



# Best Practices

*Innovations & Solutions Developed by hunger  
relief agencies in Washington State*



WASHINGTON  
FOOD COALITION

20  
YEAR  
ANNIVERSARY

REVIEWED AND EDITED BY: Julie Washburn, Executive Director of Washington Food Coalition

DESIGN: Holly Knoll

PHOTOS: Julie Washburn, various WFC Member Agencies

© 2012 Washington Food Coalition

Prepared with funds made available by the Emergency Food Assistance Program administered by the Washington State Department of Agriculture

Printed with funds made available by Bodine Enterprises

Washington Food Coalition (WFC)

PO Box 95752

Seattle, WA 98145

TEL: 206-729-0501 or 1-877-729-0501

FAX: 206-729-0501

[www.wafoodcoalition.org](http://www.wafoodcoalition.org)

## Acknowledgements

Best Practices: Innovations & Solutions Developed by hunger relief agencies in Washington State

would not have been possible without the dedication and innovation of hundreds of emergency food providers across the State. Thank you for all for taking the time to talk with us and for your amazing work to fight hunger.

Special thanks also to: Robert Coit of Thurston County Food Bank, Kathy Covey of Blue Mountain Action Council, and David Bobanick for their work in reviewing the 2007 Edition of this publication; Food Lifeline for identifying a number of best practices through their Excellence Awards; and to the Washington Food Coalition Board of Directors for their continued support.

OFFICE: 206.729.0501 or toll-free 877.729.0501 | FAX: 206.729.0504

PO Box 95752 | Seattle, WA 98145

EMAIL: [Info@WaFoodCoalition.org](mailto:Info@WaFoodCoalition.org) | WEB: [www.wafoodcoalition.org](http://www.wafoodcoalition.org)

# Our History

## Honoring those who have fought hunger in Washington for decades....

We not only strive to highlight the current innovations and solutions in of hunger relief agencies, but we also honor those that have done the hard work of building a foundation for a strong emergency food system.

In the early 1970's, several factors including the 'Boeing bust' and a nationwide energy crisis caused a hard-hitting recession throughout Washington. Families who had previously been self-sufficient were left without employment and without food on their shelves. In 1972, concerned neighbors in Washington began to grow discontent when seeing others in their community face hunger. Slowly but surely, groups rallied together in pockets of the state to set up local food banks. Some had begun organizing before this, and some would soon come after, but 1972 marks a year of remarkable activity in the formation of early food bank networks around the state. Organizations that began in 1972 include Puyallup Food Bank, Thurston County Food Bank, Bellingham Food Bank, and 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest.

The Washington State Legislature took a major step to fight hunger in 1985 when they formed the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) to provide funds to the developing food bank system. In 1992, this program expanded to also support the Tribal Voucher Food Program.

Incorporated in 1992, the WFC is the result of a merger between the Western Washington Food Coalition and Eastern Washington's Northwest Regional Food Network. Members of these independently incorporated organizations envisioned a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network. Their goal was to work cooperatively to alleviate hunger and provide a unified voice for hunger programs.

Since then, our work has been anything but light or easy. Varying economic times provide fluctuation in the strain our members face, but there has never been a season when they are not greatly needed. Our work is not confined to the traditional food bank, but we also represent all meal programs, distribution programs, and anyone fighting hunger in Washington.

Enough can not be said about the grueling work that was done by those who formed a statewide emergency food system, when nothing of the sort existed a few short decades ago. Washington Food Coalition is proud to continue the hard work of building on what they have accomplished.

The situations, interests, and needs of our agencies are diverse. However, we find complete unity in the belief that no one in Washington State should go hungry and we share in the vision of a strong emergency food system.

For those of us who now carry the work of feeding our hungry neighbors, and those who will soon join our work, we press on with optimism and the fortitude to continue until no one in Washington goes hungry any more.

**...we continue the work of building a strong emergency food system.**

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Food &amp; Nutrition .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Raising the Bar: Setting Higher Standards.....	5
<i>Operation Sack Lunch</i>	
Just for You: Meals for People with Special Dietary Needs .....	5
<i>Lifelong AIDS Alliance</i>	
Honoring Tradition: Culturally Appropriate Foods.....	6
<i>Asian Counseling and Referral Service</i>	
Reaching Out: Culturally Competent Groceries .....	6
<i>Lifelong AIDS Alliance</i>	
Be Your Own Celebrity Chef: Cooking Demonstrations .....	7
<i>Care &amp; Share Food Bank</i>	
Smart Shopping: Bulk Buying Committee .....	7
<i>Seattle Food Committee</i>	
Complimenting Donations: Purchasing Food.....	8
<i>Northwest Harvest</i>	
Food Drives: You're in the Driver's Seat.....	8
<i>Hood Canal Food Bank</i>	
Creative Shopping (aka Extreme Couponing) .....	9
<i>Good Cheer Food Bank</i>	
Sharing the Surplus .....	9
<i>Seattle's Union Gospel Mission</i>	
<b>Customer Service .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Door to Door: Delivery Service.....	11
<i>St. Mary's Food Bank</i>	
TV Info Screens.....	12
<i>Marysville Community Food Bank</i>	
Drive Through CSFP.....	12
<i>Community Services of Moses Lake</i>	
Linkages: Pairing Fresh Meals with Groceries .....	13
<i>Lifelong AIDS Alliance and Greenwood Food Bank</i>	
On the Road: Mobile Food Bank.....	13
<i>St. Leo's Food Connection</i>	
Making it Easy: Satellite Food Banks.....	14
<i>Thurston County Food Bank</i>	
Getting Creative to Bridge the Gap on Customer Screening.....	15
<i>The Vashon Maury Community Food Bank</i>	
Eliminating the Line: Appointments .....	17
<i>Hopelink Redmond</i>	
What's Cookin': Resource Hotline .....	17
<i>Anti-Hunger Coalition Whatcom County</i>	

