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1. INTRODUCTION

The Hunger Action Network of New York State is a statewide membership organization of Emergency Food Programs, advocates, low-income people, and concerned citizens whose goal is to end hunger and its causes, including poverty, in New York State.

Hunger Action Network has represented Emergency Food Programs (EFPs) for twenty years. Like the EFPs it represents, Hunger Action Network was started in response to the growing level of hunger in communities throughout New York State, following the federal budget cuts and economic decline of 1981. When many of the EFPs were initially started in the early 1980's, organizers thought such programs would be a temporary Band-Aid response that would soon fade away once Congress realized the detrimental impact of the budget cuts and once the economy improved. However, 20 years later, political leaders are increasingly calling upon food pantries and soup kitchens to be the first line of defense against the growing problem of hunger.

Since the early 1980's, demand for emergency food has steadily increased every year. Each week, more than 904,884 different hungry New Yorkers turn to food pantries and soup kitchens for emergency assistance.¹ There are currently 3,000 food programs throughout New York State. In 2001, food providers turned away tens of thousands of people each month because they did not have the resources to help everyone who needed assistance. After September 11th, about half of the programs reported an immediate increase in demand for food from hungry New Yorkers as a result of the attack and the economic downturn.² This survey examines changes and trends in hunger and food programs from September 2001 to September 2002.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Hunger Impact Survey was sent to 1080 randomly selected EFPs throughout the state. 856 were faxed and 224 were mailed. All attempts were made to ensure that the initial survey mailing was consistent with recent county population density rates. This included over-sampling in certain regions, such as in New York City where 41% of the state's population is located.

An initial response rate of 10% was expected (about 108 surveys). The actual response rate turned out to be 19% (207 surveys). Further, 30% of the responses were from New York City (63 surveys) and 70% were from the rest of New York (144 surveys). 48 counties throughout the state were represented among the responses. In regions where responses were lacking, follow-up calls were made to attain further information such as in the Hudson Valley Region.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Hunger Action Network of New York State conducted a survey of Emergency Food Programs throughout the state to examine hunger trends and programmatic changes from September of 2001 to September of 2002. 73 per cent of programs responding to the survey reported an increase in demand for food in the last year. Comparing data from the months of September 2001 and September 2002, there was a 27 per cent increase in demand for food in that month alone. Programs attributed the increase to: (1) the poor economy; (2) low wages; (3) job loss and business closures; (4) reduction in the number of hours or days people work; and (5) the ripple effects caused by the World Trade Center attack, among other things

New Yorkers are forced to rely on food programs because they cannot make ends meet. Many people who use food programs have to make the choice between paying utility and rent bills or paying for food because their wages are dreadfully low. Many people using EFPs earn the minimum wage, or approximately \$9,000 a year for one person. 82 per cent of programs said there was an increase in the amount of working poor who used their program in the last year. 71 per cent of soup kitchens and food pantries reported that the amount of people citing job loss as a reason for using their program has increased.

Many programs have recently experienced budget cuts and are worried that the cuts will continue this year considering the state and local budget deficits. Over half of Emergency Food Programs reported that they experienced a decrease in monetary donations in the last year, in part due to budget cuts. They also experienced a decrease in community donations because of the economic slump and because community members who typically donate were experiencing their own economic hardships. 65 per cent of programs reported that they need more money and 71 per cent report that they need more food to meet the increased number of people using their program. Many programs reported that some people who were affected by the September 11th World Trade Center attack are just coming forward for assistance now. Further, 84 per cent of programs expect an increase in demand for food over the next six months because of the economy and the tough winter season.

Each week, more than 904,884 different hungry New Yorkers turn to food pantries and soup kitchens for emergency assistance. The demand for food assistance exceeds the capacity of Emergency Food Programs. 32% said they cannot feed everyone who comes to them for assistance. This increased demand for emergency food has forced many programs to reduce the amount of food assistance they provide to households by “thinning” the food packages, increasing eligibility restrictions, reducing their program hours, and/or turning people away.

Of the Emergency Food Programs reporting that there was no change or a drop in service level, several stated that the decline was due to a lack of resources rather than to a decline in the need for food assistance.

