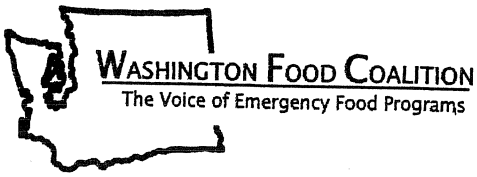
CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE



Hometown Hunger

Contributors:

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Hometown Hunger is a yearlong effort to explore the causes of hunger in four Washington State communities and develop community-based strategies to increase access to food resources by individuals and families who are affected by food insecurity and hunger. This project was initiated through a partnership between the Children's Alliance and the Washington Food Coalition in conjunction with the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program. The four Washington communities this project researched were Bellevue, Clark County, Lakewood and Moses Lake. The following reports were designed for the use of the respective communities (Clark County, Moses Lake, Lakewood) and initiating organizations.

Hometown Hunger: A Community-Based Analysis of Clark County

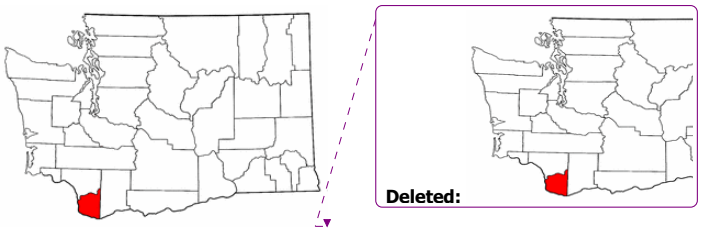
Contributors:

Shelley Curtis, Children's Alliance
Matt King, Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow
Rebekah Miller, Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow
Tracy Wilking, Washington Food Coalition

I. Background

What is Hometown Hunger?

Hometown Hunger is a yearlong effort to explore the causes of hunger in four Washington State communities and develop community-based strategies to increase access to food resources by individuals and families who are affected by food insecurity and hunger. This project was initiated through a partnership between the Children's Alliance and the Washington Food Coalition in conjunction with the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program. The Children's Alliance is a statewide child advocacy organization that works to improve the well being of children in Washington by effecting positive change in public policies, priorities and programs. The Washington Food Coalition is a statewide membership-based organization of emergency food providers and anti-hunger advocates. The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program is a yearlong leadership development program that trains emerging leaders in the fight against hunger in the United States.



The Hometown Hunger project seeks to gather information through research and community-based interviews, bring together hunger fighters to review information and identify key issues, create community-based strategies to increase food access, and utilize research as a basis for state and local level initiatives to address hunger. The project focuses on four communities in Washington: Clark County, Moses Lake, Lakewood, and Bellevue.

Hunger in Washington

Washington's hunger rates have consistently ranked amongst the highest in the nation. According to 2004 food security data released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 105,000 (4.3 percent) households are experiencing food insecurity with hunger. This makes Washington the 12th hungriest state in the nation. USDA food insecurity and hunger data confirms reports from community-based organizations that provide emergency food to hungry families. Lines at food banks across the state and calls to emergency food hotlines are on the rise as more and more families struggle to provide the basic necessities. A new food resource and referral line launched in June 2005 by the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Washington, received 13,000 calls in its first month of operation. Many of these families were desperate to find food resources, even after accessing federal food programs such as the Basic Food Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Food Insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and sufficient foods.
Hunger: uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food due to lack of resources to obtain food.
Source: http://www.cfpa.net/reports/hunger.html

The Community: Clark County

Clark County covers 628.2 square miles and includes 391,500 residents.[i] The county is the fourth smallest in geographic size in the state, but is the fifth most populous county. The biggest city and county seat, Vancouver, has 154,800 citizens and sits 15 minutes away from Portland, Oregon. This unique location allows one third of Clark County workers are employed in Portland.[ii] The other two largest cities are Camas and Battle Ground.[iii] The ethnic composition of this county is mostly white with the largest minority being Latin or Hispanic of different races. Compared to the United States, the percentages in Clark County are typically higher for whites with lower percentages of blacks and Hispanics or Latinos.[iv]

The median household income in Clark County ($48,288) is slightly higher than the national level ($44,684). However, per capita income in Clark County is $22,370, which is lower than the national level.[v] The percentage of Clark County families at or below the Federal Poverty Level ($19,350 for a family of four[vi]) is 7.5 percent, which is just below the national average.[vii]

II. Food Access

Food and Nutrition Programs

When a family needs help putting food on the table, public and private food and nutrition programs serve as a critical resource. The safety net of food and nutrition programs in Clark County, like other areas of Washington, is a mix of local, state and federally funded programs. Many families in Washington must utilize multiple food programs in order to provide adequate nutrition for their families. But even with access to these food and nutrition programs, families are still struggling to meet their basic food needs. The following food and nutrition programs are part of the basic safety net for low-income families: the Basic Food Program (Food Stamps), School Meal Programs, the Summer Food Service Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the WIC and Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program. The safety net of food and nutrition programs is enhanced by the federal The Emergency Food Assistance Program and Washington's Emergency Food Assistance Program, which provide food commodities and funding to emergency food programs.

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BASIC FOOD PROGRAM

The Basic Food Program, known nationally as the Food Stamp Program and funded by the USDA, provides monthly cash benefits to eligible low-income families, which can be used to purchase food. Low-income families and individuals receive benefits through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card, similar to a debit card, which they use to buy food items. The Basic Food Program is targeted toward those most in need. Eligibility for the program is based on financial and non-financial factors.[viii] Income eligibility for Basic Food is 130 percent of Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or below. In Clark County, since 2001, the number of Basic Food cases has increased by 53 percent.[ix] Basic Food Outreach staff and anti-hunger advocates acknowledge that there are many factors that could have led to this increase in individuals accessing program benefits. A number of procedural and regulatory changes have occurred in recent years. Some of the procedural changes that occurred were rules regarding asset tests, the use of a shorter application, removal of the

mandatory face-to-face interviews, shorter recertification timeline, elimination of the drug felony prohibition and a transition from food vouchers to EBT cards.

School Meal Programs

School districts can provide meals to students through the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participate in the programs receive reimbursement for nutritious meals provided to low-income children and eligible students receive breakfast and lunch either free or at a reduced-price.[x] The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals is used as an indicator of poverty in a particular school or district. In 2004, 38 percent of students in Clark County are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. All of the Clark County public schools provide lunch and approximately 90 percent provide breakfast.[xi]

Summer Meal Programs

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during the summer months when schools are not in session. Sponsors of this program, which can include school districts, local government, tribal agencies and non-profit organizations, also often provide educational and recreational activities at the meal sites.[xii] In Clark County last year, there were 18 meal sites that served an average of 1,272 children.[xiii] This program provides a vital resource for families who rely on the school meal programs to provide meals during the school year.

