

My name is Annie Cooper. I live in Essex Junction, Vermont. Back in 2009, my children and I needed to stay safe. I took on 100% of our financials and debt to liberate us forward.

That path was very very very difficult and, at the time, there was no free school meal program, which meant that our evenings and weekends were tough, even though the kids had the great access to the lunches and breakfasts provided through our low income situation, at that time.

I can't tell you the delight I have felt in watching our school meals become something without stigma, without forms (OMG Forms are so hard when you're in struggle) and that serves the entirety of our population, equally. It's one of the most valuable things I can imagine.

It took me years of very dedicated hard work to climb us up and out of that. We, my children and I, were under a lot of stress and to imagine a world where something of this nature would have removed such an extraordinary piece of that stress.....well. It would have made a difference, not only in what we went through, then, but in our ability to grow and our lives would have been better, sooner.

If having to figure out meals are not on the plates (no pun intended) of families, there is enormous opportunity for emotional growth within households. Which leads to less stress on parents, children, households. More time for joy and activities that are productive and not a constant worrying about where food or money for food is going to come from.

This idea of Universal School Meals is a concept that not only assists those in desperate need but also those whose households are in other manners of flux. Anything from medical crisis, to relationship crisis, etc.

Where families can remove the shopping, the financials, the food prep, the remembering to have funds prepared for food can lead to other values rising to the top and ensuring a healthier family interaction, less stress all round and the means to grow their family and their finances in ways that benefit them, which in turn benefits their community.

I fully support Universal School Meals.

Thank you for your time,

Annie Cooper