4. FINDINGS

(Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%)

A. New York State Findings

Hunger Action received over 200 responses from 1080 randomly distributed surveys in New York State. The Hunger Impact Survey Sept. 01- Sept. 02 yielded the following results for New York State:

- I. 84% of programs responding said that they anticipate an increase in demand for emergency food in the next six months.
 - 13% reported no anticipated increase in the next six months.
 - 2% were not sure.
 - 1% did not respond.
- II. 72% of the programs experienced an increase in demand for food comparing data from September 2001 and September 2002. There was a 27% increase in demand for food for that month alone.
 - 20% reported a decrease.
 - 4% reported no change.
 - 4% did not respond.
- III. 71% of programs reported that the amount of people citing recent job loss as a reason for using their program had increased in the last year.
 - 22% reported no increase.
 - 3% were not sure.
 - 5% did not respond.
- IV. 67% of programs experienced an increase in the number of children using their program in the last year.
 - 29% reported no increase.
 - 4% did not respond.
- V. 82% of programs said there was an increase in the amount of working poor people who used their program in the last year.
 - 12% reported no increase.
 - 4% were not sure.
 - 3% did not respond.
- VI. 55% said they experienced a decline in monetary donations.
 - 41% reported no increase.
 - 4% were not sure.
 - In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
 - 5% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 15% reported a decrease between 25-49%;

- 22% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 12% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 47% were not sure.
- VII. 33% said they experienced a decline in other donations such as clothing or food.
- 63% reported no increase.
 - 4% were not sure.
- In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
- 2% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 9% reported a decrease between 25-49%;
 - 15% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 4% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 70% were not sure.
- VIII. 32% said they **cannot** feed everyone who comes to them for assistance.
- 65% said they **can** feed everyone who comes to them for assistance. However, many of these programs say that they are running low on resources.
 - 2% were not sure.
- IX. Programs say they have the following needs:
- 65% need more money;
 - 71% need more food;
 - 37% need more help linking people with emergency housing;
 - 27% need more help linking people with federal nutrition program benefits;
 - 33% reported other.

B. Non New York City Findings

Hunger Action received over 140 responses from over 600 randomly distributed surveys in counties throughout New York State, outside of New York City. The Hunger Impact Survey Sept. 01- Sept. 02 yielded the following results for all counties that responded to the survey outside of New York City:

- I. 84% of programs responding said that they anticipate an increase in demand for emergency food in the next six months.
- 13% reported no anticipated increase in the next six months.
 - 2% were not sure.
 - 1% did not respond.
- II. 69% of the programs experienced an increase in demand for food comparing data from September 2001 and September 2002. There was a 28% increase in demand for food for that month alone.
- 25% reported a decrease.
 - 4% reported no change.
 - 2% did not respond.

- III. 67% of programs report that the amount of people citing recent job loss as a reason for using their program has increased in the last year.
- 28% of programs report that the amount of people citing recent job loss as a reason for using their program has not increased in the last year.
 - 2% were not sure.
 - 3% did not respond.
- IV. 67% of programs experienced an increase in the number of children using their program in the last year.
- 30% of programs report that they did not experience an increase in the number of children using their program in the last year.
 - 4% did not respond.
- V. 84% of programs said there was an increase in the amount of working poor people who used their program in the last year.
- 10% reported no increase.
 - 4% were not sure.
 - 3% did not respond.
- VI. 57% said they experienced a decline in monetary donations.
- 41% reported no increase.
 - 2% did not respond.
- In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
- 3% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 17% reported a decrease between 25-49%;
 - 24% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 10% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 45% did not respond.
- VII. 38% said they experienced a decline in other donations such as clothing or food.
- 59% reported no increase.
 - 3% did not respond.
- In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
- 2% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 10% reported a decrease between 25-49%;
 - 17% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 5% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 66% did not respond.

- VIII. 69% said they cannot feed everyone who comes to them for assistance.
- 28% said they can feed everyone who comes to them for assistance. However, many of these programs say that they are running low on resources.
 - 3% did not respond.
- IX. Programs say they have the following needs:
- 63% need more money;
 - 73% need more food;
 - 34% need more help linking people with emergency housing; and
 - 24% need more help linking people with federal nutrition program benefits.

C. New York City Findings

Hunger Action received over 60 responses from 500 randomly distributed surveys in New York City. The Hunger Impact Survey Sept. 01- Sept. 02 yielded the following results for New York City:

- I. 84% of programs responding said that they anticipate an increase in demand for emergency food in the next six months.
- 14% reported no anticipated increase in the next six months.
 - 2% were not sure.
- II. 92% of the programs experienced an increase in demand for food comparing data from September 2001 and September 2002. There was a 25% increase in demand for food for that month alone throughout New York City. Previous surveys show that there was a spike in demand for food immediately after the September 11 WTC attack.
- 10% reported a decrease.
 - 3% reported no change.
 - 8% did not respond.
- Regional breakdowns are as follows:
- For Queens County, there was a 25% increase;
 - For Manhattan, there was a 21% increase;
 - For the Bronx, there was a 37% increase;
 - For Brooklyn, there was a 21% increase; and
 - For Staten Island there was a 6% increase. However, only 1 program responded to the survey from Staten Island.
- III. 79% of programs report that the amount of people citing recent job loss as a reason for using their program has increased in the last year.
- 10% of programs report that the amount of people citing recent job loss as a reason for using their program has not increased in the last year.
 - 3% were not sure.
 - 8% did not respond.

