

Sunnyvale Sun article 5.28.08 by Nancy Tual
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When I moved to Sunnyvale in 1974, \$5 to \$7 would pay for a large brown paper bag full of groceries. Now, those of us left in the shrinking middle class with decent salaries and paid benefits are complaining about food prices. We're complaining, but the low-income families and seniors we help at Sunnyvale Community Services (SCS) are suffering.

For the first time in my 17 years at SCS, we don't have enough food to distribute to the families that depend on us for food each month. We want to give out full bags of well-balanced foods, not just whatever happens to be on hand. In summer, we give extra food to families whose children rely on school breakfasts and lunches.

What's causing the problem? We've all experienced the high prices of flour, milk, and eggs, up at least 24% in one year (10 times the rate of inflation). Bags of rice are being rationed at Costco and Walmart. With 19% of the nation's corn crop used for ethanol, the price of corn, corn fed meat and poultry, and the fruits and vegetables not planted in favor of corn jumped. The high cost of gas adds to the cost of food and depletes the budgets of low-income families just getting to and from work, school, and day care.

According to the City's 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan, 27% of its population falls equally into extremely low, very low, and low income categories. 47% of Sunnyvale School District's students qualify for free or reduced price school meals, a 52% increase from 15 years ago. Second Harvest Food Bank, probably the best food bank in the country, can no longer afford to buy the more expensive foods for the increasing number of agencies it supports and the increasing number of families relying on each agency.

With only two supermarkets north of El Camino Real, many of our clients walk to smaller markets with less inventory and higher prices rather than pay bus fare for mother and kids. And they don't have the money to buy sale items in bulk or the freezer space to store large quantities.

We've been doing all we can to respond skyrocketing need. Five years ago, 750 families participated in our food programs; now, there are over 1,300. Three years ago, we distributed \$660,000 worth of in-kind aid; two years ago, \$814,000; last year, \$1,080,000. This year, we're on track for another 20% to 25% increase. We were among the first agencies to benefit from the Food Bank's Produce Mobile and to get a second produce delivery each month. And our Board of Directors authorized up to \$25,000 of reserves to purchase food for the summer months.

But we still need your help to fill the bags so those who depend on us can fill their stomachs with healthy foods. As a family, office, church, school, youth or civic group, or community service project, we ask you to donate the foods we need most: cereal, Milkman powdered milk (in packets), peanut butter, macaroni and cheese, and "meals in a can" (stews, pasta with meat sauce, chili). We'll always take canned and packaged soups, vegetables, fruits, pasta, rice, and beans. Please bring your donations to 725 Kifer, between Fair Oaks and Wolfe between 8 am and 4:30 pm Monday through Friday. (If you come before 9 or between 11:30 and 1, just ring the bell by the glass door in our parking lot.) And, of course, we're happy to accept cash donations that we'll leverage through our deeply discounted food purchases. The less we pay for food, the more we'll have available for financial assistance to prevent eviction, utility disconnections, and

untreated medical problems.

Last week, a mother of two told me she always tried to put healthy food on the table. Now, she just tries to put enough food on the table. She said that now she has “to choose between healthy and hungry.” With your help, we can help hundreds of families make easier and healthier choices.

For more information, please call 738-4321 or visit www.svcommunityservices.org which includes the agency video.