

Stamford seniors stuck on food stamps

About a quarter of residents over 60 living on annual income of less than \$20K

By Ignacio Laguarda



Matthew Brown / Hearst Connecticut Media

Seniors pick out fresh produce that is offered on the first Wednesday of every month to those attending the Over 60 Club at St. John Episcopal Church in Stamford.

Stamford-based nonprofit SilverSource, which offers financial assistance for housing, food, utilities and healthcare costs.

About a fourth of seniors have an annual income of \$20,000 or less and 7 percent live on an income of less than \$10,000 a year. Roughly 10 percent of Stamford seniors live in poverty, according to Norwalk-based company DataHaven, while 21 percent are considered “low income.”

Kathleen Bordelon, executive director of Silver-Source, a Stamford-based organization that provides support to seniors, said the top areas of concern for seniors are almost always housing and food.

But with rising housing and healthcare costs, the amount of disposable income for seniors is being squeezed, leaving many to make tough choices.

“Do I pay for my prescriptions or do I put food on the table?” said Bordelon, describing real decisions seniors have to face. “Just living on Social Security income is not enough in Fairfield County.”

Betty McOsker, program director for the Over 60 Club in Stamford, which offers a five-day-a-week program

STAMFORD — Sylvia Simmons has had to adjust her life to make ends meet.

The 81-year-old Stamford resident, who depends on Social Security and is a food stamp recipient, is frugal with her spending.

Fairway Market is a no-go for groceries because of more affordable alternatives. Certain stores like J.C. Penney and Macy’s are off limits as well for other types of shopping.

Eating out and going to the movies? Simmons scoffs.

“Unless somebody takes you,” she said. “There are a lot of places I wish I could go or things I wish I could do, but I can’t, because I can’t afford it.”

Asked if the amount she receives from Social Security and for food stamps from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is enough for a liveable income, she responded, “You have to make it liveable.”

Simmons is one of 5,300 Stamford seniors who receive SNAP benefits. In total, three out of every 10 Stamford residents over the age of 65 use SNAP, according to



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at St. John's Episcopal Church with exercises, crafts and lunches for seniors, said she will soon face some of the tough decisions many seniors do.

The 71-year-old said that once she and her 84-year-old husband stop working, they'll have to make some changes in their lives.

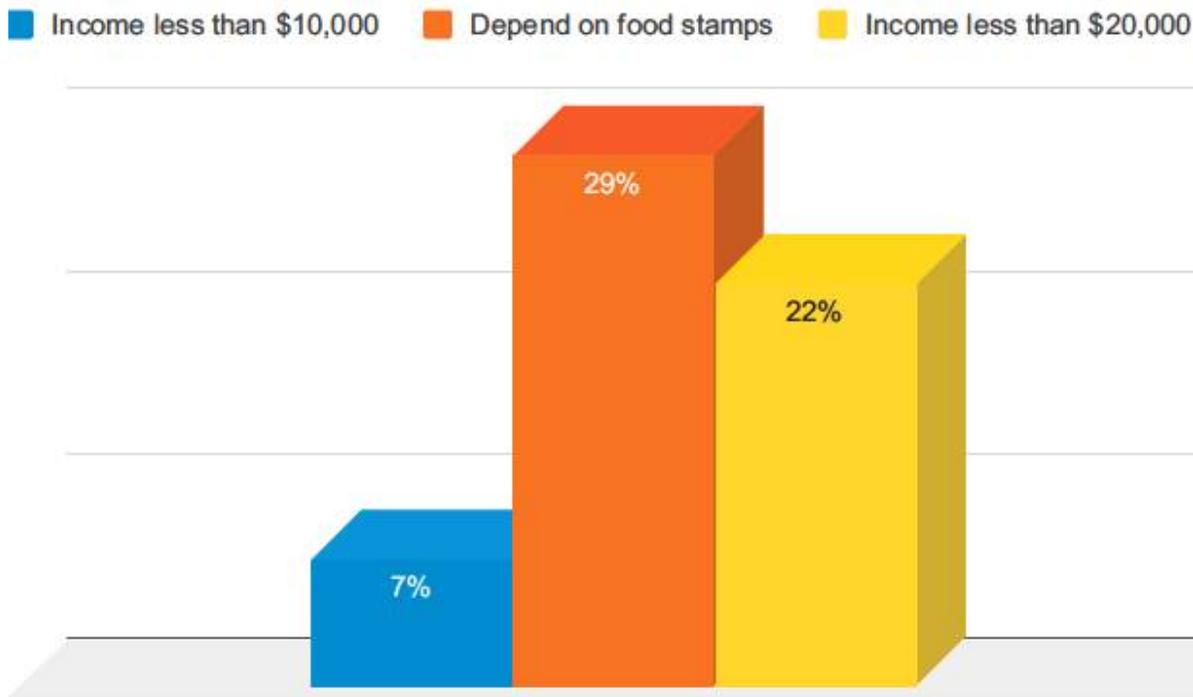
"To stay in Stamford, we're going to have to sell our house because we can't afford to keep the house and live off Social Security," she said.

The average Social Security annual income nationwide is just under \$18,000, or about \$1,470 a month.

With many seniors on a fixed income that doesn't grow at the same rate as the cost of living in the region, the number of aging residents struggling financially seems to be growing.

"For some of our members who are on really limited income, by the end of the month they are really in trouble and they can't afford things," McOsker said.

State of senior citizens in Stamford



“We have no shortage of clients,” Bordelon said.

Simmons, who lives in subsidized senior housing in downtown, said when she gets a raise in her Social Security checks, she doesn’t see any of that extra money. That’s because that money goes directly to her subsidized rent, which is calculated based on income. And her SNAP benefits also go down, depending on the size of the raise.

It leaves the long-time Stamford resident essentially back at square one.

“What’s the point of giving it if you’re going to take it all away? Before you can get it, the rent man has got it,” she said.

Nonetheless, Simmons said she’s grateful for the assistance she does receive.

“If I had to live anywhere else, I wouldn’t be able to afford it,” she said on a recent morning at the Over 60 Club.

Before saying grace in front of the roomful of seniors for lunch, Simmons said she was thankful to have a place like the Over 60 Club to socialize with others and realize that other seniors are in the same boat.

“It gets you out of the house and you get to talk to people and mingle,” she said. “I enjoy coming here.”

Christina Crain, executive director of the Stamford Senior Center, refers many visitors to Silver-Source.

She said more seniors are coming to the center looking for help finding a part-time job, a sign that many are struggling and running out of income to get by.

“I have more people looking for a part-time job, people well into their 70s,” she said. “Which is another issue because trying to find a job at that age is hard.”

Anne Salthouse, 75, an art teacher at the Senior Center, agreed.

“I don’t know that I would have been hireable now at 75,” she said.

Maria Wallman, 65, who was at Salthouse’s class a week ago, said many of her friends have left Stamford because of the cost of living.

“They’re taking off,” she said. “They can’t afford the area. The taxes are killing them.”

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