



## **2014 Highlights, Activities and Accomplishments**

In 2006, Greater Twin Cities United Way convened a representative group of hunger relief agencies that worked together to develop a plan to address the problem of hunger in our communities. The plan was introduced to the public in 2007 with a commitment to this issue over time and a challenge to the larger community to unite in support of the goal to eliminate hunger. TCHI has created a forum for leaders of hunger relief organizations to work together to end hunger and to strengthen the efforts of all by creating opportunities for collaboration and connection. The key focus of all TCHI projects is collaboration and the belief that more can be accomplished when organizations learn and plan together.

Members of the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative (TCHI) included hunger relief organizations (e.g., food shelves, meal programs and food banks, policy advocates), University of Minnesota, state government, corporations and faith based organizations.

### **Members in 2014:**

Greater Twin Cities United Way; Hunger Solutions; The Food Group; Second Harvest Heartland; Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Human Services; Extension Center for Family Development, University of Minnesota; CEAP; VEAP; ICA; Keystone Community Services; Minnesota Foodshare; Metro Meals on Wheels; Family Pathways; Northpoint Health and Wellness; Loaves and Fishes; Catholic Charities; Pillsbury United Communities; Neighborhood House; Matter.

### **Current Situation of Hunger in our Community**

Despite all of the efforts of the TCHI members and the work done collectively, the issue of Hunger still faces us in significant ways in our community.

*One of five families* with children in Minnesota faces hunger or food insecurity. This means that children do not always eat three square meals a day and sometimes skip meals. Much of this happens on the weekend and during summer vacation when there is no access to meals at school.

Food shelf usage in the nine-county metro area reached a *record 1.7 million visits in 2013* which is a nearly 50% increase from pre-recession numbers. Almost half of these visits are made by children and seniors.

*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits*, formerly known as food stamps, was reduced due to the improvement in state unemployment data, thereby eliminating 30,000 Minnesota adults without dependents from SNAP benefits. In many cases these individuals have fallen into a gap because of their extended unemployment. Many are veterans. A study from the University of

Minnesota School of Public Health found 27 percent of young veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq wars come home from those wars without consistent access to food. (Widome, Jensen, Bangerter and Fu, 2014.)

When people have a hard time making ends meet, having food on the table is often a challenge. *Families are faced with tough choices every day* – decisions between food or transportation, food or housing, food or medical care. In Hunger in America 2014 study, 63 % of families chose housing versus food; 71 % chose transportation or gas; 67% chose medical care or medicine and 71 % chose paying utilities versus food.

When it is a challenge to buy food, it is an even bigger challenge to buy healthy food. Healthier foods are often more expensive to purchase and in some cases have a shorter shelf life so when purchasing food is difficult, purchasing healthy foods is even more so. Part of coping to manage their hunger can sometimes mean choosing inexpensive, less healthy foods to feel full.

Hunger is a pervasive and quiet issue in our communities and one that has serious and damaging impacts.

There are studies that show the correlation of better grades, better attendance, and better involvement in school for students who eat good food on a regular basis. So not having access to a sufficient supply of good food can create lifelong challenges related to learning, grade achievement, and career choices. Hunger is caused by economic disparities and creates further economic disparities.

The ramifications of not eating well when pregnant are known by most and can create disadvantages for the child from onset as well as greater medical costs.

Seniors who eat well and get some exercise can increase their chances of living well longer and having fewer medical costs.

The return on investment for individuals and society when people have access to sufficient and good food is significant in terms of achievement in school, careers, safety in daily operations, and health risk reductions, and hunger is a solvable issue.

***The overall goal of the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative is to reduce and ultimately eliminate hunger in our community.***

## **Goal One: Increasing Access to Healthy Foods Task Force**

### **Healthy Eating Index Committee**

TCHI, in partnership with the University of Minnesota, is analyzing the viability and value of using the Healthy Eating Index with food shelves to increase healthy food options. One hundred forty one food shelves were involved in this process with a feedback form developed (-See Attached,) that provides not only information on the current purchasing choices but also recommendations on how improvements to the score could be made with monthly reports provided to the sites. The Healthy Eating Index is a nationally recognized tool to assess nutritional levels of different food groups and food items. The final evaluation is being developed and will take place in early 2015. Based on the findings, Next steps will be developed around how this information can be utilized at an individual food shelf level. The goal is to provide a hands-on, easily accessible tool that can inform how to increase healthy food options. This initiative will present on the findings of the research in 2015 to the Steering Committee.

