because of that one person, now we serve 288 homebound seniors or those that can’t get out who are under the poverty line, who also probably survive on bread and water over the weekends, and now allow them to have shelf stable foods and sometimes refrigerated foods. So that was a huge win for the Mobile Meals program so we could make sure that it’s not only that hot meal for lunch, but on the weekends they have other foods as well to eat.

J. Tyree: The tragic effects of COVID-19 revealed so much about how our systems work and need improvement, from education to food access. One surprising thing Christy said is that

the pandemic has also revealed what life is like for homebound seniors every day—and what the community can accomplish when it comes together.

C. Baker: So I would like to say what happened to the rest of us really became a glimpse into a senior's life. As devastating as it was to us to be quarantined and away from our friends and life as we knew it, it really is a sneak peek into the lives of our seniors and the lives that they live every day. So for so many, not much changed because they were already in their homes, but what we did see happen, however, was watching a community, all in a grief-stricken reality, come together in a way so special that made our community work harder, be stronger and love more – and that's what I saw happen. I watched this Enid, Oklahoma, community step up in a major way. CDSA, the Enid Police Department, local churches, civic programs, Rural Health Projects, just to name a small few. We rallied together and we knew that something had to change.

I believe that the quality of our programs became better. With the help of all of our local area agencies, great things happened. We were able to continue to serve mobile meals, we were still able to do commodity boxes. We created this whole care program, or what we like to call 'negating the senior trifecta' which is being physically limited, having little to no access to transportation and being financially limited.

J. Tyree: That trifecta can be devastating, and a little assistance can have a monumental impact. To demonstrate this, Christy tells the story of Charles, an RSVP of Enid success story.

[06:45]

[Sad piano music (With the Sea by Kevin MacLeod)]

C. Baker: So there he was, he was sitting on the front porch before a dilapidated house. He was the man behind a 911 call that came to us and it sent us all running to his house. He's a man in his later 80s. His beard showed the months of growth. The hard wrinkles around his eyes showed the worry. His long fingernails were dark with months of dirt under them that proved the neglect. His withered hands were holding his saddened face, and he looked up almost like a puppy in trouble as we approached his porch. It was gut-wrenching at its core.

So Charles had been a victim of caretaker fraud and abuse, and the neglect – it showed on his body from head to toe. But his home also proves the sad reality that he had been living in worse conditions than a caged animal. But he's proud, he's proud of his home, and he tried all that he knew to keep his personal life personal until the day he did tell his neighbor that if maybe, just maybe, he lit his house on fire, someone could help him. And he didn't mean that for arson, he just didn't know where else to go. He needed a bath and he needed to eat. He, for three months, went without running water, electricity, and by the time the police got there, he had just half a loaf of moldy bread that he survived on. On that day when we met him, I mean, it was the desperation of a lonely man. He had no other immediate family or anyone else to look in on him.

So one of the things that we do in working with our police department is we make sure that we have a care package when we go onto these calls, and it includes a blanket, SNAP information, our mobile meals information, our transportation, and the way that we can do this is backed by the TSET grant.

That was in October, but on that day, we were able to call our friends at OG&E, get his electricity turned back on. We were able to call the City of Enid and in under an hour got his water turned back on, and, again, because of the TSET backing, we were able to go to the grocery store for him and fill his fridge and his freezer and his cabinets. We also participate in Elder Abuse Task Force, and I'm happy to say that, actually, just yesterday, we took him to the court and that perpetrator actually just was sentenced. So in a full success story, today, Charles lives a better life at 86 than he did at 84. So even in times of desperation and worry and angst, the programs we're able to put together to really, really create a whole new life for someone is immeasurable. Really, I mean, you ask Charles – it's immeasurable. We reach about 1,000 seniors each month and he's just one of those, and because of TSET we're able to make those things happen.

J. Tyree: Wow. We at TSET are so happy that Charles got the help he needed through RSVP of Enid, and we are honored to be able to help. RSVP of Enid received a TSET Food Systems Impact Grant in order to accommodate their growing non-profit – but how was the funding actually used?

