



Friends & Neighbors

The Neighborhood House Newsletter



Healthy Food at Neighborhood House

Almost every day the news brings us more evidence of the poor eating habits of Americans. We're no longer surprised when we're told the top sources of energy for kids comes mainly from soda, pizza and desserts, or that 75 percent of health care spending goes to treating preventable chronic diseases, most of which are diet-related.

But what we don't hear enough about is that the struggle to improve eating habits is not always about desire – it's often about the difficulty people of limited incomes have in accessing healthy food. By some accounts, more than 50 million Americans, about a third of them children, don't have regular access to nutritional foods.

"Food justice" is the term sometimes used to describe the effort to address that problem. Edward Ehlinger, MD, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Health, defines food justice as making "healthy food available for everyone, independent of their income, independent of their skin color, independent of where they live."

To begin to solve the problem requires understanding it, according to Joan Schlecht, director of basic needs at Neighborhood House, who says there are many misconceptions about the issue.

For example, fast food restaurants don't play as much of a role in the problem as some people think. "Fast food is convenient, but it's expensive," she says. "People may have fast food as a treat once in a while, but to feed the family, they are much more likely to grab a box of macaroni and cheese or canned spaghetti from the grocery store, and those aren't healthy choices either."

Often, Schlecht says, the only grocery stores that people of limited incomes have easy access to are "corner" grocers, and while those establishments may be important in their communities, they typically do not have the variety of fresh foods families need.

"When those stores say they have fresh food, they are often talking about just bananas, or they may

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have some carrots," Schlecht explains. "The selection is poor, and usually what they do have is very expensive and can put a real strain on the household budget."

That budget strain is a real issue, Schlecht says. "After a family pays for rent and other housing costs, they may have very little money left for food, and processed and 'junk' foods are the cheapest. They fill bellies – but they are not the most nutritious."

That leads to another misconception. The prevalence of obesity in our society is not evidence that people have enough (or too much) to eat – it's proof simply that they are eating the wrong foods.

That's one reason Neighborhood House last year remodeled its Food Market at the Wellstone Center, and is discussing plans to expand the mass produce distribution program.

The revamped market is built around the Healthy Eating Plate, created by nutrition experts at Harvard School of Public Health and editors at Harvard Health Publications to provide detailed guidance, in a simple format, to help people make the best eating choices.

"Following those guidelines, people who come to our market first see fresh fruits and vegetables and then proteins such as meat and dairy," Schlecht shares, "and only at the end are canned or boxed foods."

In addition, a strong effort is made to have available foods that are culturally specific, she says, including different kinds of rice, beans and flour. The market is free to qualifying participants who are allowed to visit once a month.

The mass produce distribution is currently a seasonal program that last year operated from May to

October. Neighborhood House works with Second Harvest Heartland and other organizations to make 10,000-15,000 pounds of food available – fruits and vegetables, but also bread – to about 250 households at each distribution event. The distributions take place at the Wellstone Center as well as Francis Basket, John A. Johnson Elementary and Dayton's Bluff Elementary.

"It's a great way to supplement a food market visit," Schlecht states. "Families can get food from the distribution and it doesn't count toward their food market visit – it's just extra healthy food."

Neighborhood House is exploring expanding the mass produce distribution program to year-round. The distribution events are at present held outdoors, so an expansion that would include the colder months would require an indoor location be found. In addition, Schlecht says, Neighborhood House would need to make sure it could find an adequate amount of food at a reasonable price. (Although some food distributed by Neighborhood House is donated, much of it is purchased.)

Besides food distribution, Neighborhood House also works to help program participants learn to eat healthy, through partnerships with the Minnesota Department of Health, the University of Minnesota and other organizations. "Food support is about more than just providing the food," Schlecht says. "It's also important to educate people about why eating healthy is important."

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NAPS Offers A Nutritional Lifeline

Each month, Neighborhood House provides critical food support to over 30 St. Paul households through NAPS, the Nutritional Assistance Program for Seniors. On every second Friday, volunteers and staff gather boxes filled with fruit, vegetables, meat, cheese, and bread and deliver them to the homes of seniors with mobility challenges or limited access to transportation.

