

Episode 2 – Getting the Lowdown on Food Insecurity and Housing Services

Details: Welcome back to Real Issues, Real Talk: For Students, By Students! This week join the students from the University of South Alabama as we sit down and discuss the food and housing resources offered by AIDS Alabama South with Candice Taylor, Co-Executor/Programs, at AIDS Alabama South. For more information regarding all of the services offered by AIDS Alabama South, please feel free to follow this link: <https://www.aidsalabamasouth.org/>

Transcript

00:00:00 Podcast Host

Hey, everyone. Welcome back to real issues real talk for students by students. We are so excited to be back for another season and can't wait for you guys to hear every single episode that we've recorded for season four of the podcast. We are so happy that you guys have been listening, that you've been following us on social media.

00:00:20 Podcast Host

And that you wanted us to come back this season. We have some amazing episodes planned for you guys with incredible guest speakers from AIDS Alabama South to not only talk to us about relevant issues that college students might face, but also discuss all of the amazing things that they do at their organs.

00:00:37 Podcast Host

Just like you're about to hear in this episode. Thank you guys for tuning in and we'll catch you in the next one too.

00:00:43 Podcast Host

Today we have Candace Taylor from AIDS Alabama South cell. That's right. Just like you guys heard him last episode. We have another representative from AIDS Alabama South to talk about the incredible programs that they offer. And without further ado, I guess, Candace, how about you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do with AIDS Alabama South itself?

00:01:02 Candace Taylor

Well hello. I am the Co executive director alongside Shey Thorn.

00:01:08 Candace Taylor

At AIDS Alabama South I am the supervisor over the program services. So people that come see me on the program side are living with HIV and what we do is provide them with food, bank services, housing services, social support services. We have a team of case managers.

00:01:29 Candace Taylor

We also have our eligibility specialists in Lincolnshire Care if they need linkage to doctors and medical appointments. That is our specialty to make sure that they're living their best healthy, happy.

00:01:40 Candace Taylor

Life.

00:01:41 Podcast Host

That is incredible. And I mean, it's crazy to think that all of these services exist in our little small town. You know, we talked a lot in the last episode just about the breadth of services that AIDS Alabama South offers, and it is pretty extensive for how relatively new your organization is in the grand scheme of things and with the support staff that you guys have.

00:02:01 Podcast Host

Just, you know, huge kudos to.

00:02:04 Candace Taylor

It's just not even, you know, just in our little county in mobile. And thank you once again, we service 12 counties in southwest Alabama. We serve from the outside of Montgomery, down from the Alabama, Mississippi State line over to the Alabama, Florida State line. Some of these counties include Baldwin, Butler, Conecuh, Wilcox.

00:02:24 Candace Taylor

Ringo Covington WA so if you have students that are back and forth to home or that even live in these counties, even if they're in Mobile County, you know they currently do qualify for the.

00:02:37 Podcast Host

That is awesome and great clarification on just how far your organization stretches there. Now there's two programs in particular that students would like to know a little bit more about, and

we would love for you to go into detail if you can, and that is your housing assistance program, your AIDS Alabama South and your food and hygiene pantry through AIDS.

00:02:58 Podcast Host

Of himself.

00:02:59 Podcast Host

So I guess getting us started, do you mind telling us about the food and hygiene pantry, how that came about? Where is it located? What's available things along that line?

00:03:09 Candace Taylor

Sure. So our food and hygiene pantry, it's located within our building 4321 downtown loop north. And what we do is we ask people to make appointments Monday through Friday, 8:00 to 5:00. So that we can kind of regulate, you know, if people are coming in and we're seeing people and we're we're maybe missing someone if we're not able to get to you.

00:03:30 Candace Taylor

If everyone is busy, that's why you know we call an ex, you know, to make appointments.

00:03:34 Candace Taylor

But what we do with our food pantry, we go to feed in the Gulf Coast and we get food. We also have donations. You know, if you want to donate, we're at 4321 downtown Loop N we take canned goods, non perishable items. We also have refrigerators, freezers that we stock with food. And we try to provide families or individuals.

00:03:55 Candace Taylor

The food boxes, once a month, we try to build meals out of the things they're, you know, when people give them to us to. So we look at what we have and we kind of type out a sheet and we're like, hey, you have this in your food box this month these.

00:04:08 Candace Taylor

Are sample meals that you can make with your food.

00:04:10 Candace Taylor

Because we live in a society, you know the economy has been down for the last two years because of COVID everything has increased. We also know that the cost of food has increased. You know the.