C. Baker: So this allows us to pay for Mobile Meals. Another story that I have: a lady called about transportation. She moved here from California and she moved here right during COVID, and so she has been in her home for over a year completely isolated, no friends, no family, she knows nobody here. And literally – also yesterday – we were able to tell her that, because of TSET, we are gonna pay for her a year's worth of mobile meals. She lives in that area where she makes just a little too much to get federal funding or to get SNAP by one dollar. By one dollar. That does not negate her expenses. And so with tears in her eyes and just prayerful hands, she grabbed us and kissed us on our faces and just said 'Bless you' and 'Thank you.' And because of TSET, she's not alone. So she's getting that nutrition, she's getting daily interaction, she gets transportation, she gets a whole care program. And now, again, she has a family in the RSVP program and she knows now there's not going to be another holiday that goes by that she celebrates alone, or she tearfully, you know, is saddened by the reality that she's isolated, because it's not her reality anymore.

And so the TSET funding, it starts with that nutrition. It starts with the ability to go grocery shopping on emergency calls through APS or the Enid Police Department, but it also provides us that mobile meals assistance that does that five-day care program for them.

And the ones in that gray area, you know, that fall between the cracks that may make a dollar more than some government programs allow them, and so then they're just – they're lost, you know? And then they often times, in that generation, they'll pay their bills before they'll eat. And so this gives us the ability to know, I mean, with their health being better, that they don't have to shop or cook or wonder, "What am I going to make?" And often times, when a senior's living by themselves, they don't make healthy

options, you know, they'll eat hot dogs and things that are easy and quick; they don't get a fully balanced meal. So this has allowed us to be able to know that they are getting healthy meals. They're getting stronger, their minds are clearer, they're happier and then they can utilize our transportation and go. If they wanna go get their haircut, if they wanna go see a friend, if they just wanna drive to the park – it allows them the ability to not stay isolated.

TSET has absolutely, unequivocally changed our program and our area seniors, and we are so grateful.

[12:17]

[Country rock guitar music (“[Ranch Life](#)” by Flash Fluharty)]

C. Howell: While Christy and RSVP of Enid are changing the lives of vulnerable individuals in Garfield County, the Laverne Food Security Cooperative, called Collective Roots, is changing the system of food distribution in their community. Lana Shaffer and Kassie Huyen are part of an initiative that's using TSET funds to create a new program that would improve the health and economy of Laverne, a small town in northwestern Oklahoma.

Lana Shaffer: My name's Lana Shaffer, and I've lived in Laverne my whole life, born and raised here. I have been rural my whole life. That's where my heart is, and through my work – I worked for the health department for almost 17 years, and then I do have a degree in public health. So I really began to focus on looking at different things that could benefit our community. It is a very small county – we have 3,500 people total and about 1,200 in the community of Laverne, so we are very small. So that's kind of how my interest started to grow in this, and when you look at those social determinants of health and look at those root causes, food insecurity is one of the main ones that's seen in rural areas.

C. Howell: And not every rural community is the same. There's a whole spectrum of what could constitute as rural, and the needs and culture of each community differ.

L. Shaffer: To just kinda set the stage a little bit, it's actually rural but it's frontier, which is even basically further out from an urban area than other things that we classify as rural. We're about three hours from any metropolitan area. And so, being in that remote area, we do have very limited options. We are listed as a food desert, lacking access to food and particularly around produce, fresh fruits and vegetables.

You know, rural areas have struggled for a long time. By mere location as to where we are, we do lack access and resources. What's common and what other people take for granted, we do not have here. And when I say that, I'm not talking about like a Starbucks down the street. It's really fruits and vegetables and quality food, not processed – just being able to have that local and not have to drive 40 miles. Our closest, let's say, Walmart, for example, is about 40 miles.

