



New data shows that hunger locally, nationally continues in recession

By Sarah Rohrs/Times-Herald staff writer /

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For Vallejoans like Pastor Allen Franks, hunger among both adults and children is a big hole that needs to be filled.

At Franks' Vallejo First Church of the Nazarene, a free Thursday night meal attracts as many as 60 people -- far more than the dozen who showed when volunteers first began preparing dinners.

"I think there's a huge need," Franks said. The church also gives away free boxes of food twice a week.

Data and studies released by the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano confirms Franks' observation.

One in six households in California struggled with hunger between 2009 and 2011, the food bank reported, citing new data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Nationally, there are more than 50 million people, including 17 million children, who worry about where the next meal will come from, according to the food bank report.

In Solano County, nearly 34 percent of the adults are in "food insecure" households or those in which putting food on the table is often a big unknown, the food bank reported.

Similarly, 11.1 percent of the county's children are growing up in poverty.

Some 24,422 households in Solano County are eligible for the food stamp program, now called CalFresh in California.

As unemployment rose in the most recent recession, more people have become eligible for food stamps, according to the food bank.

A federal proposal to cut the food stamp program has generated considerable debate, with opposition coming from the food bank and other nutritional organizations.

"Even though people are talking about (economic) recovery people are still hungry. There are still people in need and people who are struggling," food bank spokeswoman Lisa Sherrill said.

Regardless of federal funding levels, volunteers at the First Church of the Nazarene will continue serving meals and handing out boxes of food, Franks said.

"We don't have enough for everybody but we can give out one box per household," he said.

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