



Food Security Coalition of Mid Coast Maine

November 2009

Food Security in Mid Coast Maine: In mid 2007, increasing demand for food assistance in the mid coast region prompted the Basic Needs Council of the United Way of Mid Coast Maine to bring together the 12 Food Pantries in the Mid Coast Region (Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties, and Brunswick and Harpswell) involved in providing relief to high risk, low-income households. With the exception of Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program (MCHPP), all the pantries are small, volunteer-driven, with extremely limited resources and space. The Food Security Coalition of Mid Coast Maine developed from this initial meeting with the understanding that more could be accomplished by working together in a time of growing needs.

The needs and the pressures on the local food pantries have continued to grow. In 2008, all of the pantries reported a significant rise in the number of individuals and families needing help with food, with some reporting as much as a 70% increase in 2008 as compared to 2007.

Accomplishments of the Food Security Coalition: At the first meeting of the Coalition, United Way provided information for the pantries' clients such as 2-1-1 Maine – the statewide information and referral number, a list of programs serving low-income households, and statistics on each town from census data to help the pantries make their case to potential donors and their local town governments. The volunteers at the pantries appreciated this information and the opportunity to share information and ideas with each other.

To help build the capacity of these small food pantries, United Way hired a part-time consultant to support the work of the new Coalition. With the help of the consultant, the Food Security Coalition surveyed each of the pantries to determine the scope of their work and to identify strengths and weaknesses. The Coalition has already had a number of great successes, including:

- Pantries now share with each other excess food, equipment and transportation costs to the Good Shepherd Food Bank.
- Three pantries now have new freezers, donated from businesses to the Coalition.
- Financial contributions have increased.
- Donations of perishable and non-perishable food items have increased.
- Area newspapers have increased their coverage of hunger-related issues.
- Pantries have become aware of additional free, non-perishable food through the Department of Agriculture.
- Two Bridges Regional Jail now grows food in their new garden for distribution to the local pantries because of connections made through the Food Security Coalition.
- A regional Food Pantry/Soup Kitchen brochure has been developed and distributed throughout the region.

Next Steps for the Food Security Coalition: The growing need for food assistance in the mid coast area is straining the capacity of food pantries. United Way's coordination of a regional approach with food pantries working together to end hunger has proven effective and productive, but more needs to be done.

Because of the accomplishments achieved with the help of a time-limited consultant, the Food Security Coalition is now seeking support for a Food Security Coordinator. The Coordinator would not only continue to build on the recent successes, but also help the pantries broaden their corps of volunteers, establish policies and procedures, and build regional relationships with community gardens, local businesses, schools, churches, and other regional organizations serving low-income households.

*For more information or to support the Food Security Coalition,
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