The Battle Against Hunger

Prevalence of Food Insecurity in NJ

Tag Words: food, hunger, insecure, starve, unhealthy, nutrition

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Summary

In light of recent economic events, food insecurity has increased drastically in New Jersey. It has become necessary to address the issue of increasing food insecurity and malnutrition of families who cannot afford food. Our group's objective is to promote eating healthy food for less. Since fast-foods are often cheaper and more convenient for some individuals, we have thought to promote the alternative, ‘A Better World Café’ located in Highland Park, NJ, where individuals can dine in for less or volunteer for a meal.
The Issue: Food Insecurity

The World Food Summit define food security in 1996 as “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Two groups described as having ‘food security’ consist of “High food security” and “marginal food security”. On the other hand, food insecurity consists of individuals and families that cannot meet the above definition. These consist of “Low food security”, which are individuals who have had to alter the quality or quantity of their food in order to deal with an economic situation; and “Very Low food security”, which are individuals who struggle with having enough food for the household.

How is food security measured? The USDA and the Census Bureau developed a module in the early 1990s to be included in the Current Population Survey (CPS), and has been included ever since in the census. Questions consisted of the adequacy in the quantity and quality of food eaten by the family, instances of reduced food intake and the consequences, a family’s income and how many individuals it supports, etc…

Since the government seems to be aware that there is a hunger problem in the US, is there a substantial need to direct attention to food security? According to the Economic Research Service (under the USDA) reported that in the US in 2008 and increase of 8.9% of households were placed under the “low food security” group AND 5.7% of households were placed under the “very low food security” group. Of additional concern is the drastic increase in the past few years. As of 2008, the USDA reported a drastic increase in people who lived in households that were considered “very low food security” since 2000. Over the 8 years numbers steadily rose from 8.5 million to a whopping 17.3 million.

Although New Jersey seems to be a wealthy state, the statistics have also shown a steady increase in recent years. As of 2008, over 281,000 households in New Jersey reported being “food insecure,” lacking access to sufficient enough, nutritious food. Meaning, 281,000 families do not know where they’re next meal is going to come from. In September 2008, the Community FoodBank of NJ reported a 20-30% increase in individuals that come in for food assistance.

These are the highest prevalence rates since 1995 when the question were included in the CPS (no information has yet been reported for 2009 at the time this research was performed). Although prevalence of food insecurity is below the US average in the entire state of NJ (10.3%), it remains to be an issue in particular counties, particularly since the number of poor individuals in NJ comprises 8.7% (741,472 individuals) and 19% of individuals are below the federal poverty line (1,618,488 individuals).
The Service Project

Our original service project idea concerned focusing on eliminating hunger, promoting nutrition, and eliminating waste. We found our goals to coincide with the 4 vision statements of ‘A Better World Café’:

- Eliminating world hunger
- Serving organic unprocessed food
- Feeding and including all members of the community
- Eliminating waste in the food industry

We aimed to hold a “Hunger Awareness Week” where we can raise awareness of the hunger situation in Middlesex county and the opportunity to donate and volunteer time and money to places such as, A Better World Café, by eating there. We aimed to advertise the café by:

- Short clip to be aired on RUTV
- Advertisement in the Daily Targum
- Advertisement in the Cook Weekly e-mail
- Contacting clubs and asking them to attend the event and set up volunteer times
- Contacting various fraternities and sororities and asking them to attend the event and set up volunteer times

In order to do so we contacted the manager at A Better World Café and were told to send in a proposal.

Community Service Proposal to A Better World Café:
Hello,

My name is Christine Sedrak and I am writing to you to propose a community service project that I would like to carry out. I am currently taking a course at Rutgers that requires us to do a community service project concerning an issue that we believe is misdirected or neglected, and make an effort to make an impact on society somehow. The topic my group member, Nermin, and I chose to work on is hunger. While we’d love to eliminate hunger worldwide, that would take years of work and funding to execute. Rather, we have chosen to raise awareness about hunger locally – a more practical and affordable approach.

Our goals are to raise awareness about the hunger issue in New Jersey, alert individuals of how much food they waste, and dedicate a week where students can donate some time and/or money to ‘A Better World Café’. We intend on carrying out these goals through the following:
• Writing to the Daily Targum (the Rutgers newspaper) about the local hunger issue
  o Include statistics and demographics
  o Include information about how students can eliminate food waste
• Hold a “Hunger Awareness Week” during the week of April 5th-9th (if convenient for the café) where students can come during the open hours and eat a meal. Students will be asked to donate a minimum of $3 above their fare in order to help those less fortunate
• Announce the “Hunger Awareness Week” in various on-campus weekly newsletters
• Spread the word to Greek life (fraternities and sororities) and other clubs that they can volunteer their time and funds to fulfill some of the items on the wish list for the café

I hope these goals are reasonable and coincide with the vision statements that ‘A Better World’ was founded on. If you have any comments or suggestions, please feel free to e-mail me back or call me at (number). Due to my class schedule, I may not be able to answer, if so, please leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

Thank you in advance,
Christine Sedrak

The response received wasn’t what we had expected as the manager asked us to not advertise the café since the project was already underway by a marketing class. Instead, we took Dr. Fagan’s advice by passing out mini flyers to people on George Street, informing them of what the café is and how to get there through Rutgers buses. A sample of what we gave out:

A Better World Cafe
19 S 2nd Ave Highland Park, NJ 08904
  o You may pay the suggested price or something different. If you pay more, you will help feed someone else who has more limited resources.
  o You may volunteer an hour of time in return for a meal.
  o You may have the community meal of the day if you can neither pay nor volunteer.
  o You may use the community meal as one of your choices when you are choosing more than one thing, to help keep your total cost down.