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Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded program which provides a variety of services including healthcare, nutrition education, food assistance and breastfeeding support to pregnant or postpartum women, their infants and children that are at a nutritional risk.[xiv] In 2004, WIC provided benefits to approximately 45 percent of babies born in Clark County. One of the integral parts of the program is the distribution of WIC coupons, which can be used to purchase specific foods. Through the distribution of these coupons, WIC provides a significant economic stimulus. In Clark County, WIC contributed $4,443,161 to the local economy through WIC checks redeemed at local grocery stores.[xv]

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Senior And WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

The Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) provide nutrition support to low-income seniors, women, and children through the purchase of fresh produce at local farmers markets. Local produce is also purchased directly from farmers and delivered to homebound seniors, congregate meal sites and senior housing. Participants in both WIC and Senior FMNP also receive nutrition education on healthy eating and food preparation.[xvi]

The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Health. In 2004, over $61,500 in WIC FMNP coupons were redeemed at local farmers markets in 2005.[xvii] The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. In 2005, Clark and Cowlitz County, seniors redeemed almost $18,000 worth of vouchers at local farmers markets.[xviii]

Another important source of nutrition for low-income seniors are congregate meals. Congregate meals provide meals to seniors in a social or homebound setting. They provide a critical source of nutrition for seniors and also provide an opportunity for socializing. In the county, 39,210 congregate meals and 68,435 Meals on Wheels were served in 2005. More specifically, there are nine congregate meal sites, where 1,519 seniors were served congregate meals.[xix]

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The emergency food system includes state funding, federal commodity foods, local food distribution centers, food banks, and meal programs. State funding is provided to food banks and tribal food voucher programs through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Funding for EFAP in the 05-07 biennium is $8,734,821, which includes a proviso of $1.3 million for the purchase and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. This program provides funding to over 320 food banks and 33 tribes who issue emergency food vouchers to their customers. In 2005-2006, EFAP will provide $140,399 to operate the Stop Hunger Warehouse, the distribution center for Clark County, and to purchase food. This benefits 18 food banks.[xx]

Federal commodity food products are provided to food banks and meal programs through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers TEFAP at the federal level. USDA buys the food, including processing and packaging, and ships it to the States. This food is known as "commodities." The amount received by each state depends on its low-income and unemployed populations, which means the amount received can vary from year to year. Commodities are distributed through food banks and prepared as meals in meal programs. These commodities are typically provides canned fruits, vegetables, pasta and proteins. In Clark County, the commodities are distributed from the Stop Hunger Warehouse to five food banks and three feeding sites. In 2004-2005, the Stop Hunger Warehouse handled 510,901 pounds of USDA product. More specifically, in November of 2005, over 9,000 people were given food through the food banks and 11,000 meals at the meal sites. These TEFAP commodities were distributed by the Stop Hunger Warehouse to the emergency food providers in Clark County. TEFAP plans to spend $40,624 in FY 2006 to the Stop Hunger Warehouse for administration and operating costs to run the program.[xxi]

Food banks provide perishable and non-perishable food at no charge to individuals who are in need of food. Some food banks operate within a larger organization, which helps to meet other basic needs, such as shelter and utilities. Food banks receive a portion of their food products from a food distribution center. A food distribution center typically does not provide services to individuals, just food banks. These services usually include warehousing and transporting perishable and non-perishable food. This layered infrastructure ensures that food items are distributed efficiently as possible over long distances to the individuals that need them the most.

Food distributions centers sometimes cross state lines to serve food banks. Oregon Food Bank is located in Portland and serves as a hub for 894 anti-hunger agencies, including the Stop Hunger Warehouse.[xxii] The working relationship between the Stop Hunger Warehouse and the Oregon Food Bank brings more food into Clark County than otherwise would be obtained; this is an attempt to keep up with the increase in demand.[xxiii]

III. Food Challenges

As part of Hometown Hunger, we interviewed human service and food program providers and reviewed local participation data for federal nutrition programs. The emphasis of our research was to uncover local challenges to increasing participation in food and nutrition programs and ensuring that low-income families and individuals have access to adequate food resources. Our conversations with over 20 individuals have helped to identify the following challenges in Clark County: lack of awareness about the prevalence of hunger and poverty, insufficient infrastructure within the emergency food system, lack of long-term economic stability and rapid growth in the community. In this section, we will be taking a closer look at each identified challenge.

Lack of Awareness about Hunger and Poverty

One issue that project participants continually raised was a lack of awareness in the community about the needs of low-income individuals and families. A non-profit staff member referred to a time where they were giving a presentation and shared the statistics about school meal programs in Clark County. Audience members listening to the presentation were surprised at the high number of children who qualified for free and reduced-price school meals. This staff member explained that, "even though it looks like a very prosperous community… that's one of the issues…the hidden poverty that I think the general population doesn't see. That's probably one of our biggest challenges is helping people *believe* and [then having them] want to be part of the solution." Another participant felt that there should be a focus on advocacy, because it was a strong need in the community. One Clark County board member said, "I think they [legislators] have a good feel [for hunger issues] but it certainly could be a lot better." An increased focus on advocacy has the potential to benefit the community in many ways, including: involving more members of the community in hunger issues, educating legislators and local communities, and having more equitable policies for low-income community members.

"…even though it looks like a very prosperous community…that's one of the issues…the hidden poverty that I think the general population doesn't see. That's probably one of our biggest challenges is helping people *believe* and [then having them] want to be part of the solution."
-Local Coalition Staff Member

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Insufficient Infrastructure Among Emergency Food Providers

Clark County service providers mentioned difficulties in the emergency food system with regards to limited workspace for volunteers, storage space for perishables and refrigerated trucks. One emergency food provider also mentioned the lack of usable workspace for volunteers at some organizations. Volunteers are an invaluable resource for food banks and distribution centers. Most local food banks have very few paid staff members, if any. Even the food banks and distribution centers with paid staff members could not function without the support of dedicated volunteers. Another problem is the limited refrigerated truck and storage space. For example, Oregon Food

Bank's Fresh Alliance program has great potential for growth in Clark County. James Fitzgerald of the Salvation Army Stop Hunger Warehouse, the food distribution center for Clark County, stores and distributes approximately 3,000,000 pounds of food a year of that 300,000 pounds are from Fresh Alliance food a year, with capacity around a half of a million for those perishable items. Fitzgerald estimates that Oregon Food Bank takes around 300,000 pounds back into their distribution center each year because of Clark County's lack of storage capacity and inability to pick up the product. "In the course of the year… they ought to have the space in order to handle two million pounds of [Fresh Alliance] product. I don't think it would be a real leap from where we are today," said Bob Morris, Fresh Alliance Program Coordinator. Clark County's capacity limitations impact the entire Fresh Alliance program. "In any circumstance where we can't get a local agency built up in terms of capacity then it limits our ability to expand the program overall. It kind of [all] backs up…" said Morris. Limitations within the infrastructure of the emergency food system limit providers' ability to respond to growth and serve their clients as effectively as possible.

> "In the course of the year …they ought to have the space in order to handle two million pounds of product. I don't think it would be a real leap from where we are today."
> -Bob Morris, Oregon Food Bank

Economic Stability

Finding a job is not the only challenge to becoming financially self-sufficient. "People can't live on minimum wage anymore. We need to have more of a balance of the kinds of jobs that are coming into the community…That we have more tax, more professional jobs so that not everything is on warehouses and call centers…if the community grows up with all of those [jobs] we'll be in trouble," said one local non-profit staff member.

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> -Local Non-Profit Staff Member

During the 2001 recession, the jobs that were lost in Clark County were middle-income jobs, and jobs that replaced those after the recession were lower paying jobs. The income gains that were made in Clark County were mostly in the top 10 percent income bracket.[xxiv] Low-wage jobs simply do not provide households with sufficient financial resources to cover food, housing, utility, transportation, childcare and health care costs. In addition, an over-abundance of lower-income jobs places increased demand on public services including food and nutrition programs.

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Compounded with the lack of livable wage jobs, low-income families and individuals are facing rising housing and healthcare costs in Clark County. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a worker in Clark County needed to earn $20.26 an hour in order to rent a three-bedroom apartment in 2005. That is 276 percent of Washington's minimum wage.[xxv] Many

individuals we talked to felt that individuals moving from Portland, Oregon to Vancouver had caused housing prices to remain out of reach for most low-income families and individuals.

