



Many Solano County Kids Going Hungry

By Sarah Rohrs / Times-Herald, Vallejo

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Nearly one in four Solano County children under age 18 struggles with hunger, according to a new study released by Feeding America and Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. Hunger is "a problem in our community," Solano County Health and Social Services Director Patrick Duterte said.

"There are times when people have money during the month but at some point their money may run out," Duterte added.

The study, "Map the Meal Gap: Child Food Insecurity 2011," indicates children go hungry in every county in the country.

Far more children are hungry than adults, the report concluded.

In Solano County, nearly one in four, or 22.4 percent, of the county's children under 18, struggle with hunger, the study found.

However, the rate among the county's general population is 15.9 percent, according to the report.

Food Bank spokeswoman Lisa Sherrill said the report's conclusions are not surprising. What is alarming, however, is that about half of the hungry children in Solano County are in families who are 185 percent of the poverty line.

This means that parents of these children earn too much money to qualify for most federal nutrition programs, including the school lunch program, Sherrill said.

The families still can't afford to feed their families adequately, Sherrill said.

The economy that pushed legions of people into unemployment is the primary cause behind the high rate of hunger among children, authors of the report said.

The Food Bank has made similar observations.

"From the clients we've talked to we've heard that a lot of them are unemployed or unable to find work or they are just not able to make enough," Sherrill said.

"They are in a bind to have enough food to feed their families," Sherrill said.

For instance, a set of parents from Contra Costa County contacted the food bank on Friday afternoon after they had spent their money fixing the family car, Sherrill said.

After paying off the car repairs, the mother and father panicked when they found they had no money left to feed their children during the weekend, she said.

The Food Bank was able to give them enough food for a few days so the children wouldn't go hungry, Sherrill added.

At Vallejo's Amador Street Hope Center, volunteers handing out free food try not to send parents and children away empty-handed. But sometimes, they have no choice.

Nearly seven or eight new people show up twice a week when the center opens to hand out food boxes to families with children. Food pantry director Mary Wall said some families who need help in Vallejo have one or two children while others have six or seven.

The pantry gives out more than 60 boxes of food per week. Families are allowed to come in once a month, but are referred to other agencies if they need help and can't get it at the pantry, she said.

Due to low donations and supplies from the food bank, the pantry, sometimes, runs out of food, Wall said.

Meanwhile, Solano County officials are encouraging families who need help with food to contact the county to see if they qualify for CalFresh (formerly known as food stamps) benefits.

Residents can go into one of three county offices or go online to www.benefitscalwin.org.

County offices are at the following locations:

- * 354 Parker St., Vacaville, 469-4500.
- * 275 Beck Ave., Fairfield, 784-8050.
- * 365 Tuolumne St., Vallejo, 553-5000.