00:04:24 Candace Taylor

People have lost their jobs because of places have closed and it's hard for people to, you know, receive the food and then also, you know, in the low income neighborhoods, if you look.

00:04:36 Candace Taylor

Look how far our grocery stores away and also a good grocery store. And when I say a good grocery store, those they receive the fresh fruits and vegetables every day or they're able to make those healthier meal options. Our food pantry, we seek volunteers because it is a man within itself, but also our staff.

00:04:57 Candace Taylor

We made it ourselves, So what we do we go when we stock and reload the pantry. You can look on volunteer connect and we put out, you know, for volunteers.

00:05:07 Candace Taylor

Years we load our shelves and we try to get everything in order so that when we're making these food boxes that we don't have everything all over the place get it organized, you know, neat and clean. So last month in the food box, if I could give you a perspective of what we provided, we provided them with fresh fruit.

00:05:27 Candace Taylor

The fresh fruit was nectarines. We had fresh grapes, fresh blueberries. We gave them chicken macaroni and cheese, fresh green beans, and we also had canned English peas, mashed potatoes, milk, cereal.

00:05:46 Podcast Host

Yeah, that sounds like a pretty good little box right there.

00:05:46 Candace Taylor

Ah.

00:05:51 Candace Taylor

So this month is Thanksgiving, so we're trying to year it a little more short Thanksgiving and trying to get them, you know, Thanksgiving food that they're able to if they're not able to get home for a meal or to make their own Thanksgiving meal themselves.

00:06:05 Podcast Host

Yeah, absolutely now.

00:06:07 Podcast Host

The boxes. I'm not sure if you mentioned this earlier or not. Is it a once a month thing where you do the food deliveries OK.

00:06:13 Candace Taylor

Yes, yes, it's a once a month thing. If they do not have transportation, we try to make a food box delivery list. And what we do is we kind of do it by zip code or areas of town. So if we're in 36608, then we try to stay in that area on a certain day. So we'll say Monday we're in 36608 and 366.

00:06:32 Candace Taylor

Nine, depending upon how many you know, food boxes that we can deliver and then we'll go to 3660336602 maybe on Wednesday. So we try to stay in the area, not that we're running downtown mobile to Theodore Theodore to West. So we try to put it in the area, so.

00:06:49 Candace Taylor

That.

00:06:51 Candace Taylor

It makes it, you know, a little more.

00:06:53 Candace Taylor

Easier to function and run.

00:06:55 Podcast Host

Of course, now 8 Alabama South, as you had mentioned earlier, does cover a vast majority of counties in our.

00:07:01 Podcast Host

Area.

00:07:02 Podcast Host

Do you offer your food delivery service in every single one of those counties, or is it limited more towards the generalized area where your main office is?

00:07:10 Candace Taylor

No, it is not just generalized and mobile accounting. We offered across all 12 counties. The thing is, you know when it's with the further counties you know if they call today and say hey, I

need a you know a food box tomorrow we kind of asked them to give us a heads up or ahead of time because we make a schedule so that we can ensure that.

00:07:30 Candace Taylor

OK, if I'm going to Escambia County, I got five people up here, so I'm gonna go ahead and get all five people in this Zambia instead of going to Escambia. Coming back and, you know, going back with some 4th. That's why we make it a schedule.

00:07:42 Podcast Host

Apps.

00:07:43 Podcast Host

Make the entire sense now. One thing you mentioned is your partnership with feeding the Gulf Coast. Is that like a direct partnership that you guys have or do you just purchase pallets?

00:07:54 Podcast Host

Of food from.

00:07:55 Candace Taylor

We purchased Palace of food from them and then they also have where they have gleanings or free food that we can get and we'll get the free food. We'll go and try to, you know, get the free food and, you know, the gleanings is when you go pick the fruits, you know, vegetables yourself and you as much as you can.

00:08:10 Podcast Host

Yeah. Yes.

00:08:12 Candace Taylor

Yet in a times figure they might send us a message and say, hey, we gotta glean in on next Thursday from 8:00 to 12:00, so as much as you can get from that Glenn, and then we can bring it.

00:08:22 Candace Taylor

Back and we.

00:08:23 Candace Taylor

Can distribute it for free. I did mention that all of our services are free. I forget to mention. I'm sorry that all of our services are free, and So what we do is.

00:08:33 Candace Taylor

Once we finish with that and get it all sorted and put together, we give it to the public.

00:08:37 Podcast Host

For free, that's incredible. Now, aside from feeding the Gulf Coast, are there any other third party nonprofits that you work?