While, you know, people out here, we've known – we know we live in a food desert, we know we lack access – but I guess there has always been that inability to really take the time to focus and say, “Okay, you know, here, how can we address food insecurity issues?” So when COVID rolled into town, it gave us, one, the time, but two, the necessity, because it was gonna make that gap even larger. And so we started trying to look at the root causes of food insecurity – Is it affordability? Is it availability? Is it the quality? – and really break it down and look more deeply into that. We created a small committee that was able to look at that, and 23% of our people lack access to healthy food. To compare that to the national level, the national is 2% and the state level's 9%, so that, you know, we have significantly more people that have that limited access. So when this food impact grant came along, it was amazing timing, and it gave us kind of that consistency to be able to hire the part-time coordinator to really pull together our thoughts, our efforts and to really get the concept up and going.

[16:41]

[Country-Folk guitar music (“[Edgy Pasture](#)” by Brightside Studio)]

C. Howell: That part-time coordinator is Kassie Huyen.

Kassie Huyen: My name is Kassie Huyen and I am the coordinator for the Laverne Food Security Cooperative which operates by the name Collective Roots.

I was hired as the director for the Laverne Area Chamber of Commerce, and through that role, I became connected with other people in our community who were passionate about the economic and health development in our town. And I kind of learned quickly that you can't count on outside entities to meet your needs in rural America. You have to be resourceful and creative. So I became really interested in the potential of feeding our community well using our own locally grown produce and livestock from the people right here in our area. When we were awarded the TSET food security grant, I transitioned from Chamber director over to the coordinator of that project.

C. Howell: The name and imagery behind Collective Roots are very intentional. It's a powerful manifestation of the work the co-op seeks to do: unite the community in growth.

K. Huyen: The word Collective represents our community of producers and makers who are working together to provide healthy and fresh produce and food goods as well as unique products to the Laverne area. We believe that together we can achieve and provide so much more when we pool our resources. And then the Roots part represents that there's a longstanding history in our area of hard work and perseverance and the ability to solve problems by working together. We seek to remember the virtues and experiences of our past, but also to let them guide us into our future while we're adjusting to present day needs. So that's the meaning behind Collective Roots.

C. Howell: An admirable mission. But what does the execution look like?

K. Huyen: We opened a Made In Oklahoma storefront which goes by the name Collective Roots. Our first day was February 19th of this year. We sell products that are made in Oklahoma. We sell packaged snacks, soap, pottery, all things that are sourced right here in our state made by our people, and then the food cooperative operates inside of the storefront. When the growing season starts, it will allow our local producers to pay a yearly membership fee, and it's a pretty minimal fee because we want to keep it affordable, and once they pay that fee, they'll be able to sell their produce through the store. We will also be hosting the Laverne Farmers Market right outside of our building. We are located on the main street in our town, Jane Jayroe Boulevard, and so it will be an excellent location for our vendors to get a good crowd and to be seen.

We're really new. Now, there has been a farmers market that has operated loosely over the past decade or so, but they were really seeking someone who could kind of help organize and attract more vendors. These are all very hardworking people, and so to be family members and have careers and have farms and huge gardens, it was just a lot to also try and host a farmers market without a lot of resources, and so we are trying to come alongside them and be that sort of connecting resource to help get their name out there and make it bigger and provide more things to the community.

We've stocked our store with some shelf stable foods that are local to our area, but of course our main goal is to provide local and fresh food items to our community. So right now, we're taking the steps to set up our space to house fresh fruit, fresh vegetables. Once the growing season has yielded crops, then we'll be able to sell them through the store. Our crop season – so we start yielding about late June all the way through late October. By June, we're hoping to be set up to accept those fresh produce items. We're going to be accepting SNAP payments, which I think will really be wonderful for our area and just open the accessibility up to so many more people.

C. Howell: Not only does this initiative provide healthy, fresh food to what is currently a food desert, but it boosts the local economy as well.

L. Shaffer: We really wanted to do something to meet the needs of our people and also try to grow it – start basic, have the vision and have the dream, but start with what's realistic and what we can do right now in this moment. Not only is it a food security issue, it's an economic development issue as rural communities continue to struggle with jobs, having jobs, so there's that as well, and in a small town, if you have five new jobs, it's a big deal. And so, you know, eventually we'd like to be able to develop this into a larger thing that we can employ people.

