

Food Insecurity and Poor Family Outcomes: an Interview with Kara Dean-Asseal LMSW
by Katy Delaney

Kara Dean-Asseal, a New York State licensed social worker and clinical professor at New York University, has been working with children and families for over fifteen years and has collaborated with many diverse communities to create programs and changes for families in need. Currently, she is employed at the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research where she provides training and consultation to national and New York State organizations on a variety of clinical topics—focusing mostly on family engagement and the harmful effects of food insecurity on families. Research has shown that there is a strong connection between food insecurity and obesity, making it an area of interest for Dean-Asseal.

Following her interest in this topic, and curious about how families become food insecure, she has been investigating the connection between trauma and food insecurity. This project, in conjunction with the McSilver Institute, involves interviewing and assessing families who participate in food pantries. “We are currently creating a curriculum for families to participate in when attending a food pantry to help decrease food insecurity and increase family functioning,” she explains. By participating in this program at food pantries, families will get the guidance and education that they need to make healthy and filling meals for their families with what they are provided. “The hope for this project is to bolster the safety nets and help reduce the root causes and consequences of poverty, which, unfortunately, include food insecurity and poor family outcomes”.

She has also co-founded a soon to be 501c3 called Fareground Community Café—a collaborative project with the community of Beacon, NY. Through this model, children and families from the community are able to come together to enjoy a healthy,

nutrient dense meal that functions on a “pay what you can” model. This model makes it an accessible option for everyone because it even includes the option of volunteering in exchange for a meal.

While she loves her profession, Dean-Asseal is the first to admit that there are issues with current policies affecting poverty-stricken families. “I care about this issue because I care about our future,” she affirms, “ I believe that supporting and increasing resources for post-natal care can very well alleviate a myriad of social problems in our future, including trauma, which is often the underlying cause of so many of our issues in our society”.

Professor Dean-Asseal currently teaches a service-learning course at NYU on the subject of Food Insecurities in New York City—teaching students about volunteerism while drawing attention to an issue that affects many NYC families.