### **The Faces of Senior Hunger Committee**

A Senior Hunger spent 2014 examining research and findings related to senior hunger and developing recommendations for toolkits that would help food shelves and meal programs become more user friendly. AARP and MAAA joined this group and added significant input for the data collection and review phase. It has been noted that the 50-59 (62) senior group has the most unmet needs. Awareness of this age group's needs as well as a toolkit to help seniors in general be better served is underway using the research gathered and the ideas generated by the group. The next steps include refining and categorizing these recommendations and sending them out to the 24 United Way partner food shelves for input early in 2015 followed by finalizing and distributing them to food shelves, food banks and meal programs throughout the state. This will also be an online resource and will include a self- assessment instrument to help food groups identify areas for improvement for themselves.

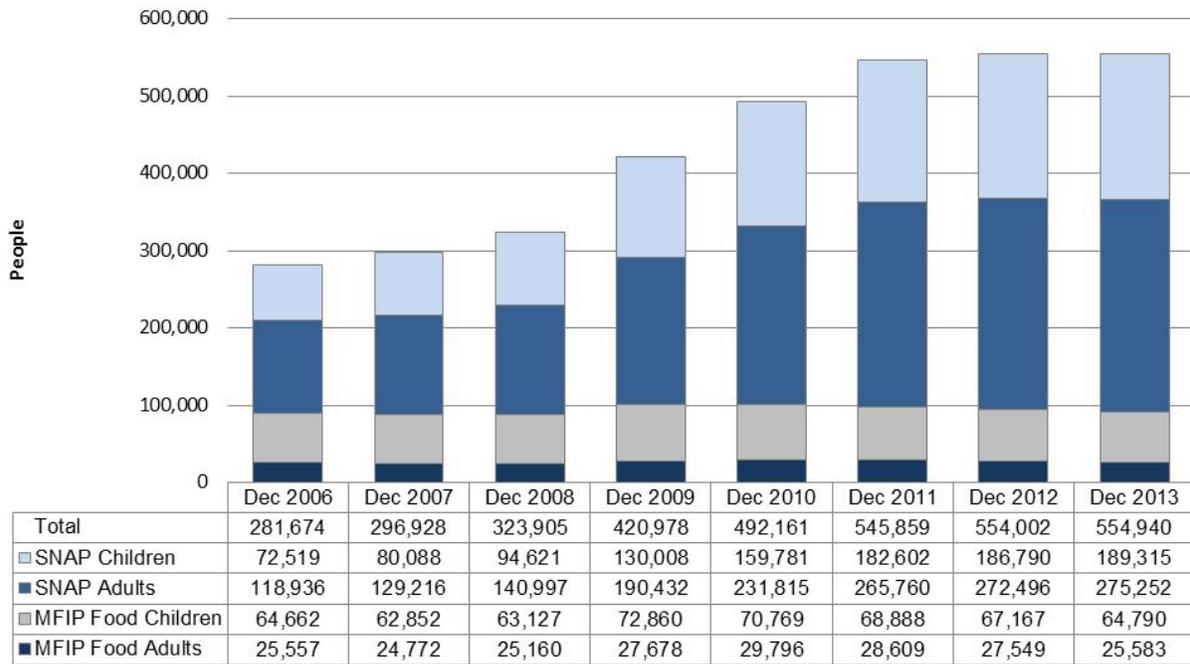
Some of the findings and recommendations will also help serve others that visit food shelves and meal programs such as individuals with disabilities.

Additional Activities under the Increasing Access to Healthy Foods Task Force:

- In addition, TCHI monitors and reviews the pounds of food distributed by the area food banks and meal programs.
- Twin Cities Hunger Initiative also monitors SNAP enrollments and supports efforts to increase participation in SNAP.

**SNAP eligible people: December 2006- December 2013**

Characteristics of People and Cases on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program – December 2013  
 Minnesota Department of Human Services



**Goal Two: Increasing Public Awareness/Impacting Public Policy Task Force**

This year the Public Awareness Task Force expanded to include Public Policy in order to link the voice of those in need with the work being done in the public policy area to support this important systems change work. Members of TCHI participated in the Partners to End Hunger and were involved in testimony as well as a post legislative summary meeting at the State Capitol. Identifying people who could speak, not only at the State Capitol, but as needed at the County and State regarding programs and rules that could help or inhibit access to services was a part of the discussion throughout the year.

Two press releases on projects were sent out to local media specifically related to TCHI projects (Healthy Savings, HEI) as well as a sharing of coverage of the partner agencies within the group.

TCHI determined that a website that helped tell the story of collective impact and was a “gathering place” for the member organization and a destiny site for those seeking ways to be involved through volunteering or donating resources to any of the member organizations. So much is accomplished by individual members of the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative that finding a way to share these successes with each other and with others was seen as a positive expansion of the work being done.