No Questions Asked: Self-Serve Food .....	17
<i>Helpline House</i>	
Resource Access Project.....	18
<i>Resource Access Project (RAP)</i>	
Redefining the Food Bank: Adding Services .....	18
<i>My Sister's Pantry</i>	
Taking Hospitality to a New Level: Offering Take-Out.....	19
<i>Women's &amp; Children's Free Restaurant</i>	
The Doctor's In: On-site Health Clinic .....	20
<i>North Helpline</i>	
Bringing it Home: Backpack Meals .....	20
<i>Des Moines Area Food Bank</i>	
More than a Meal: Recognizing Other Needs.....	21
<i>Sky Valley Food Bank</i>	
It's in the Bag! Making Celebrations Possible.....	21
<i>Maltby Food Bank</i>	
Beyond the Box: Summer Meal Program .....	22
<i>Copalis Community Church Food Bank</i>	
Beyond the Box, Take 2: Summer Lunch Camp.....	22
<i>South Kitsap Helpline</i>	
Beyond the Box, Take 3: Mobile Summer Meals Program .....	23
<i>Des Moines Area Food Bank</i>	
Taking Care of Teens .....	24
<i>Teen Feed</i>	
Survey Says: Customer Interviews .....	25
<i>Walla Walla Salvation Army</i>	
Another Survey Says: Take Two on Customer Interviews.....	25
<i>FamilyWorks Food Bank</i>	
Translating Hunger: Meeting Community Needs.....	27
<i>Hopelink Redmond</i>	

## Community Relations ..... 29

Sparkling Anti-Hunger Activism.....	29
<i>Anti-Hunger Coalition Whatcom County</i>	
Collaborative Food Distribution Program.....	30
<i>Jewish Family Service, Seattle Jewish Day School of Metropolitan</i>	
Community Resource Center: Bringing a Range of Services Under One Roof.....	30
<i>West Seattle Food Bank</i>	
Adapting a National Event Locally: Hunger Awareness Day.....	31
<i>Ocean Shores Food Bank</i>	
Taking It to City Hall: Engaging Public Officials .....	31
<i>Seattle Food Committee, Meals Partnership Coalition and the City of Seattle</i>	
Washington's Own Advocacy Event: Hunger Action Day .....	32
<i>Anti-Hunger &amp; Nutrition Coalition</i>	
Building Visibility and Brand Identity .....	33
<i>Good Cheer Food Bank</i>	
Get Yourself to the Table: Being a Community Partner.....	33

<i>North Helpline Seattle</i>	
A Community Celebration: Open Mic Night.....	34
<i>Recovery Café</i>	
Digging In: Engaging the Public in New Ways.....	34
<i>Mother Earth Farm, Emergency Food Network</i>	
All Aboard! Hunger/Emergency Food Provider Tours.....	35
<i>Seattle Food Committee</i>	
Making Your Case: Documenting Unmet Customer Need.....	35
<i>Thurston County Food Bank</i>	
Holistic Emergency Food Systems .....	36
<i>Meals Partnership Coalition</i>	
Going Beyond Emergency Food: Advocacy.....	37
<i>Oregon Food Bank</i>	
Everyone Counts: Individual Giving Program .....	38
<i>Ballard Food Bank</i>	
Show Me the Money: Generating Revenues through a Thrift Store .....	38
<i>Inter-Faith Treasure House</i>	
Show Me More Money: Effective Special Events .....	39
<i>North County Community Food Bank</i>	
Make it Your Own: Tailoring Events to Meet Specific Needs.....	39
<i>Walk for Rice, Asian Counseling and Referral Service</i>	
Milk Money .....	40
<i>Bellingham Food Bank</i>	
Sponsor a Holiday Product Program .....	40
<i>Snohomish Community Food Bank</i>	
Empowering Local Programs: Fundraising Technical Assistance.....	42
<i>Rural Resources</i>	
Plug In: Maximizing Community Networks .....	43
<i>Willapa Food Bank</i>	

## Transportation ..... 45

Going Places: Trucking School Partnerships.....	45
<i>Community Services of Moses Lake</i>	
Evaluation: Working for You .....	45
<i>Rotary First Harvest</i>	
Traffic Busters: Cooperative Trucking.....	46
<i>Emergency Food Network, Northwest Harvest, Coastal Harvest</i>	

## Organizational Strength & Capacity ..... 48

Joining Forces: Merger .....	49
<i>Spokane Valley Partners</i>	
Eliminating the Guesswork: Operations Manual.....	49
<i>Loon Lake Food Pantry &amp; Resource Center</i>	
Greenwood Food Bank Inventory System .....	50

<i>Volunteers of America Western Washington</i>	
Food in Motion .....	51
<i>Operation Sack Lunch</i>	
Saluting Good Ideas .....	52
<i>Food Lifeline</i>	
Blueprints: Food Bank Design .....	54
<i>Tri-Cities Food Bank</i>	
Super Freeze: Combining Resources to Build Capacity .....	54
<i>Kitsap County Food Bank Coalition</i>	
Ingenuity: DIY Tools .....	54
<i>Community Services of Moses Lake</i>	
Partner, not Donor .....	55
<i>Coastal Harvest</i>	
Enticing Skilled Volunteers to Work for You.....	55
<i>Friends in Service to Him (FISH) Food Banks of Pierce County</i>	
Deep Roots: Building a Community-Connected Board .....	56
<i>Toppenish Community Chest</i>	
One Call: Centralizing Volunteer Coordination .....	56
<i>Hopelink</i>	
Start Early: Utilizing High School Volunteers .....	57
<i>Wapato Food Bank</i>	
Rethinking Support: Celebrating Volunteers .....	57
<i>Hood Canal Food Bank</i>	
Increasing Volunteer Workforce .....	57
<i>Good Cheer Food Bank</i>	
Unexpected Partners: Working with Inmate Crews & Court-Mandated Volunteers.....	59
<i>Lewis County Food Bank Coalition</i>	

