



August, 2007

Volume 1, Number 1

CONNECTIONS

Outreach Sharing Project

INTRODUCING! - You and your Great Ideas!

If you're reading this newsletter, we're very happy to have made contact with you and we certainly hope that we will learn a lot from you and all of you will learn a lot from each other.

First, we want to thank all who responded to our request for information regarding food stamp outreach efforts your offices have made in recent years. Some simply welcomed receiving information and reported that they were awaiting the newsletter. Some answered that they conscientiously screen for food stamp eligibility and encourage clients to apply when the client has come into the office for other benefits. Others shared tried and true techniques for finding and serving the underserved out in their communities, and a few contributed some truly unique approaches for locating, educating, and assisting the approximately 35% of food stamp eligible people in our region who are not currently receiving food stamps. We thank you all for your contributions. The later two types of responses will be included in these newsletters.

In addition to the counties who contributed, you will see some food stamp outreach projects that are a part of State Food Stamp Outreach Plans which are 50% funded by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and approved by the Midwest Regional Office. These are the articles from Kent County, Michigan, Minnesota Department of Human Services, and the Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland's Project B.R.E.A.D. in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. More will be included in later newsletters. We hope that learning about these projects and the possibilities for obtaining this type of funding will encourage the expansion of State Food Stamp Outreach Plans.

If you do not see your response in this, our first issue of CONNECTIONS, please don't be disappointed. We started working first with the responses that arrived first, and we will share them all in subsequent issues. We know we asked for very fast turn-around for submitting articles, but we wanted to take full advantage of the time and many talents of our excellent summer intern, Isabel Marquez, without whose participation we would have been unable to begin this project we've wanted to do for some time.

Now that we've begun the project, we want to let you know that it isn't too late! We still want your excellent ideas to share with all. Please use narrative form and remember to put in plenty of detail and answer all the questions you would have if someone else were explaining the effort to you and you knew nothing about it. Then e-mail your articles in a WORD document to fsoutreachmwr@fns.usda.gov.

We hope you enjoy this issue of CONNECTIONS, find it helpful, and will contribute to future issues.

Ann Eubank, Food Stamp Outreach Coordinator, Midwest Region, FNS

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Check out USDA's new Food Guide Pyramid at <http://mypyramid.gov>

One size doesn't fit all. MyPyramid Plan can help you choose the foods and amounts that are right for you.

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Illinois

Jasper-Massac-Pope



Jasper

Submitted by: A. Elaine Miller

Jasper County has worked with a health fair, the Embarrass River Basin Agency, a senior fair, and the Jasper County Ministerial Association. Our efforts began in 2005 and are still ongoing. Specifically, outreach is done when an event occurs or partnering agencies reach out for us. Our Administrator sometimes speaks regarding the food stamp program at local organizations as well. Materials used were found on the FNS website and were provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services. Materials included pamphlets, brochures and applications. Senior citizens and low income families were the focus of our efforts.

Our outreach has been successful in that information has been made more widely available about the program, and those participating now have a better understanding of the program. There may have been applications resulting from partnering agencies handing out applications, but it has not been tracked.

Massac

Submitted by: Kathy Rushing

Massac County has partnered with the Local Housing Authority, the Senior Program, and the local Domestic Violence shelter in order to help identify those in our community who are in need. The Domestic Violence shelter contributes to most of our success. They fax us an application when they house a new person. The Local Housing Authority and the Senior Program encourage any of their clients who might qualify for food stamps to apply.

Our local office staff always tries to encourage Food Stamp applications by persons who already receive medical assistance. All groups and persons are encouraged to apply or re-apply for food stamps whether they come to the office or a worker completes a re-determination.

Pope

Submitted by: Kathy Rushing

In May of 2007, Pope County partnered with the Golden Circle Senior Center. The Local Office Administrator and Human Service Caseworker met with staff and persons attending a Senior Center luncheon to discuss the Food Stamp program. Working with a senior center, we are able to target elderly and disabled persons.

We used materials from the internet that were available from the USDA, including an envelope listing all materials needed to submit for verification and a pamphlet explaining the Food Stamp program. We also included our application and agreed to do a phone interview with the elderly and disabled. The Director of the home delivered meal program is very supportive in helping with our outreach. This program gives applications, brochures, and pamphlets which are distributed as meals are delivered. There are several persons participating in the home delivered meal program that are unable to contribute financially. The senior center would be able to accept the Food Stamps for payment and the clients could continue receiving meals.

Since the luncheon initiating this effort took place in May of this year, its success has yet to be determined; however it is an ongoing effort.