When temperatures drop and icy sidewalks become difficult for many older adults to navigate, NAPS deliveries offer a reliable source of groceries and the opportunity for human contact. Marcella has lived in her home on the West Side for 50 years. She worked in a factory for many years and raised three children, but in the years since retirement has found it difficult to afford the food she needs. "The food I receive really helps me to stretch my grocery budget for those lean months."

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Seng and Geraldine

Standing in Marcella's kitchen with a pot simmering on the nearby stove, it's apparent that the impact of food delivery goes well beyond nutrition. Mai Yia and Seng, members of Neighborhood House's Food Support team, have been making NAPS deliveries for several years - and during that time they have built strong relationships with many of the recipients. "All of our participants love Seng," Mai Yia says, "They always offer coffee because they never want him to leave."

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With many more deliveries to make, Seng and Mai Yia gather their things and prepare to leave. But as he turns to go, Seng pulls a fleece blanket from his bag and hands it to Marcella. "We're a little late for Christmas" he says, "but we wanted you to have something to help stay warm." Overcome with happiness, Marcella exclaims "it's my birthday next week! This is perfect."



Marcella

Little Hands Making A Big Difference

If you are a child growing up with regular, healthy meals at home, it can be difficult to imagine that friends, neighbors, and classmates may not have enough to eat. Yet this is true for many households in our community. Each year, 1-in-5 of Minnesotan families struggle to feed their children.

Chelsea Heights Elementary, located off Huron near Como Park, began leading an annual food drive to support struggling families and educate students about community needs. Brooke Ust, President of the school's PTO, helped to initiate this effort with Neighborhood House nearly two years ago and has seen the impact within her own home:



5th grade class



"At first when we began collecting food for the drive my children asked why we were bringing extra food to school. They would say, "mom, we already have lunch." But when I explained that we were bringing food to school for kids who might not be able to eat at home, they were shocked and wanted to do more to help their classmates."

"This food could be for my neighbor or best friend."

What started as a small effort has grown each year, and most recently raised an incredible 1,500 pounds of food. Nearly all of the donations were given to Neighborhood House's food markets, but recognizing that there are students whose families need help, a portion was boxed up and saved for school staff to give directly to families of Chelsea Heights students to help them through the leaner winter months.

With the dust settled, students helped to load their cans and boxes into a Neighborhood House van. As she hoisted her grocery bag into the arms of a waiting food support worker, one little 3rd grader paused, and said "this food could be for my neighbor or best friend." She's right, you never know who might need help.

Leave a Legacy to Make the Neighborhood House Dream Possible for Generations to Come.



There are many ways to make a planned gift. Take a moment to explore the popular ways to give by visiting the Ways to Give section of our website, or discuss it with your financial planner.

Please consider a planned gift and join those who have chosen to leave a legacy of hope, opportunity and dignity for all!

For more information, please contact Karla Healey – Leadership Giving Officer at khealey@neighb.org or 651-789-2636



A New Approach to Fighting Hunger

Early last year, we hit a big milestone in reimagining how Neighborhood House meets the needs of immigrants, refugees, and community members struggling with food insecurity. The walls of our food shelf in the Wellstone Center were torn down, and in March a new free Food Market opened. We've tripled the size of our shopping area and food is organized in sections like the healthy eating plate: vegetables, fruit, grains, dairy, and protein. We do this to help families make their food choices with nutrition guidelines in mind.

The switch from 'Food Shelf' to 'Food Market' is also very intentional and serves two goals. First, it highlights the fresh foods we have available, such as produce, dairy and eggs. Second, calling ourselves a free Food Market can help reduce stigma for our participants.

There can be a lot of misinformation and embarrassment around the perception of who uses a food shelf. Many of our participants have told us "I never thought I would be here" or "I need food, but I'm not the type of person who uses a food shelf." What's even worse is that there are also people who are hungry but don't use the food market because they "don't want a free handout" and are ashamed to seek support for their families.