## Fresh and Healthful Options: Connections to Fresh Food for Your Customers..61

Keeping it Fresh: Farmers Market Vouchers.....	62
<i>University District Food Bank</i>	
Getting Real: “Eat Real Food” Campaign .....	62
<i>Meals Partnership Coalition</i>	
“V” – for Vegetable, for Victory .....	63
<i>Bellingham Food Bank</i>	
Bringing it Together: Lettuce Link.....	63
<i>Lettuce Link, Solid Ground</i>	
Linking with Growers.....	64
<i>Hunger-Free Thurston County</i>	
Giving Gardens .....	64
<i>Marysville Community Food Bank</i>	
Farmer’s Market Gleaning.....	65
<i>Broadway Farmers Market and Community Lunch Meal Program</i>	
Healthy Food Gift Certificates.....	65
<i>White Center Food Bank</i>	
Gleaning Resource Guides by Rotary First Harvest .....	66



<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #1: Pierce County Gleaning Project.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #2: Seattle Community Farm.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #3: Plant A Row for the Hungry.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #4.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #5: “Yes, we CAN!” Cannery Project .....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #6: Yakima Valley Produce Harvest .....</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #7: P.L.A.N.T. (People Learning Agriculture and Nutrition Together).....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #8.....</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #9: Harvest for Hope.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Gleaning Resource Guide #10.....</i>	<i>115</i>

<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>148</b>
------------------------	------------

<b>The ABC’s of Emergency Food Provision in Washington State .....</b>	<b>153</b>
--	------------



# Introduction

## Overview of Washington Food Coalition

### Our Mission

The Washington Food Coalition actively educates and networks with organizations that strive to alleviate hunger throughout Washington

### Our Vision

The Washington Food Coalition is the unified voice for a strong emergency food system

### History

The Washington Food Coalition is a non-profit network of food banks, food pantries, food distribution centers, hot meal and food voucher programs throughout the state of Washington. Incorporated in 1992, the WFC is the result of a merger between the Western Washington Food Coalition and Eastern Washington's Northwest Regional Food Network. Members of these independently incorporated organizations envisioned a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network. Their goal was to work cooperatively to alleviate hunger and provide a unified voice for hunger programs. The WFC currently has a diverse membership of more than 300 independently incorporated agencies.

## Project Overview

Recipes for Success was originally developed in 2007 as a part of a capacity building project initiated by the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Washington Food Coalition (WFC) won a competitive bid process to implement the project, which included a series of nine regional outreach meetings with emergency food providers around Washington State, numerous in-person and telephone interviews with individuals, an online survey of providers, and action research to discover and document some of the things that are working best in the provision of emergency food to hungry Washington residents.

In 2012, as part of the 20th Anniversary Year for Washington Food Coalition, it was decided to review, and update the manual in order to keep it current and as useful as possible. Julie Washburn,, Executive Director of the Washington Food Coalition, led this effort with the help of board members and various WFC members throughout the state. The 2012 Edition contains some of the same best practices as the 2007 edition, along with many updated ones and a large amount of new practices that have developed since 2007.

## Goals of this Catalog

We hope this catalog will serve the following purposes:

- ...► Inspire emergency food programs across the state to innovate and adopt effective strategies to better address hunger in their communities
- ...► Recognize and celebrate programs that have developed and are already using best practices
- ...► Encourage dialogue and networking among providers to solve common problems and share successes for the benefit of all our communities Statewide
- ...► Provide community partners with ideas about the many ways they can get involved in fighting hunger
- ...► Educate funders and public officials about the issues emergency food programs face and some promising solutions that are worthy of investment

# What are Recipes for Success?

**Recipes for Success are best practices. A best practice is a good strategy for handling a challenge in your emergency food program's operations or service delivery. It solves a problem in a new way, and might be something other organizations could learn from or replicate.**

**Examples of best practices in emergency food might be:**

- ...► An efficient way of taking inventory
- ...► Adjusting open hours to fit customers' schedules
- ...► A partnership with a local farmer to provide fresh food where there was a gap
- ...► A successful way of recruiting community volunteers

Some people object to the term “best practice” on the grounds that it is difficult to determine the very best approach, or that what is best in one circumstance may not be best in a different operating environment. However, we have chosen to use this term because it is the most widely used term to describe the types of ideas we have tried to identify. Other similar terms that might be equally appropriate are: good practice, better practice, effective strategy, great idea, solution, promising practice and innovative approach.

We are also trying to model best practice in the language that we use. Throughout the catalog, we have replaced the term “customer” with “customer”, “diner” or another term with positive connotations. This decision reflects our commitment to treating all people with respect, and supporting a shift in the way we think about food programs – from casting them as an emergency social service to believing they are an integral part of the fabric of the community.

Washington Food Coalition can be your link to the member agencies listed in this resource. Contact us to connect with these members if you have follow up questions or want more details.

## A Starting Point

This catalog is not an exhaustive list of best practices, but a first step to build capacity among emergency food providers. These are good ideas and innovative approaches that were nominated by peers or came to our attention during the research period. In some cases, we were aware that several organizations were doing similar things, and have chosen to highlight a single example. An effort has been made to recognize and highlight the diversity present among emergency food providers, including geographic region, organization size and age, staffing levels, communities served, and type of program. We made a special effort to identify innovation taking place in more rural areas, in all volunteer organizations and in spite of other challenging circumstances. We hope that this catalog will jumpstart conversation about best practices and inspire our community to continue discussing what constitutes a best practice, and how we can best share knowledge among programs to promote high quality, responsive programs. WFC would be delighted to hear from you about the “best ideas we haven’t yet heard” and help to spread the word about them in the future.