- IV. 68 % of programs experienced an increase in the number of children using their program in the last year.
- 29% of programs report that they did not experience an increase in the number of children using their program in the last year.
 - 3% did not respond.
- V. 76% of programs said there was an increase in the amount of working poor people who used their program in the last year.
- 16 % reported no increase.
 - 5% were not sure.
 - 3% did not respond.
- VII. 49% said they experienced a decline in monetary donations.
- 41% reported no increase.
 - 10% did not respond.
- In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
- 10% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 8% reported a decrease between 25-49%;
 - 16% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 14% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 52% did not respond.
- VII. 21% said they experienced a decline in other donations such as clothing or food.
- 71% reported no increase.
 - 8% did not respond.
- In terms of the actual percentages of decline, the following was reported:
- 5% reported a decrease of 50% or more;
 - 22% reported a decrease between 25-49%;
 - 40% reported a decrease between 10-14%;
 - 11% reported a decrease between 0-9%; and
 - 22% did not respond.
- VIII. 41% said they **cannot** feed everyone who comes to them for assistance.
- 57% said they **can** feed everyone who comes to them for assistance. However, many of these programs say that they are running low on resources.
 - 2% did not respond.
- IX. Programs say they have the following needs:
- 63% need more money.
 - 70% need more food.
 - 43% need more help linking people with emergency housing.
 - 35% need more help linking people with federal nutrition program benefits.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Increase HPNAP Funding

The number of people in New York State relying on food programs increased by 27% when comparing September 2001 with September 2002. At the same time, over half of the programs responding to the survey reported a decrease in monetary donations and over a third reported a decrease in clothing and food contributions.

Since hunger has increased while donations to Emergency Food Programs have decreased, Hunger Action strongly recommends that the NYS Legislature preserve, if not increase, funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program. Rather than cutting back on social programs such as HPNAP, we recommend the implementation of a fair personal income tax and the elimination of corporate tax loopholes as a means of generating revenues to close New York State's \$6 billion deficit.

Last year's state funding for HPNAP was \$24.4 million – far short of the total cost of providing food to more than 900,000 New Yorkers each work. To keep pace with the increasing demand for emergency food would require funding of at least \$30.4 million.

B. Job Creation

Over 70% of EFPs responding to the survey reported an increase in the number of people citing job loss as a reason for utilizing their programs. Unemployment is affecting an increasing number of New Yorkers. Along with the slowing national economy, job growth began to taper off in New York in the latter part of 2000. To address the lack of secure jobs available in our state, Hunger Action recommends the implementation of job creation programs including the Empire State Jobs Program (A. 6179/ S. 5292) to create employment with sustainable incomes.

C. Extension of Unemployment Benefits

In March 2002, Congress enacted the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation program (TEUC). TEUC is paid for entirely out of the federal unemployment trust fund and since March has pumped an estimated \$10.7 billion into local economies throughout the nation including \$815 million in New York State. In January 2003, Congress signed into law just 13 weeks of federal extended benefits with no additional income support despite the fact that the Labor Department reports 1.856 million workers unemployed more than six months. Another 250,000 workers each month are expected to join them as the economy continues to falter. Rather than provide 26 weeks of jobless benefits as was done during the last recession, the Administration allowed jobless benefits to expire in December 2002 without intervening and then settled for just 13 weeks of extended unemployment. The National

Employment Law Project (NELP) is also concerned about President Bush's proposal to create "personal reemployment accounts" for the jobless, a \$3.6 billion initiative that prominently features "reemployment bonuses" and other policies; they have proven ineffective in serving the long-term jobless.

Extension of UI to 26 weeks is particularly important in light of the fact that workers on UI have few other sources of support. In a recent Washington State survey, two-thirds of program recipients indicated that UI provided their household's main source of income, and one-third said it was their only source of income.

As the State's economy continues to struggle and long-term joblessness keeps rising, the need for the 26 weeks of extended unemployment benefits (UI) increases. This is especially true for the states like New York with the highest unemployment rates. Should Congress fail to extend UI benefits, states and unemployed New Yorkers will no longer have this crucial source of economic aid.

