

Numerous Opportunities to Support President's Call to Action Supported by the OASHF

In support of President Obama's "United We Serve" initiative, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks (OASHF) is working closely with government agencies to provide Ohioans numerous opportunities to give back to their local communities and help meet the growing demand for services.

"The need has never been greater and thanks to this historic presidential initiative there has never been a greater opportunity for Ohioans to step forward and help their neighbors," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, OASHF executive director. "Having citizen-volunteers become more directly involved in programs is a perfect public/private partnership and can have a concrete impact in reducing hunger."

The OASHF affiliated programs include:

AmeriCorps VISTA, a one year National Service program that engages members in a variety of indirect service opportunities meant to increase the capacity and sustainability of their assignment sites, normally non-profit organizations. OASHF has sponsored a statewide AmeriCorps*VISTA project since 2006 with the primary focus on expanding the Ohio Benefit Bank network. (OBB is a Web-based computer program to connect low and moderate-income Ohioans with access to work supports and public benefits.) Most of the OASHF VISTA members are OBB Community Trainers, increasing the capacity of nonprofits across the state to serve their clients more holistically.

AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates is a 6 – 8 week service opportunity that engages mainly college students in a summer of service. Unlike standard VISTA members, Summer Associates can be engaged in direct service. OASHF sponsored its first Summer Associate project in 2008, placing 25 members at OBB sites across the state. In 2009, OASHF placed 55 summer members at 12 Summer Food Service Program sponsors to increase the capacity to feed low-income children during the school break.

AmeriCorps State is a one year National Service initiative that engages people of all ages in direct service opportunities such as tutoring, mentoring, community clean up, etc. OASHF was awarded its first AmeriCorps State sponsorship grant in June, 2009 for 30 members. Twenty of these members will be sub-granted to OBB sites where the members will act as full-time OBB counselors. The remaining 10 members will be assigned to Foodbanks for general anti-hunger work. One slot has also been sub-granted to FIRSTLINK to work on the 211 Food Line.

AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) is a one year residential National Service opportunity for 18 – 24 year olds. Members travel the country in teams of 10 to 12 members working on short-term projects such as disaster relief (economic and natural). OASHF sponsored its first NCCC team in 2009, assigning 10 members in teams of two to the five Franklin County Job and Family Services offices offering free tax assistance to clients at the JFS offices.

"Government agencies at both the federal and state level are struggling to provide the necessary funding to support the increasing number of Ohioans who are struggling daily to provide food and other necessities for their families," said Hamler-Fugitt. "We encourage all Ohioans to get involved in any way they can. The president's call to service is to be commended, but it is up to each of us to meet the challenge and do what we can as our state and country work their way out of the current economic situation."

OASHF is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, a not-for-profit organization. It is a statewide member-supported organization, representing the 12 certified America's Second Harvest Foodbanks and distributing food and grocery items to more than 3,000 member charities in all 88 Ohio counties. In State Fiscal Year 2008, foodbanks distributed more than 97.9 million pounds of food and grocery items through the network of food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters, with more than 25.3 million pounds of this food being provided through OASHF programs. More than 1.8 million Ohioans were served through food pantries from January 1, through March 31, 2009. Of those clients served, more than 232,000 were seniors, and nearly 705,000 were children. For more information, visit www.oashf.org.

For more information about the Ohio Benefit Bank or to locate a site, please call 1-800-648-1176 or visit www.OBB.Ohio.Gov.

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