# How the Catalog is Organized:

## Best practice profiles are organized into five major categories:

- ...> Food & Nutrition
- ...> Customer Service
- ...> Community Relations
- ...> Transportation
- ...> Organizational Strength & Capacity
- ...> Fresh Food Resources (NEW in 2012 Edition)

In each category, short summaries describe best practices related to that topic. We hope some of these short summaries will spark your interest in doing something differently in your program. In addition, we have highlighted a few issues of common interest through longer sidebar articles. In addition, to help you identify practices that may be particularly relevant to your type of program, we have coded each best practice using the following symbols:



FOOD BANKS



MEAL PROGRAMS



DISTRIBUTION CENTERS



SOMETHING EVERYONE CAN BORROW FROM



NEW ADDITIONS



UPDATED ENTRIES

# Food & Nutrition

In the category of food, emergency food programs are striving to bring quality, high nutrition foods in sufficient quantities to hungry people in the community. These efforts vary from programs that access garden and farm produce to an emphasis on whole grains, low salt and unprocessed food offerings. Efforts of emergency food programs are getting the attention of funders and policy makers as well. As awareness builds regarding the food-related health disparities facing low-income people, such as elevated rates of obesity and diabetes, grantmakers and donors are expressing greater interest in ensuring that everyone in our community has equal access to fresh, healthy foods. The best practices below are organized into four categories: fresh and healthy options, responding to specific dietary needs, customer education, and increasing quantity, quality and variety. General best practices in the food area include:

- ...➤ Adjusting offerings for people with special diets or limited access to cooking facilities
- ...➤ Increased responsiveness to customers' cultural requirements, including offering staples sought by specific ethnic communities
- ...➤ Declining or limiting non-nutritive food offerings

# Raising the Bar: Setting Higher Standards

## Operation Sack Lunch - Seattle



Operation Sack Lunch (OSL) espouses the ideal that nutritional excellence should not be tied to economic status. Founder and Executive Director Beverly Graham says, “food has an immense amount of power in our lives from the moment we are born. When you are given food that is not quality, a feeling of unworth surrounds that. When we are working with a population that already has issues of being treated as if they don’t have worth, giving them food suitable for the trash sends the wrong message.”

OSL acts on their philosophy by buying organic whenever possible, doing a pesticide/herbicide wash on most foods, and prioritizing buying and serving fresh, quality produce at every meal. They offer a hot meal each day that includes fresh vegetables, fruit and salad greens. They don’t use food containing artificial coloring, preservatives, additives, sugar, or trans fats. The OSL kitchen uses environmentally friendly cleaning supplies and a Thermal Accelerated Nano Crystal Sanitation (TANCS) steamer system for sanitizing the kitchen.

**What it Takes:** According to Graham, programs seeking to move in the direction of healthy, quality foods need to be open to learning and shift their thinking to operate from a place of abundance rather than a scarcity mentality. “You need to be able to be gentle with your donors,” says Graham, “and be able to say: I appreciate that you brought a pallet of Twinkies®, but that’s not what we serve our customers. Do you have lettuce instead?” It’s a slow process of education, and it helps to be open to new learning yourself.

## RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC DIETARY NEEDS

### Just for You: Meals for People with Special Dietary Needs

#### Lifelong AIDS Alliance - Seattle



Lifelong AIDS Alliance (LLA) provides practical support services to people living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses. LLA’s meal program, Chicken Soup Brigade, is specifically designed to provide healthy meals and accommodate special diets. The food program manager and dietitian work together to design meals for 17 different types of diets, including allergy-free, heart healthy, renal failure, vegetarian, and special religious diets.

People are qualified and referred by case managers at agencies such as People of Color Against AIDS Network and the Northwest Kidney Center, and the referral includes a nutrition screening. If the customer is at high risk, they provide nutrition therapy. LLA purchases most ingredients for their meal program because of their customers’ compromised immune systems and the program’s elaborate menu planning. Another way in which LLA strives to meet its customers’ needs is by providing delivery to several satellite locations throughout King County. These delivery hubs are at locations such as churches and community centers. A volunteer receives the food delivery packed in cooler bags from LLA’s refrigerated delivery truck. They then hand out the meals during a 2-3 hour window of time.

**What it Takes:** To offer a special diet meal program, you have to be able to analyze the meals for nutrition content. Computer software is the easiest method. The first step is analyzing your regular meals, and then figuring out how to adapt them to meet special dietary requirements. LLA also hires skilled kitchen staff to ensure and maintain quality, although volunteers help with many tasks such as packaging, labeling and sorting meals. Developing a labeling system is also very important to avoid a customer receiving an incorrect meal.

## Honoring Tradition: Culturally Appropriate Foods

### Asian Counseling and Referral Service - Seattle



Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) specializes in serving Asian Pacific Americans (APA), and their customers come from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers speak more than 30 different languages, so they are able to understand and provide appropriate assistance to their customers. The ACRS Food Bank distributes foods that meet APA's dietary needs including tofu, soy milk, ramen, fish and 3,200 pounds of rice each week. Because many of these items are not regularly available in the donation stream, ACRS purchases many of them. Culturally appropriate food is just one aspect of the ways in which ACRS works to meet the culturally-specific needs of customers.

ACRS also has a convenient location in Seattle's International District with bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers to assist customers with language barriers. The organization also translates written materials into multiple languages. ACRS Aging and Adult Services Director Gary Tang comments, "The majority of our staff are APA, so we are familiar with the food choices of our customers." He adds, "Some time ago, we saw customers tossing foods out of their bags as they left — cheese, packaged food." They talked to these customers, who often said, "It's heavy for me to carry, and I won't use it." This led to changes such as moving to a supermarket-like arrangement that allows for customer choice, as well as changes to the food offerings. Through these changes, people feel respected, and they get appropriate foods. "We do need to ask our customers what they want, how can we do better," says Tang. "Running human services, we tend to give ourselves an excuse not to push ourselves to do more — we just say resources are limited. We have to ask the hard questions! Customers do their homework, and will move to the food bank that best meets their needs."

**What it Takes:** Tang advises that finding volunteers who are representative of the communities served helps dramatically with cultural competency. At ACRS, they have relationships with 14 different ethnic associations who send volunteers to help with food sorting and home delivery. Volunteers who are from the same culture or speak the same language as customers can help with collecting information from customers, as well as understanding their community's needs and preferences.

