

Larry Sly: Outreach helps generations understand the need to help

By Larry Sly

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As the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano nears its 40th anniversary in 2015, it is exciting to see that a new generation of people is becoming part of the work we do.

We have employees, board members and volunteers who were not even born when the Food Bank began. This next generation sees the new ways we can engage with our supporters and makes an active effort to change their community into a better place.

I have been giving talks to groups about the work of the Food Bank since the 1970's. As time passed, I realized that the elementary school children who organized food drives at their school in my early years have become business owners and leaders in their faith communities and service clubs.

The outreach efforts we do help people understand hunger at an early age. By teaching people about food needs in the community, we help them see what they can do to make a difference. Helping our future community leaders understand the issue of hunger gives us at the Food Bank reason for hope.

The Food Bank continues our outreach work today because of the impact it has on our ability to feed those in need. We set aside weekend days as "Family Volunteer Day" on a quarterly basis. This is a chance for parents to bring their children to the Food Bank to get hands-on experience at making a difference.

Family Volunteer Day is set aside so that a safe child friendly atmosphere is created. (No forklifts or electric pallet jacks are running through the warehouse). We set up stations where families can take a tour of the warehouse, help bag produce, or organize outreach materials. We also have a short educational presentation that explains how sometimes circumstances cause a family to need help from the Food Bank.

Solano and Contra Costa counties are prosperous communities overall. Many of the people who support our work have never had to worry about where their next meal would come from. It is important for the Food Bank to help the community understand why their neighbors need food.

We know that families need to understand that sometimes bad stuff happens. It is also important that people understand they can make a difference, both through the work of the Food Bank and the direction they help our society take through the way they vote.

We make choices for our society as individuals, but each of us lives in a context of family, friendships, and social groups. The faith groups we belong to, the service clubs we are part of, the scout troops we grew up in continue to define who we are.

Food banks have become organizations that play an important role in addressing hunger in our community. By engaging families in our work, we help people understand why hunger exists in our community and what we can do to feed our neighbors in need.

To register for the next Family Volunteer Day on June 7, visit www/foodbankccs.org/familyvolunteerdayfairfield.

The author is executive director of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, based in Concord. Email: info@foodbankccs.org