00:08:45 Candace Taylor

As far as food? No, but in far as other services, if we transition into housing services, yes, we do work with other nonprofits that for housing services Lifeline 211 is one of the bigger ones that we work with as well.

00:09:03 Candace Taylor

What happens is, you know, people have evictions.

00:09:07 Candace Taylor

We can refer them over to 211 and what happens is they have a program where they can assist them with coming out of the eviction. So let's just say you receive your eviction notice and you contact us and we're like, OK, well, we know they have this program. So we're gonna get you over to them because they can do the lawyer fees.

00:09:27 Candace Taylor

And pay the past due rent to help you come out of the eviction so that you won't be homeless.

00:09:35 Podcast Host

That's incredible. And the service that I don't think a lot of people realize does exist now, just putting the pin in your housing services here for a second and circling back to food. Why do you think it's necessary for AIDS Alabama South itself to operate this food pantry when there are other community options in the area?

00:09:55 Candace Taylor

One because.

00:09:56 Candace Taylor

Because.

00:09:58 Candace Taylor

People need food, you know, just to maintain food, to take your medications. Certain food requires that you take medications to eat, but also just healthier food, food options. People can't afford fast food, not like food and fast food down. But if you have food at home, you can make bigger portions of meals.

00:10:19 Candace Taylor

And last longer so that you will not be, you know, struggling to purchase food.

00:10:24 Candace Taylor

Food pay my rent, pay my bills. You know, it's a financial burden that can be lifted off people. I've been a broke college student before. I've also been in a bind before I had, you know, stable.

00:10:40 Candace Taylor

Us and and the disparity of, OK, I paid all my bills, all my, you know, my rent, my car note. You know, it's paid. I got \$20 in for two weeks. How am I supposed to feed myself? And if I have a family off \$20.00 for the next two weeks.

00:10:54 Podcast Host

OK.

00:10:57 Candace Taylor

Food stamps, or I make too much money to qualify for certain services, so I'm kind of in like a rock or, you know, rock and a hard place. And I just need that extra push, you know.

00:11:05 Podcast Host

Absolutely.

00:11:07 Candace Taylor

Or.

00:11:08 Candace Taylor

Assistance to make it through.

00:11:10 Podcast Host

Yeah. Now one of the things that a lot of people ask us about when it comes to your organization is is it only are the services offered only for people who are HIV and AIDS.

00:11:20 Podcast Host

Incidents.

00:11:20 Candace Taylor

So for food pantry and housing services, yes, for people living with HIV. But we also have our clinical services and as well as our team group and Project 1824. That is for people that are not living with HIV.

00:11:41 Podcast Host

Contra in now going back to the housing services, because I know you touched on them briefly, could you just talk a little bit about what exactly AIDS Alabama's health offers when it comes to housing and security or what partnership organizations you guys work with?

00:11:57 Candace Taylor

Sure. So housing is health care. Let me say that and we believe that if you're stably housed and.

00:12:04 Candace Taylor

You will take your medication and you will live a longer, healthier, happy life and you'll have that secure. Ohh. I'm gonna go to my doctor's appointment, you know, and just be healthy. So with the housing services, we try to assist our clients with locating, you know, housing affordable housing.

00:12:24 Candace Taylor

As well as we can assist with first months rent.

00:12:28 Candace Taylor

When we assist with the first months rent so that the client won't have the burden of paying the deposit, the first month's rent also paying the utility bills because we work with low income individuals and sometimes you know there is a larger deposit for individual.

00:12:46 Candace Taylor

And if they have to pay a deposit to connect their electric?

00:12:50 Candace Taylor

City, their water and their gas depending on, you know, the utilities that they have paying the first loan rent can assist them financially so that they're able to pay that as well as the moving expenses that they will have to.

00:13:03 Candace Taylor

Pay.

00:13:05 Candace Taylor

Also, with our housing services, we do have a tenant based rental assistance program.

00:13:10 Candace Taylor

We call it TEBRA for short, where we can assist clients with.

00:13:16 Candace Taylor

About 7 to 30% of their rent. It's a formula that we use with the income that they were in. So I can't tell you if your rent is \$1000 that we'll pay 70. I mean that we'll pay 700 and then you pay the other 300. It's not specifically like that. It's based upon your income and we.

00:13:36 Candace Taylor

Do the formula and we come out with the amount that the client has to pay.

00:13:42 Candace Taylor

Also, with housing assistance, we have assist clients that are within their apartment or their home and they may have fell behind a month or two on their rent and we can get them caught up on you know their rent when they are falling behind so that they won't be facing eviction or being put out now.