Indiana

Adams-Allen



Adams

Submitted by: Kim S. Yann, DRF Regional Manager, Region 3

Contributions by: Jean C. Larrabee

One of our big outreach efforts is working with Hispanic migrants, some who are U.S. citizens and others who are legal aliens from Mexico. Adams County has been processing Hispanic migrant applications since before 1986. Each year the camp opens approximately the beginning of August and runs through October, depending upon the crop.

We work very closely with Red Gold, the employer of the migrants that come up. In previous years we have had Spanish translators; however, many of the migrants help each other with translating for the non-English speaking applicants. The majority of the time they speak enough English to go along with our minimal Spanish to get information across. We take the applications (Food Stamps and Hoosier Healthwise, both in English and Spanish) to the Red Gold office in the middle of July. We also provide them with employment verification forms. When the migrants come up, they sign-in at the Red Gold office to

be assigned their housing and complete their paperwork. If they are interested in Food Stamps or Hoosier Healthwise they are given the appropriate application to complete. The Red Gold office will then complete the employment form listing the pay rate, when they will start, and how many hours they will work each week in the current month as well as the following month. They then give the form to the workers and tell them to bring it to our office with the application. When they return to our office we take the application and employment forms. The applicant is then told to come back the next morning for an interview. We make sure that the employment form is together with the application form. If not, they are given a new form, told to get it completed, and bring it back the next morning.

Our office will then put the applications in the system and contact Texas or the state that they are coming from to confirm if they have received benefits and the stop date. When we know the camp is open, we will leave 2 to 3 hours of open time each morning to complete the applications. It is first come, first served. Changes have been made over the years to the proc-

ess to make it work more smoothly.

This effort has been very successful. Adams County had 120 applications filed last year, with only 6 no shows. Contributing to this success is that we all work together. This includes people in our office and people at Red Gold. We have taken the applications, both food stamps and Hoosier Healthwise, in English and Spanish to Red Gold. They will provide the applications to anyone who wishes to apply. Red Gold is very good in providing the income verifications with the applications, therefore, when the migrants bring the applications to our office they also have the income verification for us and the application process moves more efficiently.

Allen

Submitted by: Kim S. Yann, DFR Regional Manager, Region 3

Contributions by: Barbara A. Moyer

Allen County started an outreach program in July, 2004 with the Community Corrections program. A worker goes to the local probation office building and interviews people who are released from jail that day and are assigned to the program. The worker typically interviews anywhere from 5 to 15 people a day, one day a week. By interviewing clients the day they are released we insure they are able to buy food the next day. This effort has proved to be very successful. Almost all those who are interviewed are eligible for food stamps. Clients stay on the program, on average, about 6 months and get a job within 2 to 3 months.

Michigan

Crawford-Otsego-Kent



Crawford and Otsego Submitted by: Dale D. Terryberry, Family Independence Manager

This effort began about 15 years ago. When time permits we have met with senior citizenship groups to go over the food assistance program and encourage them to apply by emphasizing the program is not much different than social security. Most communities in each county have a senior citizen organization that meets on a regular basis which helps us get the word out. We believe it is important to give our senior citizens every opportunity to apply for food assistance as well as other programs that they might be eligible for. Most of this effort has taken place in Otsego County. We have only talked to a few groups in Crawford County.

This effort has been successful when we have sufficient time to do it. We believe the key to this effort is convincing the senior population that if they are eligible they are entitled to food assistance and if not they will receive a notice telling them why they are not eligible.

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Kent Submitted by: Susan Toman, Contracts/Planning Manager

ACCESS (All County Churches Emergency Support System) is a network of three hundred congregations and one hundred food pantries working together to meet needs in Kent County. In an effort to address low participation rates of eligible food pantry clients, ACCESS entered a pilot program in October, 2000 with the Kent County Department of Human Services (at that time, Family Independence Agency). Working with Agency Director Andrew L. Zylstra, five DHS Caseworkers were assigned to several large food pantries. After six months, 134 new families were enrolled and were receiving \$17,488 in monthly benefits. The program continued to March, 2002. A total of 255 families received \$45,018 in monthly benefits at the conclusion of the program. At that time, DHS was experiencing dramatic increases in caseloads that required the workers to be in the office fulltime. The program ended in March, 2002.

ACCESS attempted to carry on the Food Stamp Outreach by training Pantry Directors to do initial assessments and referrals. The reality of the demands of their jobs and the level of DHS expertise needed to effectively make referrals were obstacles to the success of the project. ACCESS sought private funding for qualified staff to carry on the program.

