



Food Notes

The Newsletter of Food For People • The Food Bank of Humboldt County

Special Holiday Issue 2011

Local Hunger at an All-Time High

More families are struggling to put food on the table than ever before. This includes a wide range of households that work but do not earn enough to support a family, people who can't find work, seniors and folks with disabilities living on fixed incomes, and a large number of children who can't



Girl Scouts glean the Mad River Community Hospital Farm where they grew produce for the Food for People pantry.

help the economic situation they live in.

This past year, our food bank has served record numbers of people. We work hard to educate the larger community about local hunger in order to find creative solutions to meet the rising need. In this special edition of *Food Notes*, we invite you to learn more about our programs and the people we serve, and to consider one of the many ways you can work alongside us in our mission to eliminate hunger and improve the health of our community.

We started out 32 years ago as a food pantry in a small house in Eureka, providing food to local households in need. Today we operate out of a large warehouse and have grown to meet the increasing need through our 12 programs. They include a network of emergency food pantries across the county, food distribution programs for

children and seniors, nutrition education and outreach, food drives and gleaning efforts, as well as our many partnerships throughout the community. This is the heart of Food for People. We work side by side with the community and for the community to help Humboldt be its strongest and healthiest.

Meeting the Need

Did you know we provide food for 16 emergency food pantries and six "soup kitchens" throughout Humboldt County? Combined, they serve 76,697 residents who struggle to make ends meet. Or maybe you've visited our main Eureka location and toured our Choice Pantry. This innovative choice-style pantry takes the form of a grocery store where people can make healthy food choices and take home only the food they really want and can use.

Lately, we have discovered that the structure of many of our families and households is slowly changing shape, transforming far



Andy Nieto, our Operations Manager, keeps food moving in our Food for People warehouse.

beyond the historical nuclear family models. Sharing resources and leaning on each other, our pantry shoppers have given us countless examples of incredible strength and kindness, even during the days of their most difficult financial hardships.

The People We Serve

Recently we met Luis and Angela, elderly grandparents, who came in with their three grandchildren. Their daughter is going to nursing school and can only work part time. The fixed income on which they live and feed themselves now needs to be stretched to feed a

Continued on page 2

The People We Serve

Continued from page 1
family of six. More and more we see this trend of families living together to deal with the economic challenges of these times.

Kathy is a single working mother with six children. She recently came to the Choice Pantry for the first time with her best friend, Barbara. The two women teamed up to help a neighbor's 12-year-old child whose parents had reached a critical level of poverty. The boy's health had diminished, giving him a grey complexion and limited energy. Kathy and Barbara let him stay at their homes and cook dinner for himself in their kitchens. And they bought him a pair of shoes after they noticed he had duct-taped together his current pair.

The two women visited the Pantry regularly for the free bread available in our lobby, and they attended the monthly free People's Produce Market that happens right here in our parking lot. But all of their combined resources were simply not enough, and they reluctantly scheduled an appointment for the Choice Pantry which allowed them to choose kid-friendly food for the boy. This story is unique, but the willingness by our clients to assist friends and neighbors in need is surprisingly common.

Susan is married with a young daughter and does not work due to medical issues. Her husband is employed, yet struggles with finding enough work to pay all of the bills. Their family depends on available resources to supplement their income and help provide nutritious food. As is typical of so many people, they came to the food bank as a last resource. Susan was surprised to find the amount of food less than expected and was nervous about getting an appointment before they were all filled up.

Susan is right to worry. More than ever, she and many others will have to deal with impending limitations on available resources. Although we at Food for People work to provide food for all those in need, we can only continue to stock our shelves and provide food during the holiday season and the months ahead with the help of a generous and caring community.

Carolyn Ayers, retired school teacher and long-time volunteer of Food for People tells us her view of the pantry.

"I see a lot of people desperate for work, down and out on their luck, embarrassed and ashamed of having to ask for help and people who try not to come until they have no other choice. I see people with very little, yet still concerned

only about others in need, careful about not taking more than their fair share and leaving enough for others. The only time I've ever felt shocked is by how little help there is out there for people."



Enjoying Summer Lunch at the City of Eureka's Camp Carson (above and top right).



end break). We partner with many organizations to feed children through our After School Snack, Children's Summer Lunch and Backpacks for Kids programs.

During the summer months, we provided 16,144 free, nutritious lunches to more than 300 kids daily at 20 sites throughout the county. When school is in session, we provide healthy snacks to over 250 children daily through our After School Program partners. We also send home sacks of groceries with children every weekend through the Backpacks for Kids program. Even with our recent expansion of the program, we are still only able to serve 15% of children in need.

Feeding Our Kids

Nearly 10,000 children in Humboldt County are at risk for hunger — living at or below the federal poverty line. At Food for People, we operate three programs designed to help children who qualify for free or reduced-cost school meals (because hunger doesn't take a summer vacation or even a week-



Feeding Our Elders

Seniors are some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and they often have to stretch limited budgets and make difficult choices in order to pay for the basic necessities and still afford good food. Our programs serve as a safety net for seniors at risk of hunger, and provide healthy, nutritious food — helping them to protect their health, maintain their independence and preserve their dignity. Our Senior Brown Bags and Commodity Supplemental Food Boxes provide nutritious monthly food for elderly members of our community, many of whom are struggling to live on less than \$1,000 a month.

