

Food Bank Responds to Growing Needs



The numbers are grim:

- 39.8 million Americans living in poverty – 13.2 percent of the population
- Nearly one in eight Americans now receive SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamp)
- An unemployment rate in New Jersey approaching 10 percent
- The number of people turning to the emergency food network in Mercer County is up by 25 percent

This is why the Food Bank is working harder than ever to secure and distribute food.



The amount of food coming into the Food Bank this year has increased by 40 percent over 2008 and we are on track to receive and handle at least 2.4 million pounds of food and groceries by the end of the calendar year.

To keep pace with the increased demand for food, we:

- Enlarged our space by 5,000 sq. feet
- Approved five new pantries for membership in the Food Bank and three more are in the pipeline
- Expanded our food distribution days and hours
- Hired an additional warehouse worker
- Grew Send Hunger Packing, our child hunger weekend meal pack, from 98 children to a current enrollment of 129 children
- Are finding and working with new food donors
- Increased the number of volunteers
- Began collaborations with local colleges and universities to provide students to help with food distribution and to deliver food to schools for Send Hunger Packing



And the work goes on...

Dear Partner,

While some in the national media talk about signs that the economy is beginning to turn around, this is news to the 20,000 plus folks in our area who face hunger and food insecurity on a daily basis.

Just read this note from a family whose child receives a "Send Hunger Packing" weekend meal pack from the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank (the family name was omitted to maintain privacy):

"I would like to take this time to thank the caring individuals who took the time to pack such generous items. The X Family would like to thank each and everyone who used their precious time and energy to prevent my family from facing hunger. Thank you."

The X Family

Predictions and forecasts of an economic recovery bring no immediate relief to this family or to all the other households in our community who worry about putting nutritious meals on the table.

What does bring comfort to the hungry and food insecure is knowing that they can count on the Food Bank to be here as a safety net during difficult times.

We are a long way off from an economic recovery that includes, most of all, jobs for those who seek work and sufficient incomes to meet basic needs.

For more than 20 years the Food Bank has been leading the fight against hunger, steadfast in our resolve to provide the food and other resources needed to sustain the emergency food network. Today, the aid and assistance we provide is needed by more people than ever imagined.

We hope you will stand beside us and help hold up the safety net for all those who cannot afford to put food on the table. Your support truly helps to feed children, adults and seniors who face the pain and indignity of hunger.

Like the X family, I thank you for your support and for helping all the unknown families prevent hunger.



TableTalk A PUBLICATION FROM THE
MERCER STREET FRIENDS FOOD BANK

Contributors: Susan Jones, Brian Peterson and Phyllis Stoolmacher

THE ADVOCATE'S CHAIR

Child nutrition programs – including school meal programs, after school programs, summer feeding programs and WIC – must be reauthorized every five years by Congress and were set to expire on September 30, 2009. With health care preoccupying the agenda on Capitol Hill, Congress put off consideration of the Child Nutrition Act but did extend authorization of existing programs through September 30, 2010.

The **National School Lunch Program** provides low cost or free meals each school day to more than 30.5 million children (FY 2007) attending public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions.

School districts and the independent schools that participate receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve lunches that meet federal nutrition requirements and must offer free or reduced priced lunches to eligible children.

The School Lunch Program makes sure that children, especially those from food insecure households, have at least one meal during the school day.

Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level (currently \$28,665 for a family of four) are eligible for free meals.

Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level (currently \$40,793 for a family of four) are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents.

The School Breakfast Program operates in the same manner as the School Lunch Program. School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the breakfast program receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve breakfasts that meet federal nutrition requirements and must offer free or reduced-priced breakfast to eligible children

The School Breakfast Program makes sure that children, especially those from food insecure households, are not hungry as they start the school day.

Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-priced meals, for which students can be charged no more than 30 cents.