In conjunction with rising healthcare costs, low-income individuals without adequate health care coverage and medical emergencies, find themselves facing increasing debt. Southwest Medical Center in Clark County provided 11,658 patients—or 32 patients a day—with free services through their Charity Care program in fiscal year 2005. Since 2000, this program has been growing by 370 percent. Not only is there a need for more free services, but they are also facing more client defaults on debt repayments. Defaults on debt repayment are up 46 percent from 2004.[xxvi]

Growth Management

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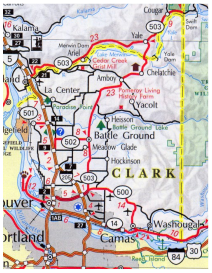
Over the past 25 years, Clark County has seen a population increase of almost 80 percent.[xxvii] Many participants mentioned this significant population growth. One participant shared a concern over the lack of infrastructure to accommodate the growth: "The analogy that I use in terms of growth management is you want your kid to get bigger but do I want my teenager to grow for the next 30 years? No, I do want him to get smarter and wiser. So, are we wiser than we were ten years ago economically?" In the absence of a centralized plan for smart growth, participants reflected apprehension for future expansion.



Rapid population growth also impacts the transportation system. In 1983, on the weekdays, approximately 39,000 vehicles crossed the Interstate Highway-205 Bridge that connects Portland to Vancouver. By 2003, this number had increased to over 142,000.[xxviii] Without a countywide growth management plan that addresses the needs of low-income residents, transportation could increasingly be a barrier to accessing services and affordable, centrally located housing.

Best Practices

Throughout our research we identified challenges and successes. One major success was the Fresh Alliance program, which is operated in Clark County through a joint venture between the Oregon Food Bank and the Stop Hunger Warehouse. Fresh Alliance is a partnership between local grocery stores, the Oregon Food Bank and local food distributors or food banks, to retrieve food products, which are near their expiration date.

> "…the Oregon big truck comes over with veggies and that really helps... You can get potatoes and fruit and greens and stuff and its really nice. If you like vegetables like I do…but when that veggie truck comes everyone is very happy."
> -A Clark County Food Bank Recipient

The program began in 2002 and has been growing ever since. The Oregon Food Bank or local food distributor picks up the food items from grocery stores, repackages them and then sends them back out to local food banks within 24 hours. The program provides food banks with food items rarely seen on their shelves, primarily meat and dairy items. Currently, as the Clark County food distribution center, the Stop Hunger Warehouse picks up food products at six stores. Due to the

previously mentioned limited space and equipment in the food distribution center, the Oregon Food Bank retrieves the food products at the remaining stores in Clark County. By the efforts of the Oregon Food Bank and Stop Hunger Warehouse, Clark County residents are able to receive more nutritious food.

IV. Recommendations

In addition to one-on-one interviews, a forum was held in Clark County in January 2006 with service providers to discuss the causes of hunger and possible solutions. The purpose of the forum was to present our preliminary research on hunger in Clark County and receive feedback from those in attendance. The following recommendations are a reflection of what we heard both at the forum and in our one-on-one interviews.

- **Increase awareness about hunger and poverty issues**
  To respond to the lack of awareness in the community concerning poverty and hunger, some local service providers suggested launching a public awareness campaign. This proposed campaign could include many different approaches that would be used to educate the public including: an integration of the human resource hotline "211" with local stories and statistics, a food recovery education program for prospective food donors and service providers, and outreach to the business community to provide resources for employees who may need them. Another suggestion was the creation of an advocacy group in Clark County that works on behalf of low-income individuals and includes them in advocacy efforts.

- **Increase capacity for emergency food programs**
  Individuals at the forum suggested a capital campaign for the Clark County Food Bank Coalition to alleviate infrastructure problems for a new food distribution center. This campaign could help increase the coalition's ability to provide more nutritious food for their customers by increasing storage space and participation in the Fresh Alliance program. A capital campaign by the coalition would also include a public awareness campaign, which could significantly change how individuals in Clark County view poverty in their community and their role in alleviating hunger.

- **Increase economic stability for low-income families**
  Forum participants had several different ideas about how to improve economic stability. These ideas ranged from local level change to broader more systemic transformations. Some participants also wanted to increase the availability of "wrap-around" services, for example a food bank providing other basic need services. Similarly, other participants wanted to see a streamlined process for individuals to access services and the ability to connect them with knowledgeable advocates to help them navigate various resources in the community. Additionally, others wanted more subsidies for affordable housing to help low-income families afford other basic necessities. Another suggestion was to support employment initiatives that increase low-income individuals' voices in the workplace such as supporting workers' rights to unionize and advocating on legislative proposals that affect low-wage earners.

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V. Conclusion

Over the course of four months, we conducted extensive research in and around Clark County by talking with human and social service providers, as well as state agencies. Many individuals in Clark County are accessing food and nutrition programs, however, not all individuals that are eligible are receiving services. According to interviews with service providers, low-income individuals and families face challenges in accessing food as a result of the lack of awareness about the prevalence of hunger and poverty, an insufficient infrastructure within the emergency food system and a lack of long-term economic stability and the rapid growth in the community.

Despite these challenges, providers praised the Fresh Alliance program, which is operated by the Oregon Food Bank, in conjunction with the Stop Hunger Warehouse, and provides nutritious food to low-income individuals and families through food banks. Providers we interviewed and those who attended the forum proposed potential solutions to some of the challenges for low-income families and individuals in Clark County. These solutions included a public awareness campaign, capital campaign for the Clark County Food Bank Coalition and various measures that address increased economic stability.

If you have any questions about this report or its findings please contact the Children's Alliance, Shelley Curtis at shelley@childrensalliance.org or 1-800-854-KIDS ext. 17 or the Washington Food Coalition, Tracy Wilking at tracy@wafoodcoalition.org or 1-877-729-0501.

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Graphics:
Page 2: Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark_County,_Washington -January 2006
Page 8: Where 2 Have Fun - http://washington.2havefun.com/maps/clarkcounty.shtml-January 2006

Hometown Hunger: A Community-Based Analysis of Lakewood

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I. Background

What is Hometown Hunger?

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The Hometown Hunger project seeks to gather information through research and community-based interviews, bring together hunger fighters to review information and identify key issues, create community-based strategies to increase food access, and utilize research as a basis for state and local level initiatives to address hunger. The project focuses on four communities in Washington: Clark County, Moses Lake, Lakewood, and Bellevue.

Hunger in Washington

Washington's hunger rates have consistently ranked amongst the highest in the nation. According to 2004 food security data released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 105,000 (4.3 percent) households are experiencing food insecurity with hunger. This makes Washington the 12th hungriest state in the nation. USDA food insecurity and hunger data confirms reports from community-based organizations that provide emergency food to hungry families. Lines at food banks across the state and calls to emergency food hotlines are on the rise as more and more families struggle to provide the basic necessities. A new food resource and referral line launched in June 2005 by the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Washington, received 13,000 calls in its first month of operation. Many of these families were desperate to find food resources, even after accessing federal food programs such as the Basic Food Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Food Insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and sufficient foods.
Hunger: uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food due to lack of resources to obtain food.
Source: http://www.cfpa.net/reports/hunger.html

The Community: Lakewood

Lakewood, Washington covers a 20 square mile area within Pierce County and has over 58,000 residents. The majority of the population is white (64.8%). The three largest minority groups in Lakewood are black (12.3%), Asian (8.9%), and Hispanic (8.5%). An additional 1.6% is American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.8% is Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[i]

The median household income in Lakewood is $36,422, which is significantly lower than the national average of $44,684. Also, the per capita income of $20, 569 in Lakewood is lower than the national average of $24,020. The unemployment rate in 2003 was 10.9%, more than twice the national average.[ii] Statistics show that 12.5% of families in Lakewood live below the Federal Poverty Level ($19,350 for a family of four).[iii] [iv]

II. Food Access: Food and Nutrition Programs

When a family needs help putting food on the table, public and private food and nutrition programs serve as a critical resource. The safety net of food and nutrition programs in Clark County, like other areas of Washington, is a mix of local, state and federally funded programs. Many families in Washington must utilize multiple food programs in order to provide adequate nutrition for their families. But even with access to these food and nutrition programs, individuals and families are still struggling to meet their basic food needs. The following food and nutrition programs are part of the basic safety net for low-income individuals and families: the Basic Food Program (Food Stamps), School Meal Programs, the Summer Food Service Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. The safety net of food and nutrition programs is enhanced by the federal The Emergency Food Assistance Program and Washington's Emergency Food Assistance Program, which provide food commodities and funding to emergency food programs.