We operate on the walk-in choice model, meaning that you don't need an appointment to use our food market. You can come in anytime during our walk-in hours and after we complete a brief intake, you shop with a volunteer and pick out

items that you'd like to take home. This summer an intern from Macalester College completed a project incorporating healthy recipes into our food market and we now offer meal suggestions to help encourage families to take advantage of the full variety of food we have available.

Bottom line, distributing fresh foods is a win-win situation. Fresh foods tend to be more nutritious than processed foods, especially when considering hidden salt and sugar content. Fresh foods are also healthier for our participants whose low income status makes them more likely to experience health problems. Before our remodel, we surveyed our participants to ask which foods they most needed. The number one answer we received was "fresh fruits and vegetables." Just like everyone else, our participants want their kids to be healthy, and to be familiar with how to cook and eat fresh foods.

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How can you help? We love it when asked "what items do you need the most?" People are often surprised to hear that we distribute perishables such as produce, dairy, and frozen meat. We're grateful for all donations, but consider thinking outside the box (or can) to feed a family in need.

Powerful Partnership



Two years ago, Julie Printz had an epiphany about hunger. A member of Gloria Dei Lutheran in St. Paul, she was in the Highland Park neighborhood distributing fresh produce at Neighborhood House's Francis Basket Food Market when she noticed a woman coming down the line toward her. The woman had been crying, and as she approached,

confided to Julie that to attend the distribution she had hired a babysitter she could scarcely afford - but after arriving found that nearly all of the produce was picked-over or gone. Julie's experience opened her eyes to the presence of hunger in her own backyard: "There's so much need, so much disparity; here I am with three tomatoes in my refrigerator, and one will probably be tossed."

Experiences like these, that raise awareness and inspire others to action, are made possible at Gloria Dei Lutheran through the work of the Outreach Committee. Formed to extend congregational participation across generations and throughout the community, the committee helps congregants like Julie to participate in ministry in a tangible way.

"People want to be involved," says current chair, Danica Goshert. "We find a way to help them make a meaningful connection."

The work of the Outreach Committee has evolved over the years, but hunger has remained a consistent focus. The committee has lead efforts to build a giving garden that grew from 1 to 3 planter beds over the course of a year, created a backpack program to ensure that children receive nutritious meals during the weekends, and the church continues to send large groups of volunteers to assist with produce distributions at Francis Basket. Danica explains that this emphasis comes from an understanding that there are many issues of social and economic justice that surround hunger, and that food insecurity must often be addressed before other challenges can be dealt with.

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For Julie, the focus on hunger creates a space for many congregants to interact with big societal problems on a human level: "Food is such a basic thing for many of us, and it's appalling that we have families and children three blocks from my home going hungry. I love that Neighborhood House is working right here in our neighborhood to support a community that sometimes seems invisible."

Mass Produce Distribution



When Children Go Hungry

As a teacher and a principal, I've seen hunger affect the lives of students every day of my career. At Dayton's Bluff Elementary on the East Side of St. Paul, 93% of our students receive free/reduced lunch. Food insecurity impacts our students in many different ways, but it is never the same for each child or family.

Hunger prevents students from reaching their full potential.

Hunger prevents students from reaching their full potential. It inhibits their physical, social, and emotional development. Students living without proper nutrition from a young age struggle to achieve, and many times never get caught up to what and where they could have been.



Despite all of these obstacles, we also see the resilience and strength of our students as they strive to do their best - even when they are hungry. We see parents working two, three jobs in order to make sure their children's basic needs are met while they go hungry themselves. We experience students sharing food with each other. Each week, students in our Sheridan Story program tell us how much they enjoy the fruits and vegetables they are able to bring home on weekends. Every day, I see my staff offer empathy, care and compassion to our students when they are hungry.

At our school, partnerships go a long way toward providing families with resources and support. Neighborhood House operates an onsite Family Center at Dayton's Bluff helping school families and community members with food, clothing, jobs, transportation, and housing. They also lead fresh monthly produce distributions during the summer months. Second Harvest, Food + You, and Neighborhood House even operate a mini onsite food shelf offering essentials like boxed milk so families can get immediate assistance when they need it most.