00:14:01 Candace Taylor

If they are facing eviction as I stated before, we send them over to 211 Lifeline 211 because they have a program for individuals that are facing eviction and that they can assist with the lawyer fees and the past due rental. You know within the eviction process.

00:14:22 Podcast Host

Absolutely. I mean that is incredible. Just the breadth of services that you guys offer when it comes to housing and security.

00:14:28 Podcast Host

Now.

00:14:29 Podcast Host

When it comes to your food, bank services and your housing services, we know that they're only for individuals who are living with HIV or AIDS. Could you touch on maybe why housing and security is extremely important for that demographic?

00:14:42 Candace Taylor

OK. So with HIV positive individuals?

00:14:47 Candace Taylor

Tools. We want them stably housed because they will take their medication, so think about this. Let's put this in perspective. I'm living with HIV and I have my antiretroviral medication art medication with me. I'm homeless or I'm couch surfing, sleeping on friends, couches or family couches I haven't.

00:15:08 Candace Taylor

Told anyone about my status, but I have this medication on me, so if they find it, they can Google it and they'll know that I'm living with HIV. So am I gonna keep this medicine with me because I'm homeless? Or am I gonna dish it and not take my medication and continue to be home?

00:15:25 Candace Taylor

List now on the other perspective, if I'm stably housed in my house and I'm able to live, you know, within my house, my privacy, this is mine. I'm gonna take my medication, I'm going to go to my doctor's appointments. I'm going to eat, you know, I'm going to eat so that I'm able to take my medication.

00:15:46 Candace Taylor

So that's where the food pantry.

00:15:48 Candace Taylor

Come in because some medicines require you to eat a meal with it, and it's not even. Ohh. I have to eat breakfast every morning to take my medicine. You may take your medicine at lunchtime if you eat a sandwich for lunch, you know you have the food that's available. OK. I ate my sandwich and I take my peel one time. Once a day. OK, I've done that and I can move on not taking.

00:16:08 Candace Taylor

Some medicines, if you take it on an empty stomach, you know it can irritate your stomach. That's not even just with art medication. You can take, you know, Tylenol on the empty stomach and it can irritate your stomach because you know you're, you know, you don't have any food or anything in there. And the acids in your stomach, it can irritate.

00:16:25 Candace Taylor

So that's the importance of having someone stably housed that's living with HIV, but also providing them with food so that they're able to maintain a healthy lifestyle, eat.

00:16:38 Candace Taylor

Take their medication, go to their doctor's appointments and live a normal, healthy life.

00:16:44 Podcast Host

Absolutely. And I mean, you know that makes total sense. I think a lot of people kind of forego.

00:16:49 Podcast Host

The importance of housing and food security when it comes to, you know, following a healthy lifestyle, being able to stay on track with your medication, things like that. So it's great that you guys are offering these services especially for a population that's at risk as much as those living with HIV could be. Now I wanna touch on utilization of your services.

00:17:10 Podcast Host

What are those numbers looking? I mean, we know that they exist. We know that they're great services, but are people in the community utilizing them on a regular basis?

00:17:19 Candace Taylor

Yes. So when I first started in 2016, we used to be on Dauphin St. we're in a small, small, small building and we see about about maybe 40 or 50 food boxes a.

00:17:33 Candace Taylor

Month.

00:17:34 Candace Taylor

We did not have the freezers or the refrigerators. It was more of like a grocery bag.

00:17:39 Candace Taylor

I don't know if you want to call it a food box. It was more like a grocery sized bag.

00:17:42 Candace Taylor

They were giving out, you know, once a month.

00:17:47 Candace Taylor

We moved over a few years later to our new location on 4321 Downtown Loop North and our Pantry. You know, it kind of exploded it. Boom. We got the industrial sized freezers, we got the

industrial size coolers, we put the shelves up so that we were able to expand and to grow. Now we're giving out anywhere between.

00:18:06 Candace Taylor

130 to 150 food boxes per month.

00:18:11 Podcast Host

Oh.

00:18:12 Podcast Host

Quite a quite some growth there.

00:18:12 Candace Taylor

Yes.

00:18:14 Candace Taylor

Yes. And it's not even just a small grocery bag. Sometimes they get a box, sometimes they get two large brown bags of food and it's able to make at least a week or week and a half of meals a month. So yes, that relieves, you know, a burden off of appliance.

00:18:34 Candace Taylor

When it comes to the housing services, housing is something I call it a monster. Because if you think about the rising prices just to put you in perspective of some of our clients that that receive their SSI, they're supplemented Social Security income or their disability income once per month and they only receive a certain 841.