BASIC FOOD PROGRAM

The Basic Food Program, known nationally as the Food Stamp Program and funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), provides monthly cash benefits to eligible low-income families and individuals, through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card, which is similar to a debit card, which they use to buy food items. The Basic Food Program is targeted toward those most in need. Eligibility for the program is based on financial and non-financial factors. Income eligibility for Basic Food is 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or below.[v] In FY2005, the Basic Food Program served 60,201 Pierce County residents, 11.5% of the caseload statewide.[vi] Basic Food Outreach staff and anti-hunger advocates acknowledge that there are many factors that could have led to this increase in individuals accessing program benefits. A number of procedural and regulatory changes have occurred in recent years. Some of the procedural changes that occurred were rules regarding asset tests, the use of a shorter application, removal of the mandatory face-to-face interviews, shorter recertification timeline, elimination of the drug felony prohibition, and a transition from food vouchers to EBT cards.

School Meal Programs

School districts can provide meals to students through the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participate in the programs receive reimbursement for nutritious meals provided to low-income children and eligible students receive breakfast and lunch either free or at a reduced-price. The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals is used as an indicator of poverty in a particular school or district. In Lakewood, 21 out of 26 schools have over 40% of kids eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. Overall, 59% of kids in Lakewood are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.[vii]

Summer Meal Programs

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during the summer months when schools are not in session. Sponsors of this program, which can include school districts, local government, tribal agencies and non-profit organizations, also often provide educational and recreational activities at the meal sites.[viii] This program provides a vital resource for families who rely on the school meal programs to provide meals during the school year. In the summer 2005, Clover Park School District in Lakewood sponsored 15 summer meals sites serving a total of 19,000 meals to Lakewood children.[ix]

Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally-funded program which provides a variety of services including healthcare, nutrition education, food assistance and breastfeeding support to pregnant or postpartum women, their infants and children that are at a nutritional risk.[x] In 2004, WIC provided benefits to 19% of Lakewood's population.[xi] One of the most integral parts of the program is the distribution of WIC coupons, which can be used to purchase specific foods. Through the distribution of these coupons, WIC also provides a significant economic stimulus. In Lakewood, WIC clients served by the Franciscan Health System contributed $2,172,706 to the local economy through checks redeemed at local grocery stores.[xii]

Senior And WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program

The Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) provide nutrition support to low-income seniors, women, and children through the purchase of fresh produce at local farmers markets. Local produce is also purchased directly from farmers and delivered to homebound seniors, congregate meal sites and senior housing. Participants in both WIC and Senior FMNP also receive nutrition education on healthy eating and food preparation.[xiii]

The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Health. Over $60,800 in WIC FMNP coupons was redeemed at local farmers markets in Pierce County in 2005.[xiv] The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. In Pierce County, $39,202 was redeemed through SFMNP in 2005.[xv] However there are currently no farmers markets in Lakewood. The nearest farmers market is in University Place, over 6 miles away.

Emergency Food Assistance Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program

The emergency food system includes state funding, federal commodity foods, local food distribution centers, food banks, and meal programs. State funding is provided to food banks and tribal food voucher programs through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Funding for EFAP in the 05-07 biennium is $8,734,821, which includes a proviso of $1.3 million for the purchase and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. This program provides funding to over 320 food banks and 33 tribes who issue emergency food vouchers to their customers. In Lakewood, EFAP will provide $22,731 in 2005-2006 to 5 food banks.[xvi]

Federal commodity food products are provided to food banks and meal programs through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers TEFAP at the federal level. USDA buys the food, including processing and packaging, and ships it to the States. This food is known as "commodities." The amount received by each state depends on its low-income and unemployed populations, which means the amount received can vary from year to year. Commodities are distributed through food banks and prepared as meals in meal programs. In 2005, there were 43,540 visits for commodities to Lakewood area food banks through the month of November.[xvii]

Food banks provide perishable and non-perishable food at no charge to individuals who are in need of food. Some food banks operate within a larger organization, which helps to meet other basic needs, such as shelter and utilities. Food banks receive a portion of their food products from a food distribution center. A food distribution center typically does not provide services to individuals, just food banks. These services usually include warehousing and transporting perishable and non-perishable food. This layered infrastructure ensures that food items are distributed efficiently as possible over long distances to the individuals that need them the most.

III. Food Access: Challenges

As part of Hometown Hunger, we interviewed human service and food program providers and reviewed local participation data for federal nutrition programs. The emphasis of our research was to uncover local challenges to increasing federal nutrition program participation rates and ensuring low-income families and individuals have access to adequate food resources. Our conversations with over 20 individuals have helped to identify the following challenges in Lakewood: lack of affordable and accessible transportation, lack of support for human services, lack of awareness of available services, an absence of grocery stores, and a lack of emergency shelters and transitional housing. These challenges underscore the link between hunger and other contributing factors. In this section, we'll be taking a closer look at each identified challenge.

Lack of Affordable and Accessible Transportation

The City of Lakewood is divided by Interstate 5. This division has created several isolated residential areas that are not accessible by public transportation. Throughout our discussions with a variety of local human service providers, one of the most consistently echoed issues was that of a lack of affordable and accessible transportation. Many of Lakewood's residents are without their own car and are therefore dependent on other means such as public transportation. However, on an extremely limited transportation budget, even a monthly bus pass can be a significant strain on their resources.

Kim Gordon of the Lakewood Family Support Center paints the picture of a typical situation: "We see this all the time, 'How am I gonna do this? How am I gonna take care of my kids, get my kids from point A to point B then get to a job, without transportation'...How are they gonna get those kids to day care, and then get themselves to a job, then get back to get the kids, get them home and get them dinner?…Then do it all over again."

In addition to a lack of affordable transportation, areas within Lakewood are facing difficulty accessing existing public transportation. In reference to the Tillicum/Woodbrook neighborhood, one service provider pointed out, "It's like they're living on an island out there." While one bus line does run through the area, many live far enough from the stops that it would require an arduous walk to or from their homes. An arduous walk for an able-bodied person becomes a challenging walk for the elderly, those with children, the disabled, and those who have a lot to carry, making the nearest bus stop too far.

Public and Political Support for Social and Human Services

The City of Lakewood receives federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. CDBG is a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program, which provides annual grants to entitled cities and counties to develop urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons.[xviii] Up to 15% of CDBG funding can be used in localities for human services, while the remaining 85% must be used for infrastructure and other physical improvements. "The City of Lakewood made a choice to use 100% for infrastructure, zero for human services. The City of Tacoma and Pierce County use the full 15%, " said one human services provider. According to HUD, "Entitlement communities develop their own programs and funding priorities. However, grantees must give maximum feasible priority to activities which benefit low- and moderate-income persons."[xix]

Several human service providers interviewed for this project pointed to this funding allocation as a barrier to increasing support for social and human services as CDBG funding could provide another revenue stream for programs. Some providers have also suggested that this represents a lack of commitment from the City of Lakewood to alleviate hunger and help provide other basic needs. "One of the things [we need] is the acknowledgement by the elected officials and government officials in the City of Lakewood that this [hunger] is a problem that involves the whole community...," said another provider.

