

Hunger, Food Insecurity, and Poverty in Boulder and Broomfield Counties

Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger relief organization, has named September "Hunger Action Month – Give a Little, Feed a Lot". Here at Community Food Share, a Feeding America member food bank, we are also calling it "Hunger Awareness Month – A Little Giving Goes a Long Way" because before individuals and our community can be *moved* to action we must first be *aware* of the problem.

Because we are largely a suburban, fairly affluent community, poverty, hunger, and food insecurity are largely invisible. This is because the majority of those living at or below the poverty line are working people – hardworking folks, often carrying more than one job, struggling daily to make ends meet, and who provide many of the services we take for granted. They are the backbone of our economy, essential to our quality of life, and they add to the rich fabric that is America. Of course, as a result of the recession, which has been felt by us all, many have been laid off and are struggling more than ever just to keep a roof over their heads. In fact, "Hunger in America" studies, which Community Food Share has conducted every four years with Feeding America, consistently show that people will pay for shelter, utilities, and medical bills over food.

But what our eyes don't show us our local community statistics do. One in eight people in Boulder and Broomfield counties lives at 130% of the federal poverty level, which translates into \$27,500/year for a family of four. That's approximately 50,000 people in our community - *enough to fill Folsom Field*. When I first reported this number to the community two years ago, the number was 40,000 people. In addition, 10,000 children are enrolled in the Federal School Free lunch program in the Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley school districts. So the need as well as the challenge is great.

For Community Food Share, and our 58 Member Agencies who receive food from us such as EFAA, the O.U.R. Center in Longmont, the Sister Carmen Center in Lafayette, the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, and Crossroads Care Food Pantry in Broomfield, poverty is far from invisible. Since the beginning of the year, Community Food Share has distributed 23% more food than the same time last year, 62% of which goes to our Member Agencies. That is an additional 623,000 meals, or close to 100,000 more meals a month. When we opened our new facility in Niwot, ten years ago, we distributed 1.4 million meals; this year we will distribute well over 6 million meals, consistent with targets in the Food Guide Pyramid. Our Member Agencies continue to report over 20% increases in demand for food assistance and the other services they provide.

Of course, hunger and food insecurity are with us every day of the year, so a call to action must be an on-going community response. If you ask yourself, "*what can I do in my life to help,*" take a look at the variety of effective basic needs non-profit human services agencies that exist in Boulder and Broomfield counties, who serve as a "safety net" for those in need, and support them with dollars, volunteer time, and food – all of which significantly help in our efforts to create a food secure community.

Even in these very challenging economic times, our community continues to be very generous to all the basic needs non-profits in Boulder and Broomfield counties, including Community Food Share. We ask that you continue your support and maintain an awareness that many of those struggling to be productive citizens and raise healthy families are people, neighbors, whom you see daily. *The face of hunger in our community may surprise you.*