MAZON, a Jewish Response to Hunger, provided funding for a 15 hour a week staff person. Fortunately, ACCESS

was able to hire a recently retired DHS supervisor, who has a passion for client advocacy and began as the Food Stamp Outreach Staff person in February, 2003. She took an average of 20 – 25 applications a month with an average monthly benefit of \$197. In November, 2003, ACCESS received some matching grant money from Michigan State University (who was administering the USDA Food & Nutrition Service grants). This allowed us to expand the staff hours to 25 per week for the following year.

ACCESS now receives funding from the Kent County Department of Human Services, as well as continued support from MAZON, for our outreach program. In January, 2007, we were able to receive some additional funding from the Senior Millage, specifically for outreach to seniors. We currently have staff working 30 hours per week with an emphasis at senior centers. We have found seniors are the least willing or able to go down to the DHS office to apply. By assisting them with filling out the applications and delivering them to the DHS office, we are helping many seniors access this important nutritional resource. Waiving the in-person interview has been tremendously helpful for those with limited transportation and/or mobility issues.

In addition to assisting clients in the application process, our Outreach staff is able to provide them with other valu-

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Michigan Continued

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able resource information. They often can answer questions related to DHS programs and problem-solve with them. The Kent County Food Stamp Outreach is an excellent example of how a faith-based organization can partner with government for the benefit of the community. With

each bringing its unique strength to the table, the food sustainability of hundreds of Kent County residents is improved.

FNS is pleased that in federal fiscal year 2007, ACCESS became a part of the Michigan State Outreach Plan which is 50% funded by FNS.

Minnesota

Le Sueur-Traverse-DHS



Le Sueur

Submitted by : John Glisczinski

Each year the Le Sueur County Department of Human Services partners with the Le Sueur County Fair to have a Human Services Booth in the commercial exhibit building at the Le Sueur County Fair.

This ongoing activity brings the financial workers to the public and lowers the stigma that Human Services (welfare) has with the residents of Le Sueur County.

At the booth we have information on all of our services and programs including Food Support. We also provide candy or balloons for the children, which usually breaks the ice with the adults that are with them. We find that approaching the Human Services booth is difficult for most people, and having free items relieves the stigmas of being associated with us.

We feel that our booth is a success as it brings down the barrier of the courthouse building and brings the programs that we offer to the people in a more relaxed setting.

Traverse *Submitted by: Marg Schmitz, Financial Assistance Specialist*

Our county is small, but some parts of it are somewhat distant from our office, so we also have a satellite office in Browns Valley, MN, 25 miles from our office which stocks CAF applications and brochures about Food Support. The satellite office is housed in the office of the West Central Minnesota

Communities Action, Inc, which is a non-profit agency offering many programs such as fuel assistance, car loan programs, tax assistance and other programs for the low and moderately low income households. This office has been open for several years and is normally staffed every day by WCMCA. We have a financial worker there every Tuesday from 9-3 to process applications for all programs. On

the other days, there is a staff person available to hand out applications for Food Support so the application date can be protected as it is faxed to our agency the same day. There are food shelves located in both offices. This satellite office primarily serves the Native American population, but others are welcome as well.

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Minnesota Continued

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It would be difficult to assess the degree of increase in Food Support impact the opening of this office had, but we did see the Food Support numbers increase.

Other outreach efforts would be having booths at the local hospital health fair where staff manned tables and brochures were made available.

During the fair session, our agency also has a booth and brochures are made available there.

Our senior coordinator also has brochures available at her meetings and I have attended some of her meetings to provide information, primarily on Medical Assistance, but have answered questions on Food Support as well.

Department of Human Services

Submitted by: Tikki Brown, Food Support Outreach Coordinator, MDHS

Minnesota's statewide outreach effort began in 2002 and has continued unabated with minor modifications.

Initially, the outreach effort began with regional meetings; connecting each county office with interested community agencies such as food shelves, Community Action Agencies, senior dining, and others.

The effort picked up speed when after the community meetings, a list of barriers was compiled and several posters, two short screening tools and a brochure holder were developed and distributed.

The outreach focused on securing support from community agencies by allowing them to choose a level of participation in outreach: Minimum Provide information (posters, brochures, and myth and fact sheets), Medium Educate, screen and refer (screening tool, screening guidebook), and Maximum Assist with completing the application (application assistance workbook).

To further encourage and assist community agencies to participate in the outreach effort, two workbooks were designed to provide guidance on the screening tool and on application assistance. In addition, trainings and technical assistance were provided to organizations as requested.