Outreach to Families

One of the most encouraging findings about Lakewood, with respect to basic needs, is the many resources for low-income people that do exist. However, a constant challenge is connecting families and individuals to those services.

"I know a lot of schools don't know that we're out there. There are a lot of things available, its just getting the word out, especially through the schools… they are the community anchor, they need to be there, and I'm not talking about the service providers that go to those schools, those

schools need to be there, so they know what services are available to the families that they serve…I really truly believe that the workers at the schools are the missing link," said Betty Beer of the Lakewood Area Shelter Association (LASA). The importance of schools in connecting families to resources was continually echoed in our conversations with providers. Human and social service providers in Lakewood are increasingly recognizing that schools are an underutilized resource in "getting the word out."

Absence of Grocery Stores in Tillicum/Woodbrook

The Tillicum/Woodbrook area of Lakewood is one of the previously mentioned isolated residential pockets. With this isolation also comes the absence of retailers, including a full-service grocery store. This area is served by a few convenience stores, but they do not maintain the full-range of products for a nutritious diet. One of the effects that this has on this neighborhood is that it increases their dependence on transportation to access food resources, because they do not exist locally. The only food resource beyond the convenience stores is a food bank located at the Tillicum Lake Gardens Community Center. While a food bank can provide some food items, it is not intended to provide a complete week's worth of meals. Some residents who may be experiencing hunger or food insecurity may also be reluctant to seek services from a food bank.

Lack of Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing

Homelessness is an issue of great and increasing concern in Lakewood. When a family or individual becomes homeless, providing them quickly with shelter can be the crucial piece that helps them to get back on their feet. Between July 2003 and June 2004, 5,964 homeless people were served by shelters and transitional facilities in Pierce County.[xx] Whatever the reason for a family's or individual's homelessness, temporary shelter and transitional housing are important pieces in reestablishing stability.

"Temporary" shelter lasts anywhere from two weeks to ninety days, whereas "transitional" housing typically lasts for 24 months. Emergency shelter and transitional housing are the types of shelter which can be provided if a family loses their home in a fire or it can be the shelter for a family who is working their way out of debt. According to the LASA, there is a lack of both in Lakewood. Not only does this increase the prevalence of homelessness in Lakewood, it also forces families to seek shelter outside of their own community, which decreases their already limited stability and restricts their access to local resources. This can have a particularly dramatic effect on children because they cannot maintain a sense of security by staying at the same school while their parent/s tries to create a steady home environment for them.

IV. Possible Next Steps

In our conversations with human service providers, many suggested possible solutions for identified challenges. These suggestions were provided during one-on-one interviews and as part of discussions at the Lakewood Human Services Collaboration. These suggestions included: making food resources more accessible, creating more community support for human service providers, connecting families to available resources, increasing healthy food resources, and providing more emergency and transitional shelter.

Making Food Resources More Accessible

Emergency Food

Some communities throughout the country have created "satellite food bank systems" in which a local food bank provides food to an alternate location outside its primary location, often bringing food to a more accessible area within the community. Caring For Kids, a Lakewood non-profit, has done just that. It began using schools as satellite food banks and as a result has increased food resources for many families in Lakewood. Increased support of school food banks is needed if this model were to be expanded and replicated at additional schools throughout the community.

At the Lakewood Human Services Collaboration meeting on January 11, the possibility of a mobile food bank was proposed as another potential solution to this food access issue. Yet another suggestion was to use school buses as a way of transporting food to and from schools, to more remote locations, and to other food bank satellites. Developing this model would require a coordinated commitment from the Clover Park School District, emergency food providers in Lakewood, and a volunteer corps.

Transportation

Creating resources to help people access the workplace, educational resources, and the previously mentioned food and nutrition programs is an important challenge that needs to be addressed in Lakewood, according to the providers we interviewed. Additional transportation resources could be the mechanism to give families that extra lift they need and increase their access to sufficient amounts of food. Some service providers in Lakewood such as LASA and Fish Food Bank provide bus tokens to their clients so that they can more easily access their services. This has given considerable assistance to the transportation problems faced by many, but it is as yet an under-funded effort. More funding would need to be secured if bus tokens were to be more widely and frequently distributed in Lakewood.

Creating More Community Support

If Lakewood is to create sustainable change to support low-income families and individuals, human service providers have suggested that poverty and hunger issues need to become more visible by the general public and elected officials. One suggestion was to launch a coordinated public awareness campaign, which would allow these issues to be raised through newspapers, radio programs, organizational newsletters, and other media outlets. Providers also recognize the need for more organized advocacy on the local, county and state levels. For example, the City of Lakewood could become more active within the Pierce County Human Services Coalition. Groups such as the

emergency food providers do an outstanding job of providing food resources, but are often limited in their resources for advocacy. If the emergency food providers were to form a coalition, advocacy efforts could be shared and united. We also learned that a dialogue on the use of CDBG funding to increase the capacity human services would be welcomed by providers.

Connecting Families to Resources

If, as one provider suggested, schools are the "missing link" in connecting more people to available resources, then efforts could be made to strengthen the school's ability to play this vital outreach role. With 33 schools and over 13,000 students in the Clover Park School District in grades PreK-12, an increased commitment to community outreach from the schools would yield powerful results for Lakewood. The Lakewood Community Resource Guide is one existing tool for outreach. The guide, available through the City of Lakewood, needs to be updated and distributed to each classroom in the Clover Park School District. The schools recognize that they cannot be more effective in outreach if they are not provided with the current information. For this information to be shared efficiently and effectively, a coordinator would be needed at each school to handle the distribution of the information and to encourage teachers and other school employees to educate themselves about the available services and resources in their community since information about resources changes.

Increasing Resources for Healthful Food

Grocery Stores

While the limited availability of groceries, in particular fresh produce and perishable items, puts low-income residents at higher risk of food insecurity and hunger, it is not a problem that is unique to Lakewood or the Tillicum/Woodbrook area. Low-income areas have consistently seen the migration of grocery stores and supermarkets to more affluent areas in the suburbs over the past 40 years, mainly because of the belief that the buying power is housed there. However, the guaranteed demand for food resources can assure the success of grocery sales in even the poorest of areas. Many states and cities have begun to develop public/private partnerships to increase the number of supermarkets in underserved areas. For examples, visit:
http://www.preventioninstitute.org/CHI_supermarkets.html
http://www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/super.market.campaign.php

Convenience Stores

If a large grocer cannot be recruited for the area, there are other ways to improve access to healthy foods. One example would be to work with existing "convenience stores" to encourage their conversion towards selling more healthy food products. According to a report by the California Food Policy Advocates entitled *Neighborhood Groceries: New Access to Healthy Food in Low-Income Communities,* "Conversion to selling healthy food involves relatively little added cost — refrigerated fixtures, inventory of new items and the time required to purchase, handle and display the new, perishable items are the main items — and takes advantage of management that has some operating skills and experience and knows, and is well known by, the neighborhood from which its customers come."[xxi] However, this conversion cannot begin to take place until residents/customers

begin to deliberately express their desire to purchase healthier food products from their local "convenience stores".

