According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in five children (approximately 15 million) in our nation live at or below the poverty line. The National Center for Children in Poverty reported that a majority of children living in poverty have at least one employed parent. In 1997, nearly two-thirds of poor young children lived in working families and young child poverty is growing fastest in the suburbs. In total, an alarming 22% of young children in America live in poverty.

Children who are denied an adequate diet are at a greater risk than other low-income children of not reaching their full potential as individuals. Children who are undernourished have trouble concentrating and bonding with other children and are more likely to suffer illnesses that force them to be absent from school. They consistently perform more poorly on standardized tests. Poor performance early in school is a major risk factor for dropping out of school in later years. According to labor statistics, educational attainment is perhaps the greatest indicator of job and income mobility, so the impact of childhood hunger can be lifelong. Programs such as America’s Second Harvest’s Kids Cafe address these risk factors by providing both nutritious meals and educational and recreational activities.

Studies have also shown time and time again that even mildly undernourished children may potentially suffer abnormal brain, cognitive, and psychological impairment that, if not corrected, can be irreversible. Recent research conducted by the Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutritional Policy at Tufts University found compelling evidence that improved nutrition can modify and even reverse these effects, which makes supplemental programs critical.