

To Whom it May Concern:

I want you to meet Sara. Sara is a typical seven-year old, red-haired, freckle-faced American girl. She has a dirty, but treasured, rag doll named Molly who is her constant companion. She has a love of the outdoors, and spends as much time playing outdoors as possible. She has a loving family and a best friend down the street that she plays hopscotch with on warm summer nights. She has a smile that lights up her face, bringing joy to all around her. She has a dream to be a doctor one day, and if asked why she will altruistically respond, "I want to help people." One thing Sara does not have is a reliable source of food. Most days she goes to school hungry. Without an adequate amount of food, Sara has a more difficult time in school and is more prone to sickness, which keeps her out of school. With poor grades, Sara will not get the scholarships necessary for her economically struggling family to send her to medical school. Without medical schooling, Sara will never achieve her dream of becoming a doctor so she can help others. Sara is a victim of her circumstances. Her parents are unemployed and are struggling to get food on the table every day. They are trying their best, but times are hard. Is it just for Sara to never achieve her dreams because of the uncontrollable circumstances she was put in?

While Sara may be a fictional character, her situation is all too real. 16.2 million children in the United States alone struggle with hunger. 21 million children rely on free or reduced lunch programs to meet their nutritional needs during the academic school year. 50 percent of low-income families are not able to provide nutritional food for their children, the main reason being the price of healthy foods. So often we emphasize the importance of giving money to starving children in Africa, which is truly a noble cause, but we are blinded to the needs right in our own backyards. I want you to imagine you are walking down your street. The first four houses you see are beautiful houses with a white picket fence, each housing a happy, well-to-do American family. Then you see the fifth house, and it is a dilapidated shack surrounded by a rusty wire fence, housing a hungry, struggling American family. That's all you see, driving down every street in America. That's reality right there. While it may not be so obvious, one in every five American children are struggling with hunger, which is not something we can simply ignore! How would you feel if you lived in that shack? I'll bet you would not like it at all!

So what, you say. 16.2 million children in America are hungry, but how does that impact me? Well let me tell you. Have you ever skipped breakfast before an important meeting and found it hard to concentrate half way through because you are so hungry? That's an everyday reality for these children. Children who come from food-insecure families on average do worse in school than children who are well fed, for a variety of reasons. One is simply the difficulty of paying attention when you are hungry. Others are much more serious. Without enough nutrition, a child's development can be greatly delayed. Food insecurity has been linked with learning disabilities in the first two years of a child's life, which sets them farther back than the other children. Research has also shown that children who are food insecure are hospitalized more often, are at risk for more diseases and chronic health conditions such as asthma, and have poorer qualities of life than those of their well-fed peers. Food insecure children are also more likely to

have behavioral problems. All of these consequences of food insecurity impact a child's performance in school. If a child can't concentrate or have behavioral issues, it is hard for him to learn and retain the information. If he is sick or hospitalized often, he will not be able to go to school as much as he should, which sets him back and makes it hard for him to catch up with other students. If he has a learning disability, it is certainly difficult to learn because he has a harder time learning than other students. All of these factors impact the schooling of undernourished children. If their grades are bad it is harder for them to be accepted to college. If they do not go to college it is much harder for them to find employment. If they do not have a job their children will suffer from food insecurity and follow the same cycle as their parents. This hurts not only the children's families, but the nation as a whole. Talents are wasted because they were never able to be developed. The economy suffers because people do not have money to spend. The government has to continue paying for welfare of these families generation after generation. Schools suffer, having to lower their educational standards to help these children. Colleges suffer because not as many people are applying and attending. Everything suffers from a problem that will not independently stop itself, but can end if someone intervenes.

So what now? You see the need and the negative impacts child hunger has on our country as a whole, but what can you do? Have you heard the proverb "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime"? Well, that's what we have to do. Teach them how to fish. The first thing we have to do is to get involved. Join an organization and partner with them. Check out nokidhungry.org. Secondly, we have to give the struggling families easy access to nutrition programs. Make people aware of how to receive help if they need it, and make sure that needy families are receiving help. Thirdly, we have to teach low-income families how to stretch their budget to make affordable yet nutritional meals for their families. This will help save the families money so they can buy more food or other necessary items. Lastly, we have to raise awareness. Let others know the widespread effects of hunger on children like Sara, and clearly show them how they can help. Childhood hunger is often overlooked in America, and we need to spread the word about how devastating it truly is.

What would you do if Sara was your child? If she were my daughter, I would give my all to provide for her needs, and if I could not provide for her myself, I would beg everyone I know to provide for my helpless daughter. I'm sure you would too. Sara is someone's precious daughter, as are all of the other 16.2 million children that struggle with hunger. Most people do not wish to see their children struggle. They have fallen on hard economical times, and many are trying their hardest to get a job so they can provide, but they just can't. They have reached rock bottom and desperately need someone to pull them out. You have the power to help them. 16.2 million is not just a statistic, it is all of the individual lives that you can change for the better. That is why I am asking you to help. For our nation, for our future, for Sara. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Anna Huebner