

**Tri –County Food Clearinghouse**  
**serving Fond du Lac, Manitowoc & Sheboygan Counties**

**Quarterly Report**  
**January – March 2010**

*Hunger is isolating; it may not and cannot be experienced vicariously. He who never felt hunger can never know its real effects, both tangible and intangible. Hunger defies imagination; it even defies memory. Hunger is felt only in the present.*

*--Elie Wiesel*

After notification of receiving funding to conduct a feasibility study regarding a comprehensive strategy for supporting the food delivery system in the tri-county area of Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties, the initial work on the Tri-County Food Clearinghouse project has focused on education, gathering data and forming relationships. Work on the study began in earnest in early March with the hiring of a Temporary Part Time employee to the position of Project Manager by the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way. This initial focus has been with the Food Pantry and Bank systems in the three counties.

An initial exploratory committee, comprised of the Executive Directors of the United Ways (UW) of Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties, representatives of the Community Action Program (CAP) agencies serving these three counties, representatives from the University of Wisconsin – Extension offices of Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties and representatives from community agencies located in Sheboygan County, began meeting in December of 2009. (Appendix A – Committee Membership List) The Committee met three times during the first quarter. Initial meetings focused on:

- Development of a survey instrument and survey process of the existing food pantries to obtain a better understanding of their operational procedures, staffing levels both paid and volunteer, supply sources both purchased and donated, amount of food distributed each month, number of individuals/families served each month and self identification of the strengths and the needs of their pantry/organization. (Appendix B - Food Pantry Data)
- Compilation of a list of current and potential suppliers of food products including meat, cheese, canned goods, produce, dairy and breads and suppliers of non-food essential basic needs items including toilet paper, laundry detergent, personal hygiene products, etc. The master list will be used to personally contact suppliers regarding the types of potential donations, amounts, transportation and storage needs/issues and other information to determine the supply chain. (Appendix C – Survey of Suppliers)
- Developing a better understanding of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP Program which is often better known as the “Commodities Program”) and is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The Director of the Lakeshore CAP agency provided an overview of the TEFAP program’s history, site selection, product accountability and general policies. (Appendix D – Sheboygan County Food Bank Meeting 03/24/10 TEFAP Program)

The Project Manager met with food providers (pantries, residential programs, shelters and meal programs) in Manitowoc and Fond du Lac counties and the Sheboygan County Food Bank Board. These meetings provided the venue to introduce the study process, explain the survey instrument, answer questions and obtain input into the planning process. The feedback to date has been positive support of the study process and a readiness to listen to “how this will help me help the people who use the pantry”.

A major undertaking, during the first quarter, was working with the Roundy's Corporation on their donation of equipment from the North 25<sup>th</sup> Street - Sheboygan Pick and Save store. Roundy's offered the Sheboygan County Food Bank equipment ranging from shelving to large walk-in coolers. In order to accept this offer, the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way, Sheboygan County Interfaith, Family Service Association and the Salvation Army provided assistance to the Sheboygan County Food Bank to:

- Locate volunteers to remove the equipment
- Locate long term storage options for the equipment
- Obtain technical assistance in removal of the larger refrigeration/cooler units
- Locate equipment, pallets and other resources needed to move and store the equipment

Planning began in January and continued through February with a moving timeline and target date for store closure. In mid-February, Roundy's finalized the closing date and informed the “Roundy's Project” group that all equipment had to be removed during the week of March 1 – 5, 2010. A group of 25 volunteers dismantled, palletized and moved over 200 feet of shelving, 40 halide ceiling lamps, a 10-door dairy cooler and 6-door beer cooler plus an ice freezer, 7-door zero zone refrigerator, benches, bike rack, cart corrals, miscellaneous racks and other bulk food fixtures.

