

Growing need

Report: Pantries, soup kitchens faced hunger spike in '09

By Catherine Candisky
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

If you gathered everyone in the state who got help at a soup kitchen or food pantry in any given week last year, they would fill Ohio Stadium more than twice.

Every week in 2009, 225,700 Ohioans sought emergency food assistance, a jump of 18 percent from three years earlier.

A report released yesterday by the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks shows the recession's devastating impact on Ohio families.

In all, more than 1.4 million people statewide received food assistance at least once last year, and often more frequently.

The spike seems to be attributed to those seeking help for the first time, usually after losing a job and running through any money they might have set aside.

At an East Side soup kitchen yesterday, Tony Bowman, 41, of Columbus, encouraged his young cousin to finish his sandwich.

Bowman started coming to the Community Kitchen on S. Ohio Avenue for lunch after losing his job as a forklift operator a year ago. Unable to find work, he's been babysitting the 3-year-old boy while his mother is at work.

"I go out every week looking for work, but nothing's shaking," he said.

The increasing demand for food assistance comes as little surprise to those working on the front lines, including Giyneetuis Fraley, the assistant kitchen manager at Community Kitchen.

She said most of the new people they are seeing have lost jobs and can't afford food, health care and other basic needs. The kitchen has continued to meet demand, thanks in large part to many, many donors.

"I usually cook a little more than we need," Fraley said. "I want everybody to be full when they leave here. It may be the only meal they get all day."

The report found that 78 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens in Ohio experienced an increase in demand last year. Some had to limit the amount of food they offer, and others were forced to turn away families. A few have closed.

"Is this a crisis? Every day is a crisis for an increasing number of Ohioans," said Lisa Hamler-Fuggitt, executive director of Second Harvest.

"The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that more than 40 percent of those surveyed in Ohio say they must choose between food and medicine or other health-care needs. Thirtyone percent have at least one household member in poor health."

She said the largest increases in demand for food assistance are in suburbs such as Dublin, Worthington and Hilliard, where those who have lost jobs or are earning less struggle to pay mortgages, health-care costs and other expenses.

Statewide, 70 percent of those seeking help had annual household incomes of less than \$15,000 a year.

The study was based on interviews with 4,092 people who visited food pantries and soup kitchens last year.

Also yesterday, Second Harvest announced a campaign aimed at increasing awareness and enrollment

in food stamps, Medicaid, energy assistance and other public benefit programs for low-income families.

The "Do You Know Someone Who...?" effort will be funded through a \$312,850 grant from the HealthPath Foundation of Ohio, an arm of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation that focuses on health issues faced by Ohio's indigent population.

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Mariah Sims, 23 months, entices her father, Shyrone Sims, with a bite at the Community Kitchen. They were making their first visit as their end-of-the-month budget tightened.



ERIC ALBRECHT DISPATCH PHOTOS

C.J. Chapman has his eyes and his appetite set on a shiny red apple at the Community Kitchen on S. Ohio Avenue. The 3-year-old was there yesterday with cousin Tony Bowman of Columbus for lunch.

Article

View



Emergency food assistance

- ▶ **225,700:** number of Ohioans receiving food each week from a soup kitchen, pantry or other agency
- ▶ **35 PERCENT** are children younger than 18
- ▶ **32 PERCENT** of households include at least one employed adult
- ▶ **52 PERCENT** say they have had to choose between buying food and paying for utilities

Sources: Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks, *Hunger in Ohio 2010*