00:18:55 Candace Taylor

Dollars a.

00:18:55 Candace Taylor

Month.

00:18:56 Candace Taylor

A1 bedroom in Mobile County is anywhere between 7:25 to 800 and something dollars a month.

00:19:03 Candace Taylor

So if I'm receiving \$841.00 a month and I have to pay \$775 in rent.

00:19:10 Candace Taylor

How much money do I have left to pay my electric bill? My water bill? I have to pay a copay to receive my medication. I have a monthly hypertensive medication I have to pay. I have, you know, my antiretroviral therapy, medication, copay. I have to pay even 3 or \$5 for a copay is a lot. Even when you don't have that.

00:19:31 Candace Taylor

You know, amount of money to pay and then you look at, OK, Now I have to have food because I have to eat. If I don't eat, you know, I'll be sick.

00:19:40 Candace Taylor

You know, I go days and days without eating and then, you know, you don't have the energy to thrive and to go because I don't eat. So that's where it ties into us. Having our food pantry and housing services to assist those clients to make that gap to, you know, within that gap.

00:19:58 Podcast Host

Yeah, of course. Now you mentioned how the two services do kind of interact with each other. Do you see a lot of people utilize both at the same time or is there kind of no trend there?

00:20:10 Candace Taylor

Yes, I do see people utilize both at the same time and as I explained and it's just because of the financial income even what about our people that work that make \$10.00 an hour and they also have.

00:20:25 Candace Taylor

A car, no car insurance, car insurance and a car note itself. And then you have rent and other utilities. So I make \$10.00 an hour. I'm barely keeping afloat. I need, you know, just a little assistance to kind of keep afloat, which is why they come in for our food bank services and even housing assistance sometimes.

00:20:46 Candace Taylor

When they are those that are have their earned income and employed, you know, it's balancing that money and trying to maintain, you know people have been in a fight for trying to increase pay because everything you know is increasing and they need to increase in salary and pay to even maintain.

00:21:05 Podcast Host

Yeah.

00:21:06 Podcast Host

I mean, shoot. If we talk about increasing prices. I remember when my drink at Starbucks used to be 3 bucks and now it's four and everything's just going up across the board. So it's hard to get ahead. And then especially if you're in a situation where you have a car note, you have others to support rents, living expenses, medication fees, things like that.

00:21:26 Podcast Host

I can completely understand how that can pile up and where your services would come into play to really help someone out in that situation. So I mean huge thank you once again for everything that you do and for offering those services and thinking about them in the first place.

00:21:39

Yes.

00:21:40 Podcast Host

All right, Candace. Now we've reached that point in the episode, but kind of towards the end here, we've got to start wrapping things up. Unfortunately, not that it hasn't been a great talk, but we know our listeners have places to be. They're on their way to class. Let's just assume for a second that our listener was walking the class. They got stopped by a few friends. They maybe got caught up in another conversation.

00:22:01 Podcast Host

And they're just coming back to this point in the episode. If they missed everything we talked about before, what is the one thing you want them to take away?

00:22:11 Candace Taylor

The one thing that I want people to take away is that we all struggle at times and there are social services available to anyone. 211 is the resource line and that you can call 211 from your phone and whatever you may need, financial assistance, mental health assistance.

00:22:31 Candace Taylor

Food, whatever. Dial to 11 and they will send you to the correct agency that provides these services.

00:22:39 Candace Taylor

Everyone you know has their point in life that they struggle and reaching out doesn't mean that you're weak because you need services for whatever it may be. But it does make you a stronger

person because you have people that you know that are going to assist you and give you that extra boost to get you over that hump so that you're able to maintain and not have to worry about whatever it may be. If it's food, if it's housing.

00:23:02 Candace Taylor

Even if it's mental health.

00:23:05 Candace Taylor

Please call.

00:23:08 Podcast Host

That excellently said, and you know, thank you again for coming on the podcast and sharing these amazing resources with our listeners. For those listening at home, if you ever need to check out these resources through Adela MSL, be sure to look at the links in our description. Everything we referenced in this podcast will be linked down below there. Once again, Candice huge huge. Thank you for coming on here.

00:23:29 Podcast Host

Today, for those listening, I can assure you this real issues real talk for students by students is not going anywhere. We know it's been a minute since you guys have heard from us, but we are excited to be rounding out the semester with a few incredible episodes and some amazing guests.

00:23:46 Podcast Host

If you are just listening to us for the first time, be sure to check us out on social media and listen to all our other Episodes Anywhere podcast or streamed, and we'll catch you guys.

00:23:54 Podcast Host

In the next one, bye.