TSET providing what they've done through this impact grant really set the stage, set the groundwork. One thing that the grant requested was community support, and if we could show community support, it would be beneficial for our application, and we were able to secure over \$12,000 in pledges from a few businesses but a lot of individuals, and when you look at a community of our size that has pledged \$12,000, to me, that's saying that we support this, we can see the benefit and we want this to keep moving forward.

And I would like to encourage, if there's other rural communities, people that listen to this podcast that, you know, I think anything is possible. I think we were the smallest community or organization to receive this grant, and I'm pretty proud of that, and I think this is doable in other rural communities for sure. There's a lot of food insecurity issues that are very similar to ours, especially in that rural area, so hopefully this will give people the encouragement to try to do something to address their food security issues.

[24:01]

[Hopeful guitar music ("[Worky Worky](#)" by Andy G. Cohen)]

- C. Howell: Collective Roots is a seed right now, and as the caretakers of this garden, Lana and Kassie are excited to see what grows.
- L. Shaffer: We do have a lot of vision. We have a lot of excitement and support through our community. We've come a long way and we have a long way to go, but we are definitely moving in the right direction, and I can't wait until a year from now and be able to look back at what we've accomplished. We are super excited and we appreciate the opportunity to share about our community and about this project. And thank you for TSET for allowing us that opportunity and trusting us to be able to carry this project forward.
- K. Huyen: It's exciting to see how a community with a vision can move forward. I've talked to some people who have gardens for years and now they're interested in selling at the farmers market, and that's so exciting to me because they can see the potential that their food could be enjoyed by people in their community. I just love people coming together for a common purpose, and this project seems to be something that so many people have been happy to jump behind. We've had excellent community support both with the storefront and then with our grant applications. Our community has just really gotten behind this and I think that they want these things to happen and to be successful as much as we do. I think it just goes to show that rural communities really come together when there's something good to accomplish. I'm really looking forward to what the future holds and really grateful to TSET for making this opportunity possible.

[26:10]

- J. Tyree: Now let's take a trip to the northeast corner of the state, to Miami, Oklahoma, where we will meet Mackenzie Garst.

Mackenzie Garst: I am the executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Ottawa County.

- J. Tyree: Boys & Girls Clubs often bring to mind fun and activity for kids after school and on weekends, but Mackenzie says they provide so much more to youths and their families.

[26:38]

[Uplifting contemporary strings music ("[Something Positive](#)" by Robert Meunier)]

M. Garst: The Boys & Girls Clubs of Ottawa County is the largest youth development program in Ottawa County. We have three locations in the county – Commerce, Fairland and Miami. We're a traditional afterschool program, summer program and just a general out-of-schooltime program. So anytime school's out, we say the club is in. How we do that is kids will come to us after school, or in the summertime for academic support, healthy lifestyle support and just general enrichment activities. But a big part of what we do is feeding, ensuring that kids are reaching their healthy lifestyles and their feeding needs, and so that's been a big focus of our program year-round in what we do at Boys & Girls Club.

J. Tyree: And then the pandemic arrived in March of last year, which upended life for all of us, including the Boys & Girls Clubs in Ottawa County.

M. Garst: You know, when the governor ordered the closing of most businesses, he made that order on Wednesday of Spring Break in 2020, so we closed the operation then. Our facility was closed to kids from that Wednesday to June 1st of 2020. But we say our building was physically closed to children, but that certainly means that our mission at Boys & Girls Clubs was never closed. I think that gave us a unique opportunity to shift our mission to meet the needs of our kids, because the unique nature of Boys & Girls Clubs is that it doesn't just take the brick-and-mortar building to reach our kids and to complete our mission to serve the kids who need us most. We knew the immediate need of our kids was going to be feeding because most kids would've received breakfast, lunch, afterschool snack and dinner at either school or the Boys & Girls Club, and now they're not at either of those two locations, and so feeding was a big part of what we did.

