

THE REPORTER

Larry Sly: Annual report change shows growth of food bank, local need

By Larry Sly

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Someone was going through some old materials they found in storage and brought me a Food Bank annual report from 1998, sixteen years ago.

Annual reports and financial audits are snapshots in time that define how an organization is providing service in the community, so it was pretty astounding to see where we were then versus where we are now.

I was amazed at how much we have grown as an organization.

In 1998, we had 32 employees; today we have 63. (Eleven of the people who worked for us in 1998 still are with us today.) We have been able to increase our services because the support we receive from the community has increased significantly. As an example, in 1998 the support we receive from individuals was \$1 million and we now receive \$5 million annually.

The Food Bank needs that increased support because we have expanded our work to meet the need in ways we never dreamed we would be doing in 1998.

At that time, we had our Senior Food Program, Food Assistance Program and Food for Children program as the only direct service we provided in the community. Because of the collaborative work of food banks through the California Association of Food Banks, we now have access to supply of fresh produce through packing sheds in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys that's only limited by the amount of support we receive to purchase it. Because this fresh food is available to us, we established the Farm 2 Kids program that distributes food to students in low-income schools.

In the past two years, we developed the Community Produce Program that takes fresh produce to over fifty distribution sites throughout Contra Costa and Solano counties. I would have been surprised in 1998 to know that someday we would provide over ten million pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables in one year to low-income people in our community.

The reason we must keep focused on our work is because the need continues to grow. We were serving 58,000 people a month in 1998 and have seen that number increase to 149,000 today. At some of our Food Assistance Program sites for example, we have seen the number of people coming increase fourfold. We are sending two trucks filled with food to some of the sites we serve because nearly 600 people come for the food we give. With our increased efficiency, staff and community support, we are able to meet that high demand and outreach to those who may not know help with food is available.

I am proud of the programs we have maintained and strengthened, as well as the new programs we have initiated. Everything we do, from distributing more fresh produce to helping enroll people in CalFresh is dedicated to getting food to those in need.

Our supporters should be proud as well. Because of them, we are able to be of service to the increased number of people who need us.

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