## Reaching Out: Culturally Competent Groceries

### Lifelong AIDS Alliance - Seattle



Lifelong AIDS Alliance (LLA), as part of their practical support services to people with living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses, offers a grocery program for customers who are healthy enough to cook for themselves. Groceries can be tailored to suit customers' medical needs (such as a "soft" bag for people with chewing difficulties), limited cooking capacity (low- and no-cook bags), and ethnic dietary preferences. They recently began offering an East African Grocery Bag, and a Latino grocery bag is planned for the future. Nicole Sievers, RD, CD, Nutrition Services Supervisor, sees the East African bag as an important way to connect with East Africans, a hard-to-reach population who may be hesitant to sign up for AIDS-related services. In trying to figure out how best to reach them, they thought "since our meals are not currently appropriate, maybe we can do something with our groceries." They created the

special bag by identifying a few key items that would appeal to East African immigrants. Working collaboratively with a local Ethiopian grocery store, they include injera (Ethiopian flatbread, a staple of the East African diet) and a few other ethnic specific ingredients. These few key items are supplemented with the usual fruits, vegetables and protein items. Just having a few ethnic-specific items seems to make a big difference. Slowly, via word of mouth, their East African customer base is growing.

**What it Takes:** An ability to identify community needs, relationships with individuals from the target group you wish to serve to help you identify appropriate foods, partnership with an ethnic grocery store or other source of culturally-specific foods.



*“When you can get public and private agencies to come to the table, that’s when great things happen.”* – Beverly Graham Founder & Executive Director Operation Sack Lunch

## CUSTOMER EDUCATION

### Be Your Own Celebrity Chef: Cooking Demonstrations Care & Share Food Bank - Grand Coulee



When staff at the Grand Coulee Area Care & Share Food Bank (CSFB) realized that many of their younger customers didn’t know how to cook, they decided to demonstrate how to cook commonly available items right on site during food bank hours. They advertised the demonstration to customers through flyers put in their food bags that listed upcoming events. The items cooked during the demonstration are included in customers’ bags that day, along with recipes. Care & Share focuses on the basics. Director Fern Blaylock says, “I even cooked a pot of pinto beans—45 minutes, they couldn’t believe it! I did it all on a hot plate.” The rice demonstration included basics of how to cook rice along with the chance to taste four different rice recipes: plain rice, fried rice, stir fry and rice pudding. The demonstrations took hold right away. People brought their friends, and demos attracted many people. CSFB received fewer returns of the demonstrated items as a result.

**What it Takes:** Doing demos requires a kitchen facility, or at minimum a hot plate, recipes for food currently available at the food bank, one or more volunteer chefs, and plates and utensils to allow food sampling. A nice extra is to give out cooking utensils such as measuring spoons to customers who need them. Blaylock recommends letting people know in advance what you will be cooking, and making your kick-off event especially nice. The chefs should have food handler’s permits. Check with your local health department if any other permits are necessary. This is a great chance for your volunteers to show off their cooking expertise and/or dramatic flair.

## INCREASING QUANTITY, QUALITY AND VARIETY

### Smart Shopping: Bulk Buying Committee Seattle Food Committee - Seattle



For the past 28 years, the Seattle Food Committee (SFC) has pooled funds to purchase foods in bulk for Seattle food banks. Seattle’s meal programs are also invited to participate with the committee to streamline ordering. The program is managed by an SFC committee supported by staff at Solid Ground’s Food Resources. Food Lifeline (FLL) provides a staff person who attends the meetings and acts as a buying agent. SFC decides on a percentage of funds that are put into a common pot and used to purchase high priority items which are then distributed to all eligible programs using an allocation formula. A special effort is made to maintain geographic diversity on the committee. Every year, SFC surveys members regarding their top three priority needs to help set the committee’s priorities. Protein items, including meats and eggs; milk, fresh produce and rice generally top the list. The committee sets limits of its funding, to purchase non-food items such as paper and plastic bags for repacking food. The committee then looks at funding available for the year, and starts making buying decisions. After many years, they have agreement on certain regular purchases, such as purchasing eggs around Easter and peanut butter and/or tuna fish to carry families through the summer. The committee meets monthly, monitoring spending and making additional purchasing decisions while sticking to identified priorities. “This is a way of being good stewards of our funding, stretching it as far as we can,” comments Trish Twomey. The only drawback she can find is that individual food banks can’t tailor their purchases. “We try to choose foods that have broad appeal, such as vegetables used across many cultural groups,” she notes.

Through this program, food banks are able to receive first rate product that is not dependent on the donation stream. The committee always purchases enough that each food bank has a sufficient supply of the item to last one week or two weeks for

distribution. Once decisions are made, FLL staff researches options and consults with committee leadership to get final approval on a purchase. The food is delivered to FLL's warehouse and is distributed from there (bulk purchasing info for Seattle food banks is even incorporated into FLL's online ordering system).

**What it Takes:** If starting a program like this in your community, the place to start would be your local food distributor. Ask them if they have the capacity to do the pass-through, store and distribute the purchased food. Also, expect to assist in overhead to help cover some of the lead agency's costs. Depending on capacity, choose appropriate purchases. For example, consider whether you can purchase perishables that require refrigeration. One place for a smaller community to start might be non-food items that all the programs need, such as plastic bags. Think about how you will organize yourselves and make decisions on behalf of the group.

## Complimenting Donations: Purchasing Food

### Northwest Harvest - Seattle



Purchasing food to supplement donated food has always been a practice of Northwest Harvest (NWH). “There is a limit to what is available through donations, especially when it comes to protein — it just isn’t available. Our goal with purchasing is to offer a more varied menu and more nutritional items,” says Bonnie Baker, Director, Hunger Response Network. Protein, rice, dried beans, pasta and tomato sauce are among the top items that NWH purchases for distribution. In order to decide what to purchase, NWH gets formal and informal input from member programs in a variety of ways. They hold regional meetings around the state in addition to their large annual meeting. In addition, they have a series of questions that they ask programs on the bottom of their monthly statistics form, including what trends they have observed, challenges and successes, and feedback on the product received from NWH. As

a result, says Baker, “We hear what people are short on.” After assessing the needs, NWH begins the process of projecting donations for the coming year. Past information on donations broken down by nutritional category is used as a basis for creating a “shopping list.” Purchasing is also influenced by where they can get good deals on large quantity purchases.

**What it Takes:** Of course, funds are the most critical factor to permit purchasing food. However, savvy buying depends on experience in food purchasing. NWH maintains contacts throughout the country and a lot of experience, which allows them to get excellent prices and the maximum benefit for their dollars.