New Jersey mandates a School Breakfast Program in any school where more than 20 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch.

continued on next page

The Advocate's Chair *continued*

When Congress does take up consideration of the Child Nutrition Act, some changes the food bank would like to see are:

- Elimination of the reduced price category so that all children from families with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty level can receive a free breakfast and lunch
- Increased funding so school districts can purchase more nutritious food, which tends to be more costly
- Increase the reimbursement per lunch at each level of eligibility so school district can keep up with rising food costs
- Mandate and fund “universal” breakfast, i.e., free to all students in school districts with a predominately low-income student population
- Fund incentives to implement school breakfast “after the bell” so late bus arrivals, etc., will not prevent a child from eating

Study after study shows that children learn better, behave better and feel better when they are not chronically hungry.

If you would like to find out how you can advocate for nutrition programs that will reduce child hunger in our nation, please contact the Food Bank.

SEPTEMBER 11th OBSERVANCE



Secretary Wells was among the work crew who inspected and reboxed food donations.

The Food Bank observed the first national September 11th Day of Remembrance and Service with a visit by New Jersey Secretary of State Nina Mitchell Wells; staff and members of the New Jersey State Commission on National and Community Service and the Bonner Foundation; and a large contingent of NJ AmeriCorps participants.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH



Send Hunger Packing school coordinators and one school principal came by for a tour of the Food Bank and an opportunity to be an advocate for programs that address child hunger.

Throughout September, Hunger Action Month, the Food Bank organized activities with a special emphasis on child hunger. Visitors to the Food Bank learned about important federally funded child nutrition programs and were invited to take action to reduce child hunger by writing to their House member and US Senators and asking them to support changes to child nutrition programs up for reauthorization in Congress that will improve access, meal quality and nutrition for millions of children.

Pens, paper and addresses were on hand. A letter or postcard could be written on the spot or taken home to be completed at a later time.



The culmination of Hunger Action Month was a day of service on September 22. NRG Energy Inc. Senior Vice President and General Counsel, Michael Bramnick, accompanied by ten NRG employees, announced an award of \$30,000 for Send Hunger Packing, the Food Bank's weekend meal program for hungry children. Then they all went to work and filled 150 back packs with nutritious kid-friendly easy to open food for the Send Hunger Packing program.

Connecting with Our Community to End Hunger

Recent Grants and Awards

Bloomberg L.P. – for support of the Food Bank’s work to reduce hunger

Concordia Foundation – to support the Food Bank’s Healthy Eating Initiatives and nutrition programs

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – Funding awarded under a joint proposal by New Jersey’s food banks for capacity building and expansion

Share Our Strength – to meet the increased need for food

Sybase Classic Presented by ShopRite – for hunger relief activities and programs

T-Shirt Sales Benefit Food Bank

Stop by Small World Coffee on Witherspoon Street or Nassau Street in Princeton where you will find a selection of t-shirts designed by Angelo Sargentini. Proceeds from the sale of the t-shirts are donated to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.

Shopping for a Cause

Looking for a unique gift for the holidays or any other occasion? Cascieri Art, with its vast array of artwork and jewelry may have just what you need. And your purchase will generate a donation to the Food Bank if you mention Mercer Street Friends. Visit www.cascieriart.com or drop in at the Food Bank.

Thunder Food Drive

On a hot Sunday afternoon in August, the Trenton Thunder held a food drive for the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.



Brian Peterson (far right), Food Bank Community Resource Liaison accepts donations at Waterfront Park.



Food Bank Director Phyllis Stoolmacher with NJ Secretary of Agriculture Douglas Fisher, who made his first visit to the Food Bank as head of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Volunteer Counts

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse during the summer and fall.

Number of Volunteers.....**112**
 Number of Hours.....**426**

GROUPS:

- NJ Bonner AmeriCorps
- NRG Energy Inc.
- Old Navy (Hamilton MarketPlace)
- Princeton University Capital Giving Office
- Princeton University Community Action
- Prudential Fox & Roach – Princeton Office
- Rider University Multicultural Student Leadership Institute
- Sun Bank
- Union Baptist Church

If you would like to volunteer, please call us at (609) 406-0503.

YES! I want to help the Food Bank meet growing needs. Here is my contribution of:

\$50 \$100 \$250 Other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please make check payable to:

Mercer Street Friends Food Bank
 824 Silvia Street, Ewing, NJ 08628

Your contribution is tax-deductible as allowed by law.