So transitioning to food service was our priority at that time. So in partnership with the school district – the school district was taking care of delivering breakfast and lunch, and the Boys & Girls Club was shifting to food service for afterschool snack and dinner, and so we transitioned to doing drive-through food pickup for dinners and afterschool snack. We transitioned to doing food boxes weekly for families to stop by the club and pick up. We would deliver those to homes of families who weren't able to reach us. Any way that we could get food into the hands of the kids who we know needed it most was now our ultimate mission. And we were doing that every single day, pumping out of lots and lots of food out of our facility. And so, you know, instead of a traditional gymnasium where basketball was being played or a traditional games room where ping pong was being played, we were a food service provider with food boxes all over the place and just trying to get meals out the door to families who needed us most.

J. Tyree: That was their biggest adjustment to meet the needs of kids, but not their only one.

M. Garst: It grew from there into 'how can we also serve the social-emotional needs and the academic needs?' We had started including things like program packets and different STEM activities and arts and crafts activities, so when families would come to do their drive-through food pickup and they were there to get their food boxes or their dinners, they were also picking up arts and crafts activities and STEM activities and various program activities for their kids to do at home to keep them busy and entertained and to get that academic enrichment as well.

J. Tyree: The Boys & Girls Club in Miami was able to reopen its doors on June 1, 2020 with new COVID protocols in place, just in time for the summer programs, including the providing of breakfast, lunch and afternoon snacks.

M. Garst: And then after we transitioned out of summer, we were able to open a Community Hope Center in partnership with DHS, and that's where the partnership with TSET and our Regional Food Bank came into play was opening our Hope Center for those students who were still out of school as we transitioned back into August of last year with the delay in opening our schools. We had lots of kids who were not returning to school, and so where were kids going to go all day? Parents still had to work. So that's when we started opening our doors from 7:30 in the morning 'til 6 o'clock in the evening, from August through now, we're still going strong as a Community Hope Center. We're going to do that through the end of the school year, and so a big part of that is still feeding breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack and dinner every day to kids who attend our Hope Center and then kids who join us after school who have transitioned back into the classroom and just attend in the afterschool time.

J. Tyree: By this time I was really wondering, "That's a lot of meals, especially since the pandemic. How many is that?"

M. Garst: In 2019, if we're looking pre-pandemic, we were used to serving about 18,000 meals a year, and that was serving afterschool snack in the afterschool time and that was serving breakfast, lunch and afterschool snack in the summertime, so averaging about 18,000 meals a year. When you're looking at just since the pandemic started, we're looking at over 25,000 meals just since September, since that TSET grant started. So, yeah, we're looking at pushing that to some crazy numbers. When we look at 2020 as a whole, we're looking at upwards of 35,000 to 40,000 meals that we served in 2020.

J. Tyree: So how, exactly, did the TSET Food Systems Grant help kids and families in Ottawa County?

M. Garst: We needed to do some kitchen upgrades in order to be able to support the amount of meals that we were serving out of the kitchen space that we have. We operate out of a former National Guard armory building and so everything that is in this building, we have had to create, essentially. It was just the walls that were here, and so we've had to build a kitchen from the ground up in the facility that's been provided.

So the TSET grant gave us the opportunity to add some essentials that would be able to help us create meals in large quantities. So we're talking about, you know, double-door freezer space and refrigerator space that's necessary for food storage. We're talking about milk coolers to store milk. We're talking about food storage space just to store dry goods. When you're talking about industrial cooking supplies, you can't cook a whole lot of food on just residential frying pans and stuff like that, so updating our cooking supplies was a big part of it, as well as we were still utilizing a residential oven and stovetop, which was very problematic when you're trying to, you know, get water to boil to cook large amounts of spaghetti. It's not going to boil on a residential stove. So we needed to replace that with an industrial oven range. We also needed to add cafeteria-style seating to our kitchen. We needed some warm food storage, so when we

would make big pans of food, we needed to be able to put it into some sort of warm storage space until we served it to the kids. And then a big part of that is the long-term sustainability of our food program is being able to make that initial investment in a food service professional and add that food service person to our staff.