## Food Drives: You’re in the Driver’s Seat

### Hood Canal Food Bank - Hood Canal



Hood Canal Food Bank (HCFB) targets specific items that are missing from their shelves, and gives out a list of these items to drive organizers such as churches and schools. “We need these extra items to fill our menu, so we started approaching people, and now they come to us for a list when they’re ready to do something,” says Kathy Roberson, Executive Director. They ask for things they can’t get through the donation stream or discounted, such as large, hearty soups, Hamburger Helper® and chili. Roberson notes the importance of selecting items that match your customers’ needs, whether ethnic or other dietary preferences. The drives give community members a chance to connect with the community via the food bank.

**What it Takes:** Many food banks have reported success with food-specific drives. Asking for specific items is educational for donors and makes them feel that their donation will make a difference. The only requirement is having a person familiar with current and anticipated stock make up a list to share with drive organizers of what is needed at that time.

*“We need these extra items to fill our menu, so we started approaching people, and now they come to us for a list when they’re ready to do something,”*

*– Kathy Roberson, Executive Director Hood Canal Food Bank.*

## Creative Shopping (aka Extreme Couponing)

### Good Cheer Food Bank - South Whidbey Island



The story begins with Ula Lewis. Ula who is a coupon shopper had a discussion, awhile back, with Damien Cortez the Good Cheer Food Bank Coordinator. Ula was getting some of her food for free and asked Damien if the food bank could use it! Damien saw the value of what she was doing and started giving Ula some funds; Good Cheer could use the savings and free food always comes in handy!

This is where the idea of creative shopping comes into play, it is “thinking outside of the box” as Damien would say. “We were dealing with a tough recession and some of our food resources were going elsewhere; our logistics needed to be rearranged” says Damien.

The creative buying program of using coupons continued to grow. Ula and friends would go to grocery stores with their coupons, purchase merchandise, stand in line to checkout and then do it again and again. The reason for doing the shopping over and over was because there were coupon limits.

Ula began to develop relationships with the store managers and this provided the food bank with a real bonus, coupons with no limits. She would make sure that she would not deplete any one store of their supply of product through her use of the coupons and I think this helped in her relationship building. Now they have a checker that works specifically with her or an associate to streamline the process!

## Sharing the Surplus

### Seattle's Union Gospel Mission - Seattle



A little over a year ago, we began to form relationships with companies that were able to provide us with large amounts of food and operating supplies on a regular basis. Some of the product was highly perishable and even though we serve over 1200 meals each day, we knew there would be more than we could use in a short period of time. We realized that a great deal of food would go to waste unless we found a way to share it with other organizations fighting hunger and homelessness. We had also observed that, like us, organizations such as yours received certain types of food on certain days of the week. Sometimes we miss out on needed product simply be the virtue of when our order date is. This led us to ask ourselves whether or not there might be an opportunity for us to fill in a gap by networking with some of the smaller non-profits whose focus is similar to ours. We knew we had surplus. We just needed to take a look at the possibilities for sharing it. The result is a distribution program that shares our surplus food, toiletries and operating supplies with a number of smaller non-profits that are focused on serving homeless and poverty level men, women & children of Seattle.

How could this program be replicated? Describe the planning and implementation steps you followed to put this project or program into place.

This program could be replicated by any organization that has built relationships that result in more product than they can use or product they receive that is not usable by their organization. We followed the following steps in putting our program together.

1. We realized that we would not be able to provide food to every non-profit that would like to receive it and that we were also responsible to our donors as to how their gifts were used. With that in mind we created an initial list of non-profits that shared a mission statement similar to ours or was already associated with the mission in some way.
2. The “partner” list, along with our request for permission to share excess product outside the mission was presented to our executive director for approval. This list has expanded by 20% in the last 9 months.
3. Once we received approval, we determined how much of the dairy product we currently received could be used by our programs within a specified period of time. We also looked at our toiletry usage to determine what the needs of our programs were.
4. We looked at our current staffing, operations schedule, and internal program shopping needs to determine what our opportunities and limitations would be in trying to share any surplus product we might have.
5. Our review really gave us the layout for our program:
  - i. We would need to send a list out on Wednesday afternoon with non-profits contacting us by email or phone with their orders.
  - ii. Participating non-profits would need to be able to pick up their orders.
  - iii. Pick-up appointments would be needed to ease congestion at the storehouse and the days for pick-up would need to be Thursday, Friday, and Monday.

General procedures were created and distributed to everyone on our list with a request for programs to contact us if they were interested in participating. Programs that contacted us became participants and several more have been added since we began the program last spring.

What were your program or project objectives? How do you measure success? What have your outcomes been? Our objectives were to share excess product that we received with other non-profits that are doing work similar to ours for the purpose of helping men, women, and children in need, form and build strong relationships with these non-profits, and cut down on the amount of food and other products going into our landfills.

We measure success in terms of the amount of waste we have to dispose of, the number of number of non-profits that continue to request product from us, the comfort the recipients have in calling us when they have a specific need to fill, and our comfort in calling them if we have a need. Because of this program;

- ...► We have experienced a large decrease in expenditures to dispose of spoiled food and non-food product that we are unable to use for one reason or another.
- ...► We are also finding that as we build relationships with our partners, they share with us when they have more than they can use of an item. We have received badly needed produce and seafood from partners whose donor base is different than ours. In turn, the agencies we partner with have no problem calling to ask if we have something they're looking for.
- ...► More food and toiletries are moving out into the community where they are needed. We provide 10-12 pallets of food to participating food banks each week. Toiletries are not offered every week. We average 2 -3 pallets each month.
- ...► We believe that our sense of stewardship is recognized by our donors. GIK donations have almost doubled over the same period for last year. A large percentage of this is food.
- ...► We are able to take large mixed donations because we know we have places to share what we can't use. This allows us to take more and that also allows us to give more. In addition to our partners, we are also able to more internally in terms of food baskets and support to area seniors.