Through our partnerships we can wrap services around a family and create an environment of positivity. These resources exist to provide food and support other basic needs, but they also spark a sense of community.

Lena Christiansen, Elementary School Principal & Educator and Neighborhood House Board of Directors

Deep Roots

Throughout the year, we rely on the contributions of many great friends and donors who make the work of Neighborhood House possible. A longtime supporter, Roy Ferber is committed to serving the needs of disadvantaged children and families throughout the Twin Cities. His roots in philanthropy run deep, especially in St. Paul's West Side community where he was born and raised. "Over the years, I realized that many of my values and interests stemmed from growing up on the West Side." says Ferber

The third of eight children growing up in a modest home, Roy remembers a childhood filled with sports, neighborhood friendships, and schoolwork at St. Matthews and Humboldt. After high school, Roy earned his college degree from the University of Minnesota with the help of a Constance Currie

scholarship from Neighborhood House - support that was much needed as he paid his way through school and paved the way to a successful business career.

During a period of reflection after selling his business, Roy established the Ferber Family Foundation to support organizations that realized his most cherished values. Over the years, the foundation has been active in the work of Neighborhood House and has acted as a key supporter during the annual March Food Drive campaign - which raises nearly a quarter of the food and funds our Food Markets need to serve our communities each year. Roy's work in philanthropy extends well beyond giving and into the realm of board leadership, where he currently serves as a director for two other Minnesota nonprofits, Treehouse and Urban Ventures. "I have been very lucky in my life and want to give back to others."



Neighborhood House™

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Community Partner



Upcoming Events



Kowalski's Market Food Drive

March 12 & 13

Interested in volunteering?

volunteer@neighb.org or 651.789.2524

SAVE THE DATE

REVEL

for a Cause!

October 6, 2016

A Blast from the Past



Children share a meal at Neighborhood House during January of 1960.

From The President's Desk



Hunger can be an immediate crisis or a long-term problem. Either way, families must address their food needs before focusing on other challenges that contribute to poverty. Food is a flexible expense in a way that other living costs are not. Many families have little control over the cost of rent, heating a home, or putting gas in the car - and are forced to make challenging decisions at the grocery store. Unfortunately, the most inexpensive foods are often the least nutritious, creating the surprising link between hunger, obesity, and chronic illness.

In this issue of our newsletter, you're going to experience Neighborhood House's fight against hunger from a variety of perspectives. You'll read about the groundswell of food justice initiatives that are taking root in Minnesota, our new approach to providing families with the healthy foods they want and need, and you'll hear an elementary school principal's account of how hunger starves low-income children of the opportunity to build successful futures.

Each March, we lead one of the largest food drive campaigns in the state of Minnesota. The food and funds we gather during this time are crucial to ensuring that all St. Paul families receive the food they need to live healthy, successful lives.

Make a gift! Volunteer! Lead a Food Drive! When participants arrive at our Food Markets, they receive more than food; they access a network of resources designed to help them identify and overcome the challenges preventing them from building better lives. Your support provides families with the food they need today, and empowers them to work toward a future free of poverty.

Nancy C. Brady

March Food Drive

You can make a difference for families in need with a donation to the Neighborhood House Food Markets. Below is a shopping list of the items needed most. Or, make a cash donation online at: www.neighb.org

▶ SHOPPING LIST:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flour | <input type="checkbox"/> Nuts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rice (all kinds) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sugar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beans (all kinds) | <input type="checkbox"/> Peanut Butter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lentils | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese, Milk & Yogurt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking Oil | <input type="checkbox"/> Herbs & Spices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fruits | <input type="checkbox"/> Baby Food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dried Fruit | <input type="checkbox"/> Toiletries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pasta | <input type="checkbox"/> Diapers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetables | <input type="checkbox"/> Pet Food |

Thank you!

Food and cash donations are gratefully accepted at the Wellstone Center,
179 Robie Street East, St. Paul

www.neighb.org

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Neighborhood House offers several volunteer opportunities.

Visit www.neighb.org/volunteer

to learn about how you and your family can fight hunger.