Mercer Street Friends is a Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian human care organization that has been providing compassionate and practical solutions to the problems of poverty and health in the greater Trenton area since 1958. The agency offers a myriad of services to address the educational, health, economic and social well-being of at-risk populations through its four divisions:

- Children and Youth Services
- Food Bank
- Home Health Care
- Parenting and Adult Services

To learn more about the programs and services of Mercer Street Friends, please visit our web site at www.mercerstreetfriends.org

LIVE UNITED



Food Bank Engages College Students through Service Learning

Princeton University

Community Action (CA) is a student-lead pre-orientation program for the freshman class sponsored by the Student Volunteers Council (SVC) at Princeton University. The program involves a week of volunteer service with local nonprofit organizations and seeks to promote an ethic of service and community awareness among undergraduates, foster collaborations between the University and surrounding communities, and engage all participants in dialogue.

The Food Bank is a long-established site for the CA “Hunger Coalition” and students are put to work helping with food distribution and food sorting.

This year we also became a site for “The Arts” and the students spent the week designing and painting a mural at the Food Bank.

Our partnership with Community Action is not our only connection with



Trenton Daylight/Twilight High School senior Carolyn Vazquez, who worked the summer at the Food Bank through a Mercer County funded youth employment program and Jun Xiang, our 2009 Class of 1969 intern.

the **Student Volunteers Council** at Princeton University. A few months ago, the SVC approached the Food Bank about expanding the partnership and involving students in ways that would be helpful to the Food Bank and at the same time provide an opportunity for students to learn about and understand the scope and extent of hunger in the greater Trenton area.

The result is a new collaboration. The Student Volunteers Council has adopted Send Hunger Packing as a service project and sends its van and students to the Food Bank on a biweekly schedule to pick-up and deliver food to the schools participating in Send Hunger Packing.

Another linkage with Princeton is through the **Princeton Internship in**

Civic Service - Class of 1969 Community Service Fund, which partially funds a 10-week summer position with the Food Bank. The internship with the Food Bank involves research projects; data collection and analysis; and writing position papers and other advocacy material.



Keleofa Bernard is in her second year as a Bonner Leader at the Food Bank. Kelly is particularly involved in our child centered food and nutrition programs.

Rider University

For several years, Mercer Street Friends has been a host site and community partner with the Rider University Bonner Leader Program. Students accepted into the program provide 300 hours of service per academic year and in return receive a biweekly stipend. The Bonner Leader stays with their host site for the length of their academic stay at Rider University, giving the student an opportunity to become more immersed in the work of the community agency and take on progressively challenging tasks each year.

The College of New Jersey

In partnership with the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), the Food Bank has begun a pilot project that engages TCNJ student volunteers to help distribute food to member agencies. With this additional volunteer manpower, the Food Bank expanded its days and hours to better serve our agencies and get more food into the community for hunger relief.



We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Community Action students who labored away with food distribution and those who left us with a fabulous mural.



TableTalk

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Check Out Hunger

Join in the fight against hunger by making a donation to **Check-Out Hunger** each time you shop at local supermarkets and other retail food stores.

Look for the \$1-yellow, \$3-green and \$5-red **Check-Out Hunger** donation slips near the check out register.

Simply hand the slip to the cashier who will scan it and, like any other purchase, your donation will be added to your grocery bill.

Check-Out Hunger is an annual statewide campaign that brings together food retailers and corporate sponsor NRG Energy, Inc. to raise hunger awareness and dollars for New Jersey's food banks.


100% of every Check-Out Hunger donation made in Mercer County goes to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.



Look for **Check-Out Hunger** at:

- Blue Rooster Cafe
- Marrazzo's Ewing
- McCaffrey's
- Pennington Quality Market
- ShopRite Supermarkets
- SuperFresh
- Thriftway Robbinsville
- Wawa
- Wegman's

And if you shop at the Pennington Stop & Shop, you can donate to the Food Bank by purchasing a *Food for Friends* paper turkey found at the store registers.

 NRG Energy, proud sponsor of Check-Out Hunger in New Jersey



Donations of turkeys and other holiday food may be dropped off at the Food Bank Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Saturday, November 21st.

In addition to holiday items, we are *always* in need of canned fruit and vegetables, tuna fish and salmon, rice and cereals.