Farmers' Markets

Another option to increase access to healthy food resources would be to attract a farmers' market to Lakewood. Farmers markets can play a major role in providing access for low-income individuals to high quality, locally grown food at affordable prices. Programs such as the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs provide seniors, women, and children with vouchers that they can redeem for fresh produce at participating farmers' markets. Since there is currently no such market available locally to Lakewood residents, providers have suggested that efforts need to be made to organize one. The existence of such markets in other locations throughout Pierce County is an encouraging sign that a Lakewood Farmers' Market is not beyond reach. The local coordinator for the Senior Farmers' Market Program is David Hanson, and his contact information can be found at http://nutrition.wsu.edu/markets/sencon.html

Providing Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing

While creating permanent low-income housing and increasing the availability of livable wage jobs are key priorities in preventing homelessness, providing a safe refuge where people can rebuild their lives is an often overlooked and under-funded service. Having accessible temporary shelter and transitional housing is an essential tool in battling homelessness.

In Lakewood, LASA is leading the effort to provide this crucial resource. They currently provide and maintain services for 2 temporary shelter units and 37 transitional housing units.[xxii] An increase in funding support of LASA through the Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP), Emergency Shelter Grant Program (ESG), and CDBG programs, as well as privately funded dollars, was suggested as one of the most effective steps to be taken to increase shelter resources. However, an increase in infrastructure must accommodate any large increase in the number of beds, because each resident must have an accompanying caseworker to provide support. Therefore, under their current infrastructure, LASA would be able to manage only a few additional units if funding was available to purchase them.

Such a heavy responsibility cannot fall solely upon the shoulders of one organization. Providing LASA with the necessary resources to provide services is a key priority, but increasing the role of other groups and organizations in this effort is important as well. Other groups in Lakewood need to galvanize additional efforts to provide resources for shelter, housing, and homelessness prevention.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout our research and interviews in Lakewood, the insights of many leaders in social and human services continually affirmed each other. These key findings include: a lack of

affordable and accessible transportation, including a lack of local access to healthy foods; a lack of public and political support for organizations working to alleviate poverty and hunger; a lack of both temporary and transitional shelter for the homeless; a lack of outreach to connect families and individuals to existing resources.

Hometown Hunger was also able to gather some suggestions from service providers as to next steps that should be taken to address these concerns. These recommendations include: making food resources more accessible, creating more community support, connecting families to resources, increasing healthy food resources, and providing more emergency and transitional shelter. Project participants recognize specific steps towards achieving these goals: encourage the growth of a satellite food bank system, increase transportation resources such as bus tokens, increase advocacy efforts through the formation of a coalition, attract a grocer to the Tillicum/Woodbrook area, encourage existing convenience stores to carry more healthy foods, attract a farmers market to Lakewood. For change to occur, dialogue would need to continue to address these concerns and generate innovative solutions, as well as move forward on setting some of these next steps in motion. At the February 8th Lakewood Human Services Collaboration at City Hall, a task force on hunger was established by mayor Claudia Thomas.

Hometown Hunger is a year-long project designed to explore the causes of hunger in four Washington communities with the goal of using community-based tactics to increase food access. The findings of this report were based off of available data, interviews with service providers and clients, and a community forum. If you have any questions about this report or its findings please contact the Children's Alliance, Shelley Curtis at shelley@childrensalliance.org or 1-800-854-KIDS ext. 17 or the Washington Food Coalition, Tracy Wilking at tracy@wafoodcoalition.org or 1-877-729-0501.

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Hometown Hunger: A Community-Based Analysis of Moses Lake, Washington

Contributors:

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I. Background

What is Hometown Hunger?

Hometown Hunger is a yearlong effort to explore the causes of hunger in four Washington State communities and develop community-based strategies to increase access to food resources by individuals and families who are affected by food insecurity and hunger. This project was initiated through a partnership between the Children's Alliance and the Washington Food Coalition in conjunction with the Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program. The Children's Alliance is a statewide child advocacy organization that works to improve the well being of children in Washington by effecting positive change in public policies, priorities and programs. The Washington Food Coalition is a statewide membership-based organization of emergency food providers and anti-hunger advocates. The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program is a yearlong leadership development program that trains emerging leaders in the fight against hunger in the United States.

The Hometown Hunger project seeks to gather information through research and community-based interviews, bring together hunger fighters to review information and identify key issues, create community-based strategies to increase food access, and utilize research as a basis for state and local level initiatives to address hunger. The project focuses on four communities in Washington: Clark County, Moses Lake, Lakewood, and Bellevue.

Hunger in Washington

Washington's hunger rates have consistently ranked amongst the highest in the nation. According to 2004 food security data released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 105,000 (4.3 percent) households are experiencing food insecurity with hunger. This makes Washington the 12th hungriest state in the nation. USDA food insecurity and hunger data confirms reports from community-based organizations that provide emergency food to hungry families. Lines at food banks across the state and calls to emergency food hotlines are on the rise as more and more families struggle to provide the basic necessities. A new food resource and referral line launched in June 2005 by the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Washington, received 13,000 calls in its first month of operation. Many of these families were desperate to find food resources, even after accessing federal food programs such as the Basic Food Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Food Insecurity: limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and sufficient foods.
Hunger: uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food due to lack of resources to obtain food.
Source: http://www.cfpa.net/reports/hunger.html

The Community: Moses Lake, WA

Moses Lake's 14,953 residents live within 9.2 square miles of land that surrounds 1.6 square miles of water.[i] Moses Lake sits in Grant County, which is the fourth largest county, in square miles, in Washington. After Moses Lake, Mattawa and Ephrata are the largest cities in Grant County. Compared to other counties in Washington, Grant has the fifth lowest per capita income.[ii] The ethnic composition of this city is mostly white with the largest minority being Latino or Hispanic of different races.[iii] Moses Lake has more than double the percentage of Hispanics than the national average.[iv]

The median household income in Moses Lake ($36,467) is considerably lower than the national level ($41,994).[v] The per capita income in Moses Lake is also lower than the national level at $16,644. The percentage families in Moses Lake that live at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) ($19,350 for a family of four[vi]) is 11 percent, which is higher than the national average.[vii]

II. Food Access

Food and Nutrition Programs

When a family needs help putting food on the table, public and private food and nutrition programs serve as a critical resource. The safety net of food and nutrition programs in Moses Lake, like other areas of Washington, is a mix of local, state and federally funded programs. Many families in Washington must utilize multiple food programs in order to provide adequate nutrition for their families. However, even with access to these food and nutrition programs, families are still struggling to meet their basic food needs. The following food and nutrition programs are part of the basic safety net for low-income families: the Basic Food Program (Food Stamps), School Meal Programs, the Summer Meal Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the WIC and Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs. The safety net of food and nutrition programs is enhanced by the federal The Emergency Food Assistance Program and Washington's Emergency Food Assistance Program, which provide food commodities and funding to emergency food programs.

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BASIC FOOD PROGRAM

The Basic Food Program, known nationally as the Food Stamp Program and funded by the (USDA), provides monthly cash benefits to eligible low-income families and individuals through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card, which is similar to a debit card and can be used to buy food items. The Basic Food Program is targeted toward those most in need. Eligibility for the program is based on financial and non-financial factors.[viii] Income eligibility for Basic Food is 130 percent of FPL or below. In Grant County, since 2001, the number of Basic Food cases has increased by 81 percent. Currently, Grant County has a significantly higher rate of Basic Food participation than the average in Washington.[ix] Basic Food outreach staff and anti-hunger advocates acknowledge that there are many factors that could have led to this increase in individuals accessing program benefits. A number of procedural and regulatory changes have occurred in recent years. Some of the procedural changes that occurred were rules regarding asset tests, a shorter application, removal of some mandatory face-to-face interviews, shorter recertification timeline, elimination of the drug felony prohibition and a transition from food vouchers to EBT cards.