- This effort resulted in over 400 community agencies committed to a level of outreach and participation increased over 10%.
- Funding for Food Support Outreach staff has been se-

cured in part through bonus money awarded to the state from USDA. The effort initially began with Kitty Brown and Tikki Brown. Tikki has remained with help from Bonnie LeVang and other staff.

- While the overall target for outreach is the working poor, seniors have been a focus due to their low participation rates.

Outreach has remained ongoing due to frequent county visits, newsletters, and the exploring and promotion of new outreach projects.

The current outreach effort has revolved around securing statewide partners to bolster outreach activities and to further collaborations with the County offices. The most recent initiative is one in which Community Action Agencies submit an outreach plan along with Minnesota's state outreach plan thereby receiving the 50% federal reimbursement. The project is currently in pilot status, with 12 Community Action Agencies working in 50% of the state's counties. Activities are varied, but typically involve promotion of the program to specialized clientele and the offering of application assistance.

Regional meetings are planned for this summer and fall with the County, Community Action Agencies and Nutrition Education Assistants to discuss new projects and to ultimately form more improved collaborative efforts.

County Best Practices:

Isanti County: Established "Community Connect" an effort to connect people in need to County and community services in one location. After their successful first year of

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Minnesota Continued

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connecting over 140 people to services, Community Connect has received a \$10,000 grant from United Way to continue their work. The second annual Community Connect is scheduled for October 25th and includes food provided by the Salvation Army. Bolstered by the success of Community Connect, Isanti County staff provides screening using the state screening tools and assistance to people as they wait for commodities at the local food bank. Staff report that they have assisted clients not only with

Food Support, but also have provided extra cash to the household by assisting with Medicare.

Ramsey County: Has six community sites co-located with other community agencies. Food Support applications are accepted at all of those sites. Ramsey County staff also provides training and information at agencies upon request and recently took the initiative to provide program information and applications at the St. Paul Project Homeless Connection event this spring.

Ohio

Cuyahoga- Richland



Cuyahoga Submitted by: *Aida C. Idiaquez, County Manager, Community initiatives*

Cuyahoga County & the Hunger Network of Greater Cleveland

Cuyahoga Employment & Family Services (CEFS), the agency that administers Food Stamps in Cuyahoga County, Ohio is a subset of the Ohio Department of Jobs & Family Services. In order to maximize participation of eligible residents in the Food Stamp program, the agency contracts with the Hunger Network of Greater Cleveland for outreach. The Hunger Network receives \$62,000 in funding from Cuyahoga Employment & Family Services to support the Community Liaison Project. This outreach expenditure is part of a larger \$1.1M contract funded by the Cuyahoga County Board of Commissioners providing for overall funding support for food services through the Hunger Network.

Funding from Cuyahoga County for food services at the Hunger Network began in the year 2000.

The Community Liaison Network is the centerpiece of the Hunger Network's outreach program, which is used to assure continuity of the program's exposure and services. The Network has three staff members who rotate through each of the Network's 36 hunger centers, 20 pantry programs and 64 partnering community sites every 60 days. Altogether, the Hunger Network sites serve 60,000 people per month.

The Hunger Network targets low income individuals and families in the City of Cleveland and in what is referred to as the "First Ring Suburbs." Those are the oldest – those developed earliest, of the suburbs ringing the core city.

Examples of important partners in the dissemination of information and applications regarding Food Stamps, apart from the Network's own food pantries and soup kitchens, are Neighborhood Centers Association, United Way's First Call for Help, Interact Cleveland and Starting Point, a child care provider network.

According to the Executive Director of the Hunger Network, the primary thing she has learned from the agency's experience with the Food Stamp program is:

"Many more seniors are eligible for the program than actually participate. They are impatient with the "red tape" of the application process and absolutely do not want to reveal the per-

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Ohio Continued

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sonal information required to complete the process. This is an area in which advocates should get involved to eliminate barriers to low-income seniors' participation."

Staff at the Hunger Network also endeavor to link Food Stamp enrollees to additional benefits for which they are eligible. For instance, at 130% eligibility some Food Stamp consumers might also be eligible for Medicaid Spend Down or Children's Health Insurance or Child Care benefits.

Number of Food Stamp recipients in Cuyahoga County:

At the end of the first quarter of 2007: 178,272 FS recipients

At the end of 2006: 180,113

At the end of 2005: 179,230

Cuyahoga County and the Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland

A second Food Stamp outreach program is operated by The Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland and is called Project B.R.E.A.D. (Bridging and Reconnecting Eligible Cleveland area residents by Ensuring Access and Delivery of service).