Using Rutgers buses:
Get on EE from either the public safety building, liberty street, Burger King, or the train station and get off at either the SAC (Student Activities Center), Rutgers Student Center, or Scott Hall.
Next, get on the L bus and get off at Harrison Ave. Walk back the way the bus came towards Route 27/Raritan Ave until you come to A Better World Café (between 2nd and 3rd Ave).

As we passed out our mini-flyers on George Street we were confronted with a nice man whose first question was “What kind of food do they serve?” – we were thrilled that he showed concern for what he was eating and kept track of his vitamin intake each day. He then informed us that no one would care enough to go to Highland Park for healthy food, when there was a health foods store around the corner that was always empty. He also explained to us how many
of the New Brunswick residents felt – neglected and dependent on the University and local Hospitals for jobs and healthcare.

The ‘ethics’ behind the issue became evident as we decided we shouldn’t ‘weed-out’ people we thought should know about the café. Others responded with a, “Oh, Highland Park- its right there!” While others grunted, “why would I go all the way to Highland Park when I’m right here with a Burger King.”

We then volunteered at the café ourselves and were able to work side-by-side by other volunteers who were working for a meal. They had a great sense of humor and showed more concern for what they were eating than we had expected.

Later, I found an email from the café manager:

**From: Jean Stockdale**

**To: Christine Sedrak**

Dear Christine,

We had already spoken by phone, then today I heard about a big anti-hunger initiative at RU for April 14 and 15, with further opportunity to take part in it on Apr 18 and during Tent State April 24-30. So I took the liberty of giving your email to the organizer Nick who will contact you to see if you want to participate.

Jean

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Jean Stockdale
19 S. 2nd Ave.
Highland Park, NJ 08904

Nick contacted me and we met where he showed me a full power point slideshow of SouperVan – a sort of new and improved, healthy, clean, type of ‘grease truck” that’s expected to be on Douglass this coming Fall 2010. The project has been underway for the past year and is expected to go public this coming Thursday, April 29th. SouperVan is a low-profit business that aims to pledge 100% of profits to worthy causes that directly feed the hungry. More about SouperVan is to come as they finalize their plans with the administration.

Links:

http://www.whoismyneighbor.net/projects/a_better_world_cafe
http://soupervan.org/
Editorials

A Better World Around the Corner

To the editor:

What if you had limited food to eat, but wanted to sit down at a decent restaurant. With many limitations, one important one being transportation, one would wouldn’t have much options. I’m talking about Better World Café, a community café, located in Highland Park, that wants to make “healthy eating accessible and affordable to all!” So why is this café located on one of the street corners of Highland Park, and not in the center of New Brunswick, where it would be accessible to most? Maybe that’s something that needs to be addressed with a Better World Café and New Brunswick so we can collaborate and change something for the better. Going up and down the streets of New Brunswick to let people know about Better World Café was the first step of raising awareness of the place, but most of these people do not have transportation to get to Highland Park. So letting them know how to use the bus system seemed to be a good plan, until we ran into a problem of whether it was a safety issue for them and some were not interested and others didn’t seem to see the trip as worthwhile. The plan didn’t get too far, but rather got us thinking about why there wasn’t a Better World Café in New Brunswick, so we can have a better world!

Nermin Ghaly

A Better World for Us

Shielding others from the Battle on Hunger

Christine Sedrak

As the hunger problem drastically increases with every passing minute, some individuals are thinking of what they can do to control it – one city at a time. Chances are, by the time you’re halfway done reading this article, nearly 200 people worldwide will die from starvation. Thanks to the efforts of Denise Cerreta from Salt Lake City, approximately 6 “better the world” café’s have been opened nationwide. Fortunately for us, there’s one conveniently located in Highland Park – less than 3 miles from some sites on campus. A Better World Café is founded on four vision statements, 1) eliminating world hunger, 2) serving organic unprocessed food, 3) feeding and including all members of society, and 4) eliminating waste in the food industry. These four vision statements coincide with personal beliefs of two Rutgers students, Nermin Ghaly and myself. Under the instruction of Dr. Julie Fagan, a professor of Ethics in Science at Rutgers University, we will attempt to raise awareness about the hunger issue locally and eliminate food hunger. Each day there is a community meal served for free at ‘A Better World Café’, along with additional meals that one can pay a relatively small amount for. This café allows food for anyone who cannot afford to feed their families, or support themselves. If you can afford to pay for food, with an additional donation, your efforts will go to feed someone else who may not be able to afford a meal. We aim to hold a Hunger Awareness week in mid April where we will ask people to dine and donate of their own will. Additionally, we aim to raise awareness that such a café exists to people who are in need of the food.