Keeping it Healthy

Jenny took care of her ailing father for years. “My 90-year-old father’s greatest pleasure was eating the fruits and vegetables you gave him. We had barely enough to live on or heat for our home, but he loved those fruits and vegetables.” She felt strongly about keeping him healthy and would roll into our parking lot in her ancient car with her warm, positive energy, grateful for the opportunity to take home a good selection of fresh produce that she couldn’t otherwise have



Our free People’s Produce Markets run monthly, May through October, in four locations around the county.

afforded.

During the months of May through October, we host a season of free farmers’ market-style produce distributions that provide almost 200,000 lbs. of fresh fruits and vegetables to more than 8,000 individuals. Here at our Eureka location, we invite other nonprofits to participate by providing information about their services, and local musicians donate their time and music to provide a festive atmosphere. People often line up for hours ahead of opening time to take advantage of this opportunity for free produce.

Not sure what to do with the extra produce from your garden? Last year a total of 55,324 lbs. of fresh produce was donated to us through gleaning and backyard garden donations.

NonProfit Network

We currently partner with 25 local nonprofit organizations that provide many different services, including after school and recreation programs for children, veterans’ services, drug and alcohol recovery programs, food pantries, assistance for the homeless



Beverly Olson, long-time volunteer; helps distribute fruits and vegetables at the People’s Produce Market in Eureka.

and transitional housing for low income families. Partnering with us makes it possible for them to access nutritious food, bread and fresh produce at a very low (and sometimes no) cost for the people they serve.

800 Ways to End Hunger in Humboldt

Why 800? Many, many years ago, 800 people donating \$5 a month is what it took to cover our yearly budget. Since that time, we have greatly increased our services to children, seniors and working families in need throughout our community. We currently provide food assistance for over 12,000 people monthly, and our yearly budget has grown proportionately.

What remains the same is that everyone doing their part, and donating a comfortable monthly amount turns into something powerful. Money we can depend upon allows us to make long-term plans, while building strong foundations for our programs. Your donations will make a direct impact right now and right here in Humboldt County. Thank you to all 800

Club members – your commitment is making a difference and is allowing us to help when we are needed most. It’s easy to become an 800 Club member. Contact Harriet Pecot at harriet@foodforpeople.org or call (707) 445-3166 for more information.

Holiday Spirit Food & Fund Drive

As we gear up for this holiday season, we would like to invite the community to participate in our Holiday Spirit Food & Fund Drive by joining the **Hunger Fighter Challenge**. We challenge local businesses, organizations and individuals to donate all they can to ensure that everyone in Humboldt County has a holiday season free from hunger. This drive will collect food and financial donations through a variety of methods, with donations going to support Food for People's anti-hunger operations throughout the community.

At this time of the year, some of the most needed items are:

- peanut butter
- canned meat and fish
- beans and hearty stews
- canned fruits in 100% juice
- whole grains (pasta and cereal)

The food collected during the holiday season is something we depend on to carry us through the coming months. Within the last year, Food for People has seen our reserve of locally donated food supplies dwindle due to an immense increase in need — **up 45% from just the previous year**. With your help, we can ensure all families have enough to eat during the



cold winter months, including and beyond the holidays.

If you are interested in taking the **Hunger Fighter Challenge** or would like more information about our Holiday Spirit Food & Fund Drive, please contact Jason Whitley at (707) 445-3166 or go to our website at www.foodforpeople.org.

Our Volunteers

The heart of our organization is our volunteers, and that equals a very big heart! Working at the Food for People pantry, it's easy to be touched by the volunteers and their dedication.

"Make sure you let people know all the choices we have today!" or "Did you tell them about the free produce market coming up?" are some of the conversations you

might hear in the pantry. The bottom line is their genuine caring to help people and let them know about any and all available resources. This past year, our volunteers donated a total of 32,496 hours, or the equivalent of 18 full-time staff positions! Come by and meet Laura Hughes, our Volunteer Coordinator, and find the right place for you to be part of our Food for People family.



Ivy Matheny, Food Distribution Coordinator, with long-time volunteer, Ozzie Pomeroy.

From Our Director

Putting a face on hunger is important to us at Food for People. Each and every day we see people from all walks of life who share their personal stories. Some of the stories are incredibly humbling and reflect the challenges that have brought an increasing number of people to our door as the economy has worsened. They include seniors who are living solely on their Social Security income; individuals who can no longer work due to injury or illness; and families who are struggling to put food on the table and still pay the other bills after losing their jobs or dealing with unexpected medical expenses or car repairs. They include our friends and neighbors who live next door, sit next to us at church or go to school with our children. And their stories remind us that

circumstances can change for any one of us in the blink of an eye.

That's the message we hope you will remember this holiday season. We never know what life has in store for us, but if we believe in the power of "paying it forward" by donating food, serving as a volunteer or making a financial donation so that the next person who walks through the doors at the Food Bank receives the help they need, then we've created the kind of community we all want to live in.

Warmest wishes to you and yours for a joyous holiday season from all of us here at Food for People.

Anne Holcomb
Executive Director