We thought about cost and efficiency as we put our program together. Offerings are sent out after all of our internal programs have had an opportunity to take or reserve what they need for the coming week. We do not deliver product and that conserves fuel and manpower. Agencies need to place an order. There is no just showing up to pick up food. Agencies are asked to pick-up their order during the middle of the day when we are not in the process of loading or unloading our trucks.

# Customer Service

Treating customers with dignity is a key best practice for emergency food providers. In speaking with food banks and meal programs around the state, many expressed the importance of having a strong customer service orientation and “good attitude,” and some talked about how their faith or values guide the way they do business. Many agencies have taken customer service beyond the basics as well, stretching themselves to make their services more accessible and convenient, more personalized, and more culturally competent. Others are going beyond food to provide other needed services. General best practices in the area of customer service are:

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers treat customers with respect
- Maximizing customer choice through a shopping or self-select format or other mechanisms
- Listening to customer input and adapting services and food available to meet the specific needs of your customer base
- Recruiting volunteers from key demographic groups so that your volunteer base is reflective of the customers served
- Having good signage and clear guidelines for customers, available in multiple languages if needed
- Establishing hours of operations based on customer rather than volunteer convenience, such as weekend and evening hours for working individuals and families

The customer service profiles below are divided into the following categories: meeting customers where they are, increasing access and convenience, hospitality, beyond food, going the extra mile for kids, and more good ideas.

## MEETING CUSTOMERS WHERE THEY ARE

### Door to Door: Delivery Service St. Mary's Food Bank - Seattle



St. Mary's Food Bank (SMFB) offers a home delivery service for customers who are homebound. “We noticed with our walk-in customers coming in that some elderly and disabled people were struggling. Sometimes we would get a call from a case worker who knew someone who needed food,” says Kate Maughan, Food Bank Director. SMFB delivers to several hundred people each week, which Smith says is the “tip of the iceberg” in relation to need. The program is made possible by volunteers who agree to cover a route with a number of deliveries once a week, using their own cars to deliver the food. SMFB does background checks and sets the bar high regarding whom they send out, since customers are vulnerable and alone. The service is intended for people who cannot leave their homes without assistance. Customers self-identify as needing the service, and given the demand, they are always asked whether there is someone in their

lives who they can send to pick up their food. Once registered, customers are added to a delivery route.

SMFB has route sheets that they print every week. The volunteers see the same 10-12 people each week, so they get acquainted. In many cases, several customers are clustered in one building. They rely on volunteer drivers to assist with adjusting the contents of food bags to meet the special dietary needs of their customers – these restrictions are notated on the route sheet. SMFB delivers only once a week, so they bring a lot of groceries since they know customers can't get out. How long the route takes depends in part on how chatty the volunteers are, but usually 45 minutes to two hours. They need to balance visiting with the need to get perishable food out to folks, and may also vary the length of their visits depending on how isolated the customer is.



**What it Takes:** “This program is hard. You really need to have your ducks in a row because these people need their food every week. If you can’t do that, don’t start it.” says Maughan. Be prepared to screen and manage volunteers, and have a “Plan B” for when a volunteer is sick or on vacation. She also notes that people are needed to pack bags, handle logistics, and make volunteers feel appreciated. At SMFB, some people share routes, alternating weekly or monthly. In some cases, children ride along with their parents, seniors appreciate the children’s visits. It is very important to establish geographic parameters and limits on the number of customers served, although it can be difficult to say no to people in need. SMFB has benefited from a volunteer who created a customized Access database system for them. However, route assignments are determined by staff, and could be done using a simpler tracking system if needed.

## TV Info Screens

### Marysville Community Food Bank - Marysville



Marysville Community Food Bank utilizes a best practices that has to do with how they get information to our customers. They have a large flat panel TV screen visible to customers while they wait in line. They run a laptop in the office through that TV to run PowerPoint slides that provide food safety info, other resource info (like local places for clothes, medical, etc), thanks to our donors, what’s “hot” for food available at the food bank (“lots of onions today”), and many other types of info. Much of the info is available on flyers as well so that folks can take these for more details.

*“I find that the slide shows are really helping to get information to our customers.”*

*– Dell Deierling, Director of Marysville Food Bank*

## Drive Through CSFP

### Community Services of Moses Lake - Moses Lake



Community Services of Moses Lake (CSML) has designed a “drive-through” style distribution. This comes in response that most of their CSFP customers are elderly and it takes extra effort for them to park their car, walk to the food bank, get their distribution, and carry it back to their car (which in most cases would be with the assistance of one of the CSML staff). The whole process was very time-consuming for both the customers and the volunteers.

The drive-through distribution is set up with two lanes around the back of the warehouse organized using cones and signs. Customers will drive up, and two volunteers will approach them with the sign-in sheet, cheese, and the other CSFP commodities. Upon signing in, the commodities are then loaded into the customer’s vehicle. Taped to the

cheese is the next month’s distribution dates written in both English and Spanish. The customer then drives forward making way for the next customer to move forward.

Customer feedback has been extremely positive noting that the distribution for the elderly is far easier using this method. Results of this distribution process is that the customers never need to leave their vehicles, they never need to back up into a busy parking lot, and time is saved for both customers and volunteers. This method would also help the process for the

women, infants, and children participating in CSFP as it can be difficult for a parent to park the car, get all the children out, get everything, and bring all the children back.

## Linkages: Pairing Fresh Meals with Groceries

### Lifelong AIDS Alliance and Greenwood Food Bank - Seattle



Lifelong AIDS Alliance (LAA)'s food program, Chicken Soup Brigade, works to improve the nutritional health of people living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses. When they expanded their mission to include seniors, LLA teamed up with Seattle's Greenwood Food Bank (GFB), operated by Volunteers of American Western Washington, to deliver meals to homebound seniors in GFB's service area. LLA delivers packaged, frozen meals once a week to GFB. GFB then delivers the meals along with groceries to qualified customers (currently, about 10-15 people) at their homes. GFB helps identify people in need of meals, and also takes responsibility for completing intake paperwork for LLA and documenting the customers' nutritional needs. LLA cooks and packs quality meals and brings them to GFB weekly for distribution. This partnership works well for both organizations: LLA is able to send meals to seniors, and GFB is able to provide both groceries and meals (double the nutrition!) to their elderly, homebound customers. Mike Cox, Grocery/Delivery Coordinator of LLA comments, "It has been a benefit for us to show collaboration to our funders, a feather in both of our caps." LLA already had a satellite system for meal delivery, so this partnership was a natural extension.