And so that's where TSET was able to assist us with that initial seed investment with this grant is to get us up off the ground to help us with the long-term self-sustaining goal of our food service program. We've been able to add our dinner program and things like that through partnerships, but we needed that initial investment to make those upgrades in the kitchen so that we could build this food program around that, to incorporate the long-term goal of being self-sustaining to serve these meals, and that's where TSET came into play for us.

[35:36]

[Uplifting piano music ("[Before the Exit](#)" by DarkBlue Studios)]

J. Tyree: This increased capacity has helped not only the boys and girls who come to the clubs, but also their families at home.

M. Garst: One of the biggest stories that I like to tell is around Thanksgiving time when we were kind of in the heat of the pandemic in our area. We were in lockdown and families were losing their jobs and people were being laid off and furloughed and we just kept hearing from Club families over and over, "I don't know how we're going to make it. We're behind on rent payments. Our utilities are going to be shut off. I have to choose between feeding the kids or paying the electric bill." And we wanted to help.

And so we were able to make Thanksgiving dinner boxes for our families with community resources. We gathered all the necessary – you know, the turkeys and the hams and the stuffing, and, you know, the green beans and the cranberry sauce and all of that, and we put together 55 dinner boxes for 55 of our most needy families. And each of them were worth about \$100 worth of food, but I think \$100 worth of food doesn't even touch on the impact it made for the families that we served because many of them said they would not have been able to have Thanksgiving had we not helped. And so I really like to highlight that story because it highlights the mission and how we're here to help. It makes me emotional just telling you this story because we are here to do what we need to do for our families, you know, to serve our missions. It's more than feeding, it's more than food – it's what we have to do to serve our community.

We could not have done it without the kitchen. If you think about all that it takes to go into just one Thanksgiving meal for, like, your family or my family, if you multiply that by 55 families – it takes a lot to pull that off for 55 different families, so having the capabilities to do that in our industrial kitchen with the help of the TSET grant was just really a blessing for our organization.

[37:50]

C. Howell: It's so inspiring to see how communities come together and help each other in times of crisis. These grants make a big difference in the lives of people in many areas of our state.

J. Tyree: Yes indeed. We shared the stories of three of those grants and their impacts in this episode. But last summer the TSET Board of Directors also approved Food Systems Impact Grants to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, Urban Strategies Inc. in Tulsa, to Hunger Free Oklahoma to expand their Double Up Oklahoma food program into 11 grocery stores in nine counties, and to Gateway to Prevention and Recovery in Shawnee to help them provide a mobile food market in Pottawatomie, Seminole and Hughes counties. The seven one-year grants total \$1 million and they are targeted for specific projects to address food insecurity and to increase access to healthy, nutritious foods for Oklahomans throughout the state.

C. Howell: It's exciting and important because healthy food is such a basic need for all of us. Despite the efforts of advocates and agencies, food insecurity, especially for children, is still at crisis levels in Oklahoma. TSET is participating in a [virtual panel discussion](#) with state leaders to discuss child hunger, how it affects children's ability to learn and what organizations are doing to help. The panel is on May 11th, and we'll include a link for more information and an opportunity to RSVP in today's show notes.

You can learn more about the grants TSET offers and their impacts by visiting tset.ok.gov. And while you're there, check out some of TSET's other funded programs in communities, health systems and research that promote better health for all Oklahomans. And speaking of better health, you can also check out our [TSET Better Health Podcast page](#), where you can listen to any of our 14 episodes, and be sure to check back for our next episode.

J. Tyree: Yes, the fun never ends! But bringing these stories and topics really is our pleasure. So until next time, this is James Tyree –

C. Howell: And Cate Howell –

J. Tyree: Wishing you peace –

C. Howell: – and Better Health.

[Theme music]

[40:41]

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01:25 – “[Lovely Morning](#)” by Immersive Music
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12:16 – “[Ranch Life](#)” by Flash Fluharty
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26:38 – “[Something Positive](#)” by Robert Meunier
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