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Hunger Prevention Efforts of Kenosha County Faith-based Organizations

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Background:

The **Kenosha County Hunger Prevention Council (HPC)** is a coalition of pantries, non-profit organizations and social service agencies working to promote food security and address hunger in our community. Together we conduct research to better understand the problems, educate the public about hunger issues, and share resources for the greatest positive impact. Kenosha County UW-Extension is a member organization of the HPC. Through discussion among HPC member organizations, it became apparent that there were faith-based organizations providing services outside the official system of Human Services and food pantries. To gain a more complete picture of county emergency food resources, services and accessibility, UW-Extension staff developed an “informal provider survey” for area places of worship.

Methodology:

Faith-based organizations (such as churches, synagogues and mosques) were the target group for this survey. A list of Kenosha-area faith organizations from the Chamber of Commerce was cross-referenced with the most recent online directory, resulting in 108 area places of worship. Each faith-based organization was called to inquire if they offered any emergency food relief services. If assistance to those in need was offered, a time was scheduled to meet in person and conduct the full survey. If the organization could not meet in person, a phone survey was conducted; if a phone survey was not possible, the survey was mailed to their location. We continually attempted to contact all organizations who were non-responsive, leaving messages and following up with a written letter if still no response.

The survey consisted of twenty questions aimed at assessing the type and amount of services provided, the audience served, any requirements or restrictions to receive assistance, and the logistics of their program (when offered, how staffed, how funded, etc.). The organizations were questioned regarding if and how they referred people to official social services. Finally the faith-based organizations were provided a resource list of social services, food pantries and programs that are available to those in need, which they could distribute to those they were serving. The organizations also were invited to join the Hunger Prevention Council.

Results:

Of the 108 faith-based organizations surveyed, 16 (14.8%) provide direct services to those in need. An additional 34 organizations (31.5%) are partnering with one of the four local pantries to provide emergency food. Currently 37 faith-based organizations (34.3%) do not provide direct food relief services or contribute to area pantries. The remaining 21 faith-based organizations (19.4%) were contacted but did not respond to repeated calls and mail contact.

This means that at least **46.3% of the faith-based organizations in Kenosha County are helping provide resources to address local hunger relief**, either directly or through local food pantry partners. For these informal providers, services included providing food baskets, food vouchers, soup kitchen meals, housing assistance (emergency rent or mortgage funds), gas cards, and energy-bill assistance. All of the faith-based organizations which are providing services stated they considered this outreach to be part of their congregational mission. Most were not actively referring people to such programs as food stamps or free/reduced school meals, or to area food pantries. The resource list of area services and service organizations developed as a result of this survey is available as a .pdf document (English or Spanish) on the Kenosha County UW-Extension website under Family Living/Hunger Prevention.