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School Meal Programs

School districts can provide meals to students through the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participate in the programs receive reimbursement for nutritious meals provided to low-income children and eligible students receive breakfast and lunch either free or at a reduced-price.[x] The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals is used as an indicator of poverty in a particular school or district. In 2004, over half of the students in Moses Lake are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. All of the Moses Lake School District public schools participate in NSLP and SBP.[xi]

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Summer Meal Programs

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during the summer months when schools are not in session. Sponsors of this program, which can include school districts, local government, tribal agencies and non-profit organizations, also often provide educational and recreational activities at the meal sites.[xii] In 2005, there were 11 meal sites in Moses Lake serving an average of 443 children.[xiii] This program provides a vital resource for families who rely on the school meal programs to provide meals during the school year.

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Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federally funded program, which provides a variety of services including healthcare, nutrition education, food assistance and breastfeeding support to nutritionally at-risk pregnant or postpartum women, their infants and children.[xiv] In 2004, WIC provided benefits to approximately 76 percent of babies born in Grant County. One of the integral parts of the program is the distribution of WIC coupons, which can be used to purchase specific foods. Through the distribution of these coupons, WIC also provides a significant economic stimulus. In Moses Lake, WIC contributed $106,681 to the local economy in December 2005 through WIC checks redeemed at local grocery stores.[xv]

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Senior And WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

The Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) provide nutrition support to low-income seniors, women and children through the purchase of fresh produce at local farmers markets. Local produce is also purchased directly from farmers and delivered to homebound seniors, senior housing facilities and congregate meal sites. Participants in both WIC and Senior FMNP also receive nutrition education on healthy eating and food preparation.[xvi]

The WIC FMNP is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Health. At the Columbia Basin Farmers Market, which is the farmers market in Moses Lake, $14,400 in WIC FMNP coupons was redeemed in 2005.[xvii] The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is funded by USDA and administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. In 2005, seniors redeemed over $8,300 worth of coupons at the Columbia Basin Farmers Market.[xviii]

Another important source of nutrition for low-income seniors are congregate meals. Congregate meals provide meals to seniors in a social or homebound setting. They provide a critical source of nutrition for seniors and also provide an opportunity for socializing. In Moses Lake, there are two congregate meal sites. In December, 271 seniors were served congregate meals and 55 received home delivered.[xix]

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The emergency food system includes state funding, federal commodity foods, local food distribution centers, food banks and meal programs. State funding is provided to food banks and tribal food voucher programs through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Funding for EFAP in the 05-07 biennium is $8,734,821, which includes a proviso of $1.3 million for the purchase and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. This program provides funding to over 320 food banks and 33 tribes who issue emergency food vouchers to their customers. This funding comes through the Washington State General Fund. In Moses Lake, EFAP provided $53,541 in FY2005-2006 to six food banks.[xx]

Federal commodity food products are provided to food banks and meal programs through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers TEFAP at the federal level. USDA buys the food, including processing and packaging, and ships it to the States. This food is known as "commodities." The amount received by each state depends on its low-income and unemployed populations, which means the amount received can vary from year to year. Commodities are distributed through food banks and prepared as meals in meal programs. In December of 2005, TEFAP provided food products to 1,276 families totaling 4,880 individuals in Moses Lake.[xxi]

Food banks provide perishable and non-perishable food at no charge to individuals who are in need of food. Some food banks operate within a larger organization, which helps to meet other basic needs, such as shelter and utilities. Food banks receive a portion of their food products from a food distribution center. A food distribution center typically does not provide services to individuals, just food banks. These services usually include warehousing and transporting perishable and non-perishable food. This layered infrastructure ensures that food items are distributed efficiently as possible over long distances to the individuals that need them the most.

III. Food Challenges

As part of Hometown Hunger, we interviewed human service and food program providers and reviewed local participation data for federal nutrition programs. The emphasis of our research was to uncover local challenges to increasing participation in food and nutrition programs and ensuring that low-income families and individuals have access to adequate food resources. Our conversations with over 20 individuals have helped to identify the following challenges in Moses Lake: lack of resources for individuals who are homeless, lack of awareness of available resources for migrant and seasonal farm workers, inability to access resources in Moses Lake by residents in surrounding areas, and a lack of resources for older adolescents. In this section, we will be taking a closer look at each identified challenge.

Homeless Services

"We have homeless people, just not the same as Seattle and Tacoma," said Tom Bonnington, Community Relations Manager at North Columbia Community Action Council. Because of Moses Lake's colder climate, individuals who are homeless are not as visible as they are in communities surrounding Puget Sound. Often people who are homeless in Grant County are forced inside whether it is with friends, cars or other methods to stay out of the harmful weather. From June 2004-June 2005, 351 individuals accessed homeless services in Grant County.[xxii]

Moses Lake does not have a men's shelter, youth shelter or meal programs for people who are homeless, which some believe is causing great difficulty for those in need. In addition, people who are homeless in Moses Lake also have trouble accessing other services besides shelter. Bonnington acknowledged that individuals who are homeless can access a mailing address to receive Basic Food benefits, but this creates new problems for individuals who do not have access to proper resources to prepare food. Bonnington added that the creation of a meal program in Moses Lake was another important need in the community. He estimated that an open-site, accessible and well-publicized could serve 50-100 individuals a night during the winter and about 150 individuals in the summer.

Providing Services to Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers

One of the challenges in Moses Lake is meeting the needs of a growing population of Hispanic migrant and seasonal farm workers. Providers feel that there is a lack of awareness in the Hispanic community of available social service resources. With a large migrant and seasonal worker population in and near Moses Lake, providers are changing their traditional outreach strategies in order to increase awareness of available programs and services. However, despite new and varied outreach approaches, service providers are still struggling to reach families in need. Other barriers, besides a lack of awareness, that providers mentioned were cultural and language barriers, misconceptions about certain programs and program restrictions.

Services to Surrounding Areas of Moses Lake

In rural communities, it is often a challenge to serve clients over large geographic areas. This can be a problem for potential at-risk populations such as seniors and migrant and seasonal farm workers. Many migrant and seasonal farm workers live outside of Moses Lake where fewer resources are available. "Moses Lake is very fortunate, I would have to say, compared to other communities. People that come to Moses Lake don't get access to those services, unfortunately, and that is a real pitfall because people drive from Mattawa, Quincy, [and] several other areas to come here for help and they can't get in, necessarily," said one provider. Often city residents have challenges when accessing services, so for individuals who are outside the city's limits, this is an even greater challenge. This same provider noted, "…during the winter it's a lot harder to get around too, so that makes it a little bit harder for families that do not have cars, even in Moses Lake." To compound this problem, wintertime is especially difficult for migrant and seasonal farm workers because there may be fewer jobs available. The restrictions on resources and difficulties traveling to Moses Lake create additional challenges for an already at-risk population.

> "… several different services…actually, are limited to this area. So the people that come to Moses Lake don't get access to those services…"
> -Grant County Service Provider

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Resources for Older Adolescents

Some service providers in Moses Lake also feet that there is a lack of structured activities for older adolescents and that they do not have enough opportunities to gain skills that will help prepare

them for life after high school. "There are certain things for just the size of the town that limit your abilities for culture or especially for youth, things to occupy themselves with that are healthy outlets versus let's go hangout, or let's go engage in risky behaviors." This particular provider who works with youth was also concerned about how this related to the growing problem of gang activity in Moses Lake. Likewise, a provider that works on employments issues was also concerned about the high school dropout rate and the development of specific skill sets. This is not surprising given that in 2003-2004 Moses Lake School District had a drop-out rate of 10.3 percent, while the state average is 5.8 percent.[xxiii] They mentioned, "…there isn't a whole lot of opportunities for those 16-18 that might need to gain some first-time employment skills and/or continue to upgrade their basic skills or stay in high school so they can have more opportunities in the future."