Extending UI benefits is essential during these economic times as it prevented tens of thousands of workers from falling into poverty during the last recession. UI reduces hunger by playing a substantial role in preventing workers from being forced to cut back on meals, as has been confirmed by economic research.

D. Ensure Living Wages

Over 80% of the EFPs responding to the survey reported an increase in the number of working poor people utilizing food pantries and soup kitchens in the last year. This indicates that an increasing number of New Yorkers are working, but are not earning enough to cover the cost of basic needs, including food. To address this problem, Hunger Action strongly recommends that the NYS legislature make the minimum wage a living wage of \$8.40/hour. Currently, an employee earns \$5.15 an hour in a minimum wage job; this amount is hardly enough for an individual or a family to pay for basic expenses on a monthly basis.

Hunger Action also recommends that all level of governments ensure that companies receiving economic development subsidies and contracts from the government provide living wages to their employees.

E. Increase Access to Education and Training

Certain EFP providers responding to the survey reported that people leaving welfare for work do not find employment that provides a sustainable income. Thousands of individuals have entered low-wage, low-skill jobs under welfare reform. It is important that policy makers collaborate with NYS Congressional representatives to ensure increased access to adequate education and training so that welfare recipients can obtain sustainable employment.

We recommend that members in the New York State Senate and Assembly re-introduce and sponsor legislation that will ensure that participation in higher education will count towards the welfare work requirements. While only a small percentage of welfare participants are presently prepared for college, the state and local governments should not hinder college ready participants from attending college. A recent national study by the Children's Defense Fund found that the only welfare participants who routinely escaped poverty when they find work are those with a college education.

Studies show that many welfare recipients do not have basic education. Hunger Action was disappointed that Governor Pataki didn't sign A.7933/S.7696, which sought to expand access to basic education, including allowing up to 16 hours a week of education to count as work. We urge the legislature will revisit this issue as soon as possible.

Hunger Action supports making college education accessible and affordable to all New Yorkers regardless of their economic status. This will ensure that individuals and families will be able to obtain living wage jobs.

F. Increase Participation in the Food Stamp Program

Approximately 50% of those who are eligible for food stamps in New York State are not enrolled in the program. Funding for food stamp outreach efforts for community-based organizations has remained stagnant at \$1 million for the past eight years. Hunger Action and child nutrition advocates recommend that funding be increased to \$3 million so that Nutrition Outreach and Education Providers can operate in every county in New York State. Funds must also be provided to properly train Social Service staff in food stamp provisions to ensure that applicants are not wrongfully denied or diverted from the program.

It is also necessary to expand access to the food stamp program for immigrants. Due to changes made to the Food Stamp Program as part of the Farm Bill, more legal immigrants will be able to apply for food stamps starting April 1, 2003. However, there are still many legal immigrants, namely those who have not been in the US for five years, who will remain ineligible for food stamps due to their citizenship status. This leaves thousands of New Yorkers without access to enough food. Legal immigrants pay taxes and contribute to society and therefore should be able to receive food stamps. Hunger Action recommends that the New York State Legislature introduce legislation that expands the Food Assistance Program so that all legal immigrants can receive food stamps in New York State.

Food stamp monthly income eligibility guidelines exclude New Yorkers who earn over 130% of the poverty level. Yet many New Yorkers who earn above this level are not able to cover the cost of living based on their income. Hunger Action therefore recommends that New York State provide food stamps to households at 200% of the poverty level through a Supplemental Food Stamp Program. Funds from this program could also be used to supplement federal food stamp benefit allotments.

G. Improve Child Nutrition Programs

It is estimated that half of those relying on Emergency Food Programs are children and almost 70% of the EFPs responding to the survey reported an increase in the number of children utilizing their programs in the past year. To address this problem, Hunger Action recommends that the NYS Legislature provide increased outreach funds for the federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). This program is grossly underutilized compared to the School Lunch Program, as only 23% of income eligible children participate in SFSP while 71% participate in School Lunch.

Although Child Nutrition Programs have the potential to help eradicate childhood hunger, such programs need many improvements. Hunger Action urges New York State legislators to show support for provisions that broaden eligibility guidelines, increase sponsor reimbursement levels, expand universal breakfast programs and reduce paperwork requirements as part of federal Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization.

6. REFERENCES

¹ America's Second Harvest. *Hunger in America: New York State Report*, 2001.

² Hunger Action Network of New York State. *World Trade Center Disaster Hunger Impact Survey*, November 2001.