



IRVING PARK COMMUNITY

**Food Pantry**

# VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER

*For The Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

SPECIAL ISSUE 2013

The month of September is **Hunger Action Month**, which is the subject of this special issue of the Volunteer Newsletter.

## **SNAP Challenge: Can you live on \$35/ week?**

The amount of \$35 per week is the average amount of money given to someone who is receiving SNAP food benefits. This is the week of the SNAP Challenge! However, I encourage you to try it for seven days **anytime** during the month of September. Here are the guidelines:

- Spend only \$35/week or \$5/day for all food and beverages.
- All food purchased and eaten during the week, including fast food and dining out, must be included in the total spending.
- Only eat food that you purchase for the project. Do not eat food that you already own (this does not include spices and condiments).
- Avoid accepting free food from friends, family, or at work, including at receptions, briefings, or other events where food is served.
- Keep track of receipts and take note of your experiences throughout the week.
- Invite others to join you!

Once the week is over, tell us how it went so we can share your stories!

*"35 million people in the U.S. are hungry or don't know where their next meal is coming from, and 13 million of them are children. If another country were doing this to our children, we'd be at war."*

-- Jeff Bridges

## **See "A Place at the Table"**

This is an amazing documentary that will show you the lasting consequences of hunger in our nation, and illustrates the underlying problem of hunger in the U.S., what is causing it, and what needs to be done to change it. This movie is available on dvd and through Netflix. Visit the film's website at <http://www.magpictures.com/aplaceatthetable/>

## **At the Federal Level**

Next week, the House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) will present a bill to cut \$40 billion from the SNAP budget (through stricter eligibility standards and new work requirements). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps, enables 47 million low-income Americans to access food through grocery stores. More than 820,000 individuals in Cook County alone use SNAP to put food on the table each month. In Illinois, people know SNAP by the blue Illinois LINK cards. These are the people we register through the DHS for SNAP benefits at the food pantry every week. Right now, 1 in 6 of our neighbors don't know where their next meal will come from.

Recently the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that about 49 million individuals nationwide were food insecure at some point in 2012. The report also shows a 4% increase in U.S. food insecurity in the last decade.

The Food Depository continues to see near-record numbers turn to our network—77% more individuals vs. four years ago. With the rise in unemployment and increase in food and fuel costs, we expect the level of need to remain high.

In this time of record need due to widespread unemployment and the weak economy, the government must do its part to safeguard anti-hunger programs for low-income individuals and families.

Charities like ours **cannot** meet the need for food assistance. Programs like TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), which provides high-quality, nutritious food to food banks for distribution; CSFP (Commodity Supplemental Food Program), which provides a nutritionally appropriate box of food for low-income seniors; and SNAP (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), which provides households with monthly benefits via a grocery debit card, are essential to the physical and mental well-being as well as the long-term prosperity of our nation.

## What Can You Do?

Write a letter to your congressman. Write your own or send a sample below:

*Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am from (city, state). As your constituent, I ask you to please remember the 807,690 low-income people who are struggling against hunger in Cook County and oppose any cuts to anti-hunger programs like SNAP in the Farm Bill.*

Call your Congressman today! Tell them that you support ending hunger. If you need the contact information for your representative, visit:

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

## A Brief History of Food Stamps and the Farm Bill

The USDA has always overseen nutrition policy, starting in 1939 when Congress enacted the first food stamp program to help distribute food during unemployment at the end of the Great Depression. This became part of the farm bill in the 1970s. Urban lawmakers liked the bill's nutrition policies, while rural lawmakers liked its price supports for crops like wheat and cotton.

Recently, House Republicans removed Food Stamps from the farm bill because both parts of the farm bill (food subsidies and nutrition) have grown over the years, and are now targeted by a caucus of tea party supporters and others who want to cut federal spending. Other nutrition programs such as Emergency Food Assistance Program, as well as programs aimed at children, seniors and Native Americans are eliminated in the House bill.

Kate Mayer, CEO of the Greater Chicago Food Depository said in a conference on September 13th, that there will be cuts, and this will put more pressure on places like ours: food pantries, soup kitchens, produce mobiles, etc. **Charity cannot fill the gap.** Charity does not have the funding, the resources nor the labor (volunteers) that can provide what the House proposes to cut.

*"Charity is nice for some things, but not as a way to feed a nation. We don't protect our national security through charity, and we shouldn't protect our families and children that way either."*

*-- Jeff Bridges*

The earlier House bill that was unsuccessful included more than \$20 billion in cuts. Now the new bill proposes \$40 billion in cuts.

*In 1978, the Greater Chicago Food Depository distributed **471,000 lbs of food to 85 agencies** in its first year of operation. Today, the GCFD distributes **66 million lbs of food to 650 pantries, soup kitchens and shelters** in Cook County.*

## The Future vs. Today's Bottom Line

Hungry causes significantly poorer health and education outcomes, particularly in children: In infancy, hunger causes iron deficiencies affecting cognitive and physical development. Hunger causes headaches, stomach aches, ear infections, colds, depression, an increased incidence of anti-social behaviors and a greater need for special education. Hungry children and teens are twice as likely to repeat a grade and three times as likely to be suspended from school. Hungry pregnant women risk having an underweight baby and/or a baby with severe birth defects. Hungry mothers suffer from excessive stress, depression, anxiety and often have lower self-esteem—conditions that likely contribute to multi-generational hunger.

Hungry adults are more likely to be obese and diabetic (fruits and vegetables are more expensive, and less filling, while more low-quality, high-sugar, high-starchy foods, are made and sold in abundance).

## Hunger Hurts America

Hunger costs Americans millions of dollars annually in healthcare and education, such as hospitalizations and medications for hungry individuals, expenses to treat headaches, stomach aches and colds, expenses to treat child mental disorders, managing teen suicide and caring for underweight newborns, as well as expenses of special education programming required by many hungry children. Another long-term consequence of hunger: Poor educational performance leads to poor educational outcomes, which leads to millions in lost wages.

## Financial Benefits of Ending Hunger

Without question, there are significant financial benefits to ending hunger. Most obvious: if all Americans were adequately nourished, the billions of dollars that pay for healthcare and education costs for hungry individuals would be eliminated. In addition, public programs such as SNAP, which, if used to their full potential, could offer significant individual and societal benefits.