The Empowerment Center of Greater

Cleveland is a contracted vendor of Cuyahoga County Board of County Commissioners that provides assistance in determining the eligibility of individuals and families for participation in the USDA-FNS Food Stamp Program. Funding for this program comes from the Cuyahoga County Board of County Commissioners (\$120,791, in 2007) and the USDA-FNS/State of Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services-Department of Family Stability (\$120,791 in matching funds). The Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland Project B.R.E.A.D. program is provided in collaboration with Cuyahoga County Department of Employment and Family Services.

Outreach is done throughout Cuyahoga County. Outreach staff of the Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland (ECGC) conduct outreach activities in a large variety of sites. Staff is assigned to provide this service in reception areas of hunger centers, community centers, churches, at community events, and other locations as identified. Project B.R.E.A.D. outreach began in 1999 with funding provided by foundations and then in 2000 funding support began from USDA-FNS and Cuyahoga County. Outreach activities are still ongoing. Outreach activity is conducted on a daily basis each week. Presently, we have three

Project B.R.E.A.D. outreach workers who work full time. In addition, we have a Bilingual Community Support Specialist who conducts outreach in the Hispanic community on Tuesdays, as well as handling all intake and walk-in inquiries for services including Project B.R.E.A.D. ECGC uses both USDA-FNS and Cuyahoga County literature to promote the Food Stamp Program. We also utilize a number of flyers that the ECGC staff has created to assist with outreach. Target groups are persons living on low incomes in Cuyahoga County. We approach groups through neighborhood centers or groups that our research and outreach identify.

This has been a successful collaboration from its inception. A positive working relationship exists between all parties to this program. Communication regarding the processes and procedures involved remains open and clear. At different cycles of this program we have had to modify our outreach efforts to open new areas when others seemed to slow down. In 2006, 627 applications were submitted, of these 378 were opened and a total of 551 individuals served as a result. Year to date in 2007, 887 applications have been submitted, of these 344 were opened.

Richland

Submitted by: LuAnn Howard, Social Program Administrator

Richland County has a population of approximately 121,365 people. We have approximately 5,316 house-

holds currently participating in the Food Stamp Program as of June, 2007. 10.9% of Richland County people or 13,229 residents live at or below poverty. 9.25% or 11,869 of Richland County residents participate in the Food Stamp Program. Our outreach activities include and have

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Ohio Continued

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included the following:

Richland County Fair – our agency has a booth to distribute information regarding the Food Stamp Program as well as other programs offered by our agency. Residents of Richland County can actually pick up a Food Stamp application at our booth and ask agency representatives questions about Food Stamp eligibility. A computer is available at the fair booth that enables residents to determine if they may qualify for Food Stamp benefits.

Partnership with Area Agency on Aging – In cooperation with our local Area Agency on Aging, we have partnered on various outreach efforts to inform the seniors in our community of the Food Stamp services in two ways:

The Adult Protective Services Interdisciplinary Team that meets with Area Agency on Aging representatives as well as with other community agency representatives

monthly to problem solve Adult Protective Service case referrals in our agency. Promotion of the Food Stamp Program benefits occurs during this meeting.

Conducted seminars for seniors to give them information on all programs available including the Food Stamp Program. This includes brochures on the Food Stamp Program, Common Food Stamp Myths Concerning Elderly Households, Food Stamp Rules for the Elderly and Disabled, and How to Use Your Food Stamp Card.

Cleveland Food Bank – In May 2007, Richland County Job and Family Services participated in a Community Discussion about Poverty where information was presented about the Food Stamp Program as well as ways to apply for and receive Food Stamps in Richland County. As a result of this Community Forum and the upcoming first free fresh produce distribution at the Mansfield/Richland County Public Library, our agency will continue a relationship with the Cleveland Food Bank to ensure our residents have access to food.

Wisconsin

Milwaukee



Milwaukee

Submitted by: Susan Moeser, PhD., Deputy Administrator

In May of 2005, Milwaukee County launched a mobile eligibility van, embarking upon a unique opportunity to better serve the people of the community. Milwaukee County is an urban county with a population of slightly less than a million people. The poverty rate is high. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey for 2005, 18.2% of the population is below the poverty level. For children the rate is a staggering 29%.

For many in the community, coming to a county food stamp office can be difficult. The urban poor are faced with the realities of low-income jobs that do not provide time off, of transportation issues, and of child care needs. Almost 12% of Milwaukee County residents are single mothers. Another 12% are aged 65 or over and almost 16% are disabled. With this knowledge in hand, Milwaukee County made a wise decision to purchase a specially equipped eligibility van.

