

There is a decrease in homelessness and more affordable housing is available.

One of United Way of Dane County's supporting strategies for reducing and preventing homelessness in our community is to subsidize housing costs by providing greater access to surplus foods. By decreasing the strain of food costs in household budgets and maximizing available financial resources for housing, households will not have to worry about choosing between feeding their family or paying the rent.

Dane County's existing network of strong food pantries and service providers committed to assisting those in need puts us in an excellent position to eliminate hunger as a method to maximize resources and prevent homelessness in our community.

Why It Matters

- The average American household spends \$187 per person per month on food (2002 statistic, U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- The fair market value for rent of a 2-bedroom apartment in Dane County is \$746 per month, for a 3-bedroom it is \$1019 per month (*Out of Reach*, National Low Income Housing Coalition)
- One-third of the families with children that use food pantries in Dane County reported that the children sometimes had to go without food because there was none in the house (Hunger Prevention Council, October 2003)
- Research has shown that even mild under-nutrition on young children can reduce physical growth and affect brain development (America's Second Harvest)
- Dane County ranks 60th out of 72 counties for the percentage of people in poverty receiving FoodShare (food stamps) yet we rank the 1st out of 72 for the numbers of families paying more than 35% of their income for rent (30.31%) (*Hunger Close to Home*, UW Extension and Wisconsin Food Security Project)

Promising/Best Practices – research has shown these to be especially effective

1. Maximize food pantry usage of available free foods (such as TEFAP) and obtain as much food from food banks as possible, versus using retail outlets
2. Allow people to access food pantries as often as needed
3. Screen customers/clients at food pantries for FoodShare and other supplemental food programs eligibility and offer encouragement to enroll
4. Ensure that in-take and screening at food pantries are conducted in a welcoming and dignified manner
5. Allow customers/clients to select from all products available versus pre-packaged selections
6. Enough food pantries must exist within an accessible distance of customers/clients to meet need
7. Replace as many food drives with fund drives as feasible

Areas of Focus – as prioritized by United Way of Dane County's Basic Needs Community Solution Team

- Increase capacities of Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin, Inc. (CAC) and Second Harvest Food Bank of Southern Wisconsin and help educate the community to understand the importance of both of their business models.
- Examine transportation challenges food pantries face for increasing capacity and identify potential solutions
- Increase enrollment in FoodShare by partnering with the Hunger Prevention Council of Dane County, Inc. (HPC) and the Dane County Food Pantry Network (DCFPN) in their prescreening eligibility project with implementation at local pantries.
- Maximize food pantry financial resources by identifying which items are most often purchased from retail outlets and determine if CAC, Second Harvest, and/or another venue have options for meeting these needs.
- Examine potential enhancements to the current food pantry system to better serve households that rely on using food pantries multiple times per month. Identify food pantry sites willing to switch to unlimited use policies with customer/client-choice formats and develop and support implementation plans.
- Determine how to assist households that use food pantries multiple times per month to most effectively utilize all available resources.
- Develop collaborative community education pieces with CAC, Second Harvest, HPC, and DCFPN on how fund drives benefit food pantries (and their customers/clients) more than food drives.
- Encourage and support food pantries to reorganize under customer/client-choice formats and develop mobile food pantries for underserved geographic areas of the community.