Companies throughout Sheboygan County generously donated equipment, trailers for long term storage and technical expertise to assist with the success of this project. Volunteers provided over 500 hours of labor. The Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way provided funds to purchase some supplies and meals for the volunteers. (Appendix E – Inventory List of Donated Equipment and Sheboygan Press Photo)

Other activities during the first three months included:

- Contacting other United Ways regarding similar processes in their counties/areas (St. Croix Valley, Marathon and Oshkosh)
- Working with a realtor to identify and visit potential physical plant sites
- Identifying potential donated physical plant sites
- Meeting with City of Sheboygan Planning and Development staff
- Contacting and meeting with individuals who may be recruited to assist with the assessment process and/or membership on an Advisory Committee
- Initial research into potential grant sources
- Developing template for the business plan

### Preliminary Data

Initially, a total of 45 food pantries were identified in Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties. As the study process progresses additional pantries and food suppliers are being identified including homeless shelters, “soup kitchens”, meal programs for the homeless, unemployed /low income and other food programs that could benefit from a comprehensive strategy to support the food supply system.

Preliminary information provided via the survey process to-date shows a wide range of operational hours from 1 day per week for 2 hours in the morning to three days per month for about 2 hours in the early evening. One larger pantry in Manitowoc is open 4 days per week for 1 ½ hour each morning and the pantry in Two Rivers is open 4 days per week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eligibility criteria and guidelines vary from photo identification, proof of residency, proof of income or self verification. Most pantries operate with volunteers with the exception of a few that allocate part of a paid FTE position to some food pantry duties. The number of volunteers per pantry range from 20 to 100 plus.

Most food pantries purchase some amount of food or other basic needs items. The amount of money spent on purchased goods is from \$20 per month to \$2,600 per month. Not all pantries track the amount of food distributed and those pantries that track the amount distributed use one of three methods – pounds, boxes or bags. One pantry reported an average of 550 bags distributed each month, another pantry reported an average of 250 boxes per month and another pantry reported distributing just over 15,000 pounds per month. Tracking the number of people using the pantry services varies with some pantries tracking individuals and some tracking families. The range reported for individuals was from an average 140 to 1,200 per month. The average number of families served ranges from 300 to 750 per month. Many pantries do not have a set budget and most track monthly or annual expenses. Annual expenses range from \$1,000 to \$28,000 based on the survey responses.

About 50% of the pantries are not- for- profits with a 501(3) (c) status. Operationally the pantries vary from having a Board of Directors or Advisory Board to no Board or Committee and about 50% have some type of policy or procedure manual.

Most pantries have similar or identical food donation sources including local churches, Boy Scout Food Drive, Mail Carrier/Postal Service Food Drive, private citizens, local businesses and schools. Most purchase food from their local grocery store. Few pantries responding to the survey purchase food from Second Harvest or Feeding America.

Pantries were asked to identify at least three strengths and three needs as part of the survey process. Approximately 80% identified volunteers as their strength with comments ranging from “our volunteers treat our clients with respect and dignity”, “dedicated and reliable volunteers”, “wonderful and willing volunteers” and “great, compassionate, cooperative staff and volunteers”. Other strengths were more specific to each pantry.

- Donated Building
- Community Help
- Willingness to Serve All People
- Attempt to Meet Special Needs
- Central Location on a Bus Line
- Extremely Supportive Church Staff and Church Members

Almost 50% of the survey respondents identified space as a need. Other needs included:

- Specific types of items – cereal, paper products, fresh vegetables and milk
- Cost of Utilities
- Lack of Refrigerators and Freezers
- Keep donations flowing year round

### **Next Steps**

The ongoing focus during the next quarter will be continuing with education, data collection and building relationships including:

- Personal contacts with the pantries that have not responded to the survey to gather needed information
- On-site visits to some of the pantries in each county
- On-site visits to some of the larger pantries in Washington and Brown counties
- Personal contact with the major food and basic needs suppliers to assess the potential supply sources
- Meeting with Second Harvest and Feed America
- Establish an Advisory Committee with membership from all three counties and representation from major suppliers, food banks/pantries, packaging and trucking companies, etc.
- Continue to explore potential physical plant opportunities
- Visit the State Certified Kitchen in Algoma, WI
- Begin research into the food recovery program of Waukesha County

In conclusion, during meetings with the Food Pantry/Bank representatives they have expressed support and caution plus the sharing of many ideas for better coordination and improved services. Their ideas have extended beyond the scope of the project to include their observations that some people need pots and pans and sometimes a stove and others may need education on how to prepare food. Overall, it has been an exciting and gratifying three months with interest in this project growing.