The Public Awareness/ Public Policy Task Force guided the process with a creation of a Request for Proposal and establishing a Communications Sub – Committee of staff members with knowledge of websites and communication strategies. This group reviewed the proposals that were submitted and selected a website developer and developed the lay-out, look, content, links and functionality of the

website. The website was featured on an 'I Walked' button at the Walk To End Hunger on November 27<sup>th</sup>. [Mnhungerinitiative.org](http://Mnhungerinitiative.org)

Communication leads from each of the partner organizations will post their organization's events on line and will take turns writing up their organization as the lead story for a month.

The group also discussed the name change of Twin Cities Hunger Initiative to Minnesota Hunger Initiative along with the Executive and Steering Committees. The name change soft launch coincided with the website introduction on November 27 with plans to develop a thorough communication plan in early 2015.

Participation at the **Food Access Summit** served to increase awareness by the members of relevant food access issues.

**The Walk to End Hunger**, a fundraising and public awareness event was started by the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative This year was the seventh annual walk and members of TCHI had booths on their programs and services. Thus far, the Walk has generated nearly \$1.8 million for hunger relief in the 9-county metro area and Senator Klobuchar has participated since 2008.

### **Goal Three: Increasing the Capability and Capacity of Food Shelves and Meal Programs to effectively serve their clients Task Force**

#### **Healthy Savings Pilot Project**

The Healthy Savings Program, with technology created by Solutran, an IT company in Plymouth Minnesota was visibly advertising the launch of their program. TCHI contacted them to ask if they'd be interested in working together on a project. During the first quarter of the year, the groups met to learn about each other and explore project options. This planning group decided to pilot an effort using the Healthy Savings card with pre-loaded dollars to provide an incentive for participants to eat more fruits and vegetables. This group worked to identify the criteria, to create an application process, to select three representative organizations, to create a pre and post evaluation, to determine the amount on the card and to consider other supplemental materials to help incentivize participants such as posters, recipes, demonstration classes. A 12 week pilot was funded by Solutran and launched early summer with a recruitment of 100 families/individuals via three foodshelves: ICA in Minnetonka, CEAP in Brooklyn Center and Blaine, and Northpoint in North Minneapolis. The participants were given healthy savings cards containing \$10.00 for free produce weekly as well as access to additional discounts on healthy foods and \$3.00 of free food at the 23 participating farmer's markets. During the 12 weeks, weekly reports on participants' purchases were sent out weekly on Monday mornings to the three food shelves and meetings were held during this pilot project to review the results and to consider new strategies as needed to increase engagement. Following the 12 weeks, the post evaluation surveys were conducted and summarized and focus groups held at four locations. The concept of using the Healthy Savings card, pre-loaded with \$10/week to be used to purchase produce by families in need turned out to be effective. The results of this pilot were positive with 87 % engagement and 49% redemption rates which are considered high for both categories and with positive results in the area of consuming more healthy foods and seeing some positive health results in a short time. In addition, valuable information

was obtained to move forward with an expansion of this program including participating in the development of an USDA RFP in the last quarter of 2014.

### **Mobile Food Shelves and Data Collection**

The Mobile Food Shelf program presented at the TCHI Steering Committee resulted in a transfer of program coordination from The Food Group to Hunger Solutions to continue and expand the opportunities.

Database work is being done by a number of vendors in the community. A simple program for smaller foodshelves was an effort taken over by Hunger Solutions drawing on work that had previously been done by The Food Group. As the various vendors develop their products further, TCHI will show the range of options for food shelves throughout the State to help them find data bases that would work for them.

### **Additional efforts:**

- The Twin Cities Hunger Initiative Steering Committee heard from the Children's Defense Fund on Benefit obtainment and overall community needs; on studies related to other collective impact efforts; from Hennepin County on a study done on gaps in services, from Hunger Free Minnesota twice on their outreach to hospitals and health care clinics and on the sun setting of Hunger Free at a special meeting. The Food Group presented on its work on a cultural specific toolkit and on the Mobile Food Bank project.
- Meetings were held with the Ramsey County meals program, and members attended the Nutritious Food Coalition meetings. There were also meetings held with the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Education during the year to work toward complementary efforts.
- TCHI has created a forum for leaders of hunger relief organizations to work together to end hunger and to strengthen the efforts of all by creating opportunities for collaboration and connection. The key focus of all TCHI projects is collaboration and the belief that more can be accomplished when organizations learn and plan together
- Announcing new name, effective January 2015 Minnesota Hunger Initiative

**MINNESOTA  
HUNGER  
INITIATIVE**