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The faces & The facts

2010



Columbian Gardens, Oakland

Abstract

Every day in Alameda County thousands of mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers turn to an emergency food source to help them nourish their families. The Food Bank is currently serving 49,000 unduplicated individuals each week; 23% more than the 40,000 unduplicated weekly clients revealed in the 2006 study. However, this is only a partial picture of the increased need in the community. Many more people have needed to increase their frequency of visits to food pantries, soup kitchens, after-school programs, senior centers, shelters and other community agencies – thus our requests for emergency food referrals have escalated 47% in the past year and 98% since the outset of 2008. In 2009 alone, our Emergency Food Helpline referred food to 32,743 households composed of nearly 113,000 individuals. The Food Bank is serving 250,000 unduplicated individuals each year, or 1 in 6 Alameda County residents. The vast majority make multiple visits to one of our sites over the course of a year.

Children make up the largest group of people receiving emergency food in Alameda County – that has been true through most of the Food Bank's 25-year history – but this study reveals that demand among minors is escalating at a rate disproportional to the population in general. Seniors

also remain particularly vulnerable to hunger. For low-income seniors, many of whom are already susceptible to chronic diseases and disabilities, a lack of access to nutritious food often triggers depression.

Households that seek emergency food assistance are more likely than at any other point in the last decade to have at least one working household member. An increase in employment can be seen as a positive trend among food recipients, but the pay level of the work is the critical component; clients who do not earn a sustainable wage are still at risk of hunger, despite their efforts. Thus we have what would be, in different economic times, seemingly ambiguous data: more employed clients coupled with higher rates of food insecurity.

As the Food Bank expands its efforts to distribute to swelling ranks of clients, these key findings offer (and advocate for) recommendations to end hunger in our community. One obvious path is to strengthen and improve access to federal food programs. The Food Stamp Program is critical to ending hunger, yet continues to be underutilized in Alameda County, even among households that regularly access emergency food.



Davis Street Family Resource Center, San Leandro



St. Mary's Center, Oakland



Hope for the Heart, Hayward



Berkeley Food Pantry, Berkeley

Key Findings

Key Finding 1:

More Children Are Going Hungry

- 43% of Food Bank clients are children and teens.
- 25% of households with children report that their child was hungry at least once during the past year and they couldn't afford enough food.
- 80% of client households with at least one child under 18 face low or very low food security.

Key Finding 2:

Little Progress In Senior Hunger

- 19% of clients are seniors.
- 67% of client households with seniors face low or very low food security.
- 13% of client households report SSI as their main source of income. Currently the maximum monthly income an individual can receive is \$845.

NOTE: For purposes of delineating population groups in this report, "senior" refers to any person 50 years or older.

Key Finding 3:

Low-wage Earners Are Losing Ground

- 42% of client households have one or more employed adult.
- 78% of client households reported that during the last 12 months the food they bought didn't last and they didn't have money to buy more.
- The median monthly income of Food Bank client households is \$990, compared to the county-wide median of \$5,851.

Key Finding 4:

Nutrition Programs Continue To Be Underutilized

- 17% of client households receive food stamp benefits; 74% had incomes eligible for food stamps.
- 22% of Food Bank clients unsuccessfully applied for food stamps in the past year.
- 53% of clients report that benefits last two weeks or less.
- While 67% of children participate in school lunches, only 15% of clients participate in summer lunch.

Policy Recommendations

Actions the Food Bank and its partners must take to create a culture in which hunger can be eradicated

Create Family Economic Sovereignty

Support Wages, Work and Education

- Create sustainable-wage jobs that ensure families working full time can meet basic needs such as food, shelter, transportation and healthcare.
- Support a progressive state tax policy.
- Ensure that families receive the federal earned income and child tax credits due them.
- Support effective transitions to employment for people leaving assistance programs; help workers keep jobs by creating education, job training and advancement opportunities; ensure safe, affordable childcare and transportation.
- Keep public higher education (including community colleges, continuing and vocational education) affordable.

Build Sustainable Communities

- Increase the number of affordable housing units for rent and purchase.
- Support policies that make homeownership affordable.
- Help families build and maintain economic independence by expanding access to financial services.

Strengthen Government Safety Net Programs

- Ensure adequate unemployment, cash welfare, Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
- Ensure basic healthcare coverage for low-income families.

Support Good Nutrition and Address Health Disparities

Improve Access to the Food Stamp Program

- Abolish the state fingerprinting requirement.
- Eliminate the asset test for all Californians (not only those supporting minors).

- Implement simplified reporting to reduce paperwork.
- Increase benefits and reinstate benefits for all residents with eligible incomes.

Expand and Improve Child Nutrition Programs

- Increase summer and after-school meal sites.
- Immediately update school meal patterns to reflect current nutrition standards.
- Increase the federal meal reimbursement rate to allow schools to offer wider varieties of healthy foods – including more whole, locally sourced fruits and vegetables.
- Increase flexibility of funding in order for school districts to tailor services to their student populations.
- Fully fund the WIC program to serve all eligible women, infants and children.

Encourage Eligible Families to Participate

- Fund outreach campaigns for all federal nutrition programs.

Increase Access to Nutritious Food

- Support policies that facilitate production and consumption of nutritious food in low-income neighborhoods through retail and community projects (e.g. farmer's markets).

Strategically Expand Food Bank Services to Meet Emerging Needs

Assist More People in Need

- Expand Food Bank services in underserved areas of Alameda County.
- Help the Food Bank's network expand service hours.
- Coordinate emergency food delivery programs for seniors and the homebound.
- Increase the number of non-English speaking communities served.

Enhance Existing Services

- Maintain the high quality of food provided to member agencies.
- Continue to expand school food distributions.



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