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Best Practices

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

According to many service providers in Moses Lake, there is a tremendous sense of volunteerism and good will within the community. "We are interested in what we're doing. We have excellent civic clubs. Our Rotary Club is probably the best in Canada and Washington," said lone local resident. Some individuals see this as a great asset to someone coming to live in Moses Lake. "I think the biggest benefit, besides the cost of living in this area, is the fact that this community pulls together very well to assist people in need." Other individuals attributed the sense of community to the familiarities and friendships that come from a living within a close-knit community. "We are a smaller community so a lot of people know a lot of people. You walk to the store and you recognize people, which bring this community closer. "

> "We have an attitude. We are interested in what we're doing. This is a very good community in terms of volunteerism."
> - Community Leader

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COMMUNITY SERVICES OF MOSES LAKE, INC.

It is hard to live in Moses Lake and not know Linda Finlay or Peny Archer (See picture left[xxiv]). They are the lifeblood of Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc. (also known as, Moses Lake Food Bank). Finlay serves as the Executive Director and Archer as the TEFAP Project Coordinator or "hunter for food," as she calls herself. These personable, intelligent and driven women live by a simple code: no one deserves to be hungry. When talking about her own credo, Finlay quoted a Washington philanthropist who said, "to help one person is to better the world."

With their combined experience of almost 30 years, they have implemented a client-focused model that offers compassion to anyone that comes through their door. This manifests itself in many different ways. For example, when gas prices were climbing in the fall of 2005 the food bank changed their rules to allow clients to visit less frequently and still receive the same amount of food.

Another way that Moses Lake Food Bank serves as a model for other food banks is their aggressive food recovery. They pride themselves that they have never had to turn away a client because they ran out of food, despite growing demand. They are able to keep their shelves filled through resourcefulness and perseverance. The food bank receives food from a variety of sources: food processing plants, local agriculture, Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife, businesses, private citizens and state and national government. Finlay mentioned that, in the beginning of November, Archer, in anticipation of the huge increase in demand during the holidays, got out the phone book and start calling local businesses for donations to ensure that they would not run out of food.

Another striking aspect of the food bank is the strong community partnerships they have formed within Moses Lake. Several service providers praised and respected the work of the food bank. "We have an awesome food bank here, " said one provider. As long-term residents, Finlay and Archer have been able to foster mutually beneficial relationships with other agencies by recognizing that they are all serving the same client base and respecting the vital role of other community services.

IV. Recommendations

In addition to one-on-one interviews, a listening session was held in Moses Lake during the Community Resources Forum in February 2006 with service providers to discuss the causes of hunger and possible solutions. The purpose of the listening session was to present our preliminary research on hunger in Moses Lake and receive feedback from those in attendance. The following recommendations are a reflection of what we heard both at the forum and in our one-on-one interviews.

- **Increase Availability of Resources for Individuals who are Homeless**
  In the interviews and during the forum, service providers shared what they are doing to serve individuals that are homeless. Representatives from North Columbia Community Action Council informed us on current developments for additional shelters in Moses Lake. In 2005, the state legislature introduced House Bill 2163, which was drafted in order to help implement the state's goal of ending homelessness in 10 years. Each community that wanted to receive funds from the bill had to implement a Homeless Housing Task Force that outlined their 10-year plan to end homelessness. Currently, North Columbia Community Action Council leads the committee with three of its staff members, and nine other individuals from other organizations.
  At the time of publication of this report, *Grant County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* had just been ratified by the county government. This plan addressed the need for a men's shelter; however, since the funding is based on the tax of specific court documents the exact amount of funds available for this program was unclear. Phase II, which is due December of 2006, will address homeless youth and will have a better projection on funding for the program.
  In Moses Lake, there was also progress, in regards to, the lack of meal programs. During the forum, Moses Lake Methodist Church announced that they will be providing meals during lunch on the last Saturday of every month. This is a great addition to the current services that are provided in Moses Lake. Hopefully, this program will serve as a resource to those individuals and families that are homeless in Moses Lake.

- **Increase Awareness of Resources to Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers**
  During the community forum, participants acknowledged the barriers to services for migrant and seasonal farm workers. These issues cannot be resolved quickly and will require long-term solutions. For example, some programs have restrictions to only

individuals that have proper documentation, which limits access to those programs. However, during the forum, participants did share ways that they try to increase access to their programs. Most of them spoke to personal perseverance of changing misconceptions of programs. Some mentioned that this was done through one-on-one communication to build trust with potential customers. During an interview, one provider mentioned that they referred potential customers to another organization if they wanted a second opinion about the perceived drawbacks of participating in a program. Providers also felt that distributing information to existing customers was important to help them access other services. In an interview, one childcare provider spoke to their own dedication to spreading information. "There is not enough information out there on what is available, and one of my biggest goals is always to make sure to get resources. We have a Grant County Resource for Families Manual that I give out to my parents. That is something that I push so that they know what's out there, where they can go for help." These efforts by local providers help the long-term goal of increasing access to services to the seasonal and migrant farmer workers.

- **Increase Access to Services to Individuals in Surrounding Areas of Moses Lake**
  One provider mentioned during the forum that they felt that one reason for the gap in services in more remote areas of Moses Lake was the availability of funds for those areas. They acknowledged that urban areas of the state do receive large funding support, but that Moses Lake was often applicable for funds targeting rural areas. Nonetheless, even smaller and remote areas such as Mattawa, Warden and other cities, often are left in the dark even for funding that is specifically targeted for rural areas. An option for increasing availability of services to these areas could include more funding options for cities like Moses Lake to earmark funds to extend their services in smaller communities in their region.

- **Increase Availability of Resources for Older Adolescents**
  Participants at the forum focused their comments concerning at-risk youth and availability of resources. One of their concerns was a restriction in the Food Stamp Program. Currently, in order to receive food stamps, outside of their family, a youth must be emancipated from their parents. Some participants felt this was a barrier for these youth trying to access food resources. A representative from the school district mentioned that it was important for youth to be identified as homeless so they can have receive services like free school meals.

V. Conclusion

Over the course of four months, we conducted extensive research in and around Moses Lake by talking with human and social service providers, as well as, state agencies. Many individuals in Moses Lake and Grant County are accessing food and nutrition programs at higher rates than the rest of the state. According to interviews with service providers, low-income individuals and families face challenges in accessing food, as a result of, the lack of resources for individual who are homeless, lack of awareness of resources for migrant and seasonal farm workers, inability to access resources in Moses Lake for residents in surrounding areas and lack of resources for older adolescents.

Despite these challenges, providers recognized the support from the community in terms of volunteerism and involvement for local programs. Additionally, providers praised Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc. for their response to hunger. Providers we interviewed and those who attended the forum proposed potential solutions to some of the challenges for low-income families and individuals in continuing current progress on increasing resources for individuals that are homeless, perseverance by service providers to decrease barriers to resources for migrant and seasonal farm workers, changing the funding structure for rural communities and changing restrictions for at-risk youth to resources.

If you have any questions about this report or its findings please contact the Children's Alliance, Shelley Curtis at shelley@childrensalliance.org or 1-800-854-KIDS ext. 17 or the Washington Food Coalition, Tracy Wilking at tracy@wafoodcoalition.org or 1-877-729-0501.

Endnotes:

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[iv] United States Census Bureau- http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en-January 2006 (Only 2000 data was available at the time of publication)

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[xv] Susan Evans-WIC Washington Department of Health

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[xviii] Melody Woolley-Aging & Adult Care of Central Washington

[xix] Melody Woolley-Aging & Adult Care of Central Washington

[xx] Linda Finlay-Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc.

[xxi] Peny Archer-Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc.

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Page 2: Desert Oasis- http://www.washingtonhomepark.com/moses-lake.htm-January 2006
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