**What it Takes:** Cox found it easy to establish this partnership — since he is active with the Seattle Food Committee, he already knew many food bank coordinators around the city. A formal memorandum of understanding between partners outlining roles and responsibilities is recommended.

*"We believe that by giving food we would eat ourselves — nutritious and varied — we are helping our neighbors in need."*

*– WFC Emergency Food Provider Survey respondent*

## On the Road: Mobile Food Bank

### St. Leo's Food Connection - Tacoma & Lakewood



St. Leo's Food Connection (SLFC) is expanding access through a mobile food bank. The mobile food bank started after the Lakewood Collaborative Hunger Task Force, a group of city officials, civic leaders and social service providers, identified three neighborhoods in Lakewood which were extremely low-income, and had significant transportation challenges and were without grocery stores. SLFC stepped up to serve one of the neighborhoods, Springbrook. "Because we already had a truck and we package food, this was a natural fit for us," commented Director Kevin Glackin-Coley. "The Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma, where we are based, is gentrifying, so our customers are moving outside the center city. Now we have to go to them." St. Leo's Food Connection packages the food at their office, stores it temporarily at the Emergency Food Network, and transports it on Saturday to four different locations serving 125-150 households each week. SLFC divided the neighborhood into quadrants and picked four main intersections as mobile food bank sites, so customers wouldn't have to walk too far. Their truck, loaded with bags of food, pulls up to each corner at an appointed time and distributes food bags from out of the rear of the truck. They have made small changes to the schedule and procedures over time. "If we waited until we knew how to do it, we probably still wouldn't be doing it," says Glackin-Coley. "There are hungry people who aren't being served by the system as it currently exists. We are trying to think outside the box to reach them." They know the program is making a difference because they've heard from a local elementary school teacher who says she noticed a big difference for some of her students, who were no longer coming to school famished on Monday mornings.

What it Takes: A truck, good data about where emergency food is needed, partners (St. Leo's Food Connection works with Centro Latino volunteers for translation), flexibility of volunteers and staff.

## DEFINING SERVICE WITH DIGNITY

Many food banks share a commitment to service with dignity. What do we really mean by that? Below are some “ingredients” to move us toward a shared definition, generated by participants in a conference session at the 2007 Food Lifeline Agency Conference.

- ...> Removal of barriers
- ...> Generous spirit
- ...> Increased customer/customer choice
- ...> Commitment to customer service
- ...> Personalization
- ...> Consideration and respect
- ...> Understanding
- ...> Valuing customers' time
- ...> Respect for privacy

Oregon Food Bank has taken the concept of a shared definition further and developed the following statement of “Customer Rights and Responsibilities” which is posted in all their member food banks.

**RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** We recognize the basic rights of individuals who seek food assistance. Concern for personal dignity is of great importance. At the same time, staff and volunteers expect responsible behavior from you.

**You can expect from us:**

- ...> Respect, Consideration, Cooperation, Patience - Opportunity to participate in Surveys & Evaluations
- ...> Access to Services for which you are eligible - A Safe Environment
- ...> Personal information kept Confidential

**Our expectations of you:**

- ...> Respect, Consideration, Cooperation, Patience
- ...> Accurate Information to establish eligibility for services
- ...> A Safe Environment

## Making it Easy: Satellite Food Banks

### Thurston County Food Bank - Olympia



Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB) was motivated to establish satellite food banks in order to increase access. All the satellite programs they have established depend on partnerships with a hosting agency, and have been developed strategically to reduce known barriers to access. They have established 10 satellites so far, targeted to serve low-income families, seniors and geographically isolated communities. TCFB began its satellite program at two housing complexes with a high percentage of low-income families, working with the on-site after-school programs. This allows working parents to pick up



food once a month when they pick up their kids. Before, many of these parents had trouble making it to TCFB's downtown location during the workday. The next step was serving the frail elderly who have trouble traveling downtown and carrying their groceries home. By bringing food to two senior centers, the seniors have a comfortable place to wait for the food and for a "Dial a Lift" ride home afterward. Other goals of the satellites have been to extend hours of operation, providing evening and weekend food bank hours, and bringing food into geographically isolated communities.

TCFB offers satellites in partnership with host agencies that provide volunteers, a site, and reporting of program statistics. TCFB delivers food and offers technical assistance to get the satellite up and running. Partners benefit because they don't have to do food drives or package up bags of food. Basic bagged food is provided, and TCFB is glad to add on produce, bread or other items if the site has the capacity to receive, store and distribute the food. Customers are also still welcome to visit the downtown location to access a greater variety of foods.

**What it Takes:** Operating satellites requires selecting and recruiting appropriate partners. TCFB requires their satellites to be credible, able to track and report statistics, able to meet a high standard for volunteer screening, and to carry their own liability insurance. You must also have the ability to distribute food. Executive Director Robert Coit advises, "Don't roll out too fast! You will be successful, and you will need more food and resources to support the satellites. Be sure you can accommodate an increase in your customer base." Be strategic in your planning, and remember that your success hinges on the reputation of the host agencies. Think about your own capacity, and how to handle the logistics on your end. TCFB went "old school" with prepared grocery bags because they have the volunteer capacity to prep the bags, and can even pack them a few days ahead when there is a slow day. Finally, develop a clear, written memorandum of understanding between the two agencies. TCFB always requires such an agreement, and has developed written policies for the satellite program as well.

## Getting Creative to Bridge the Gap on Customer Screening

### The Vashon Maury Community Food Bank - Vashon



The Vashon Maury Community Food Bank launched a new program to bridge the limitations of State support agencies in reaching our community. There are no DSHS Offices or Public Health Service Offices in our community. People seeking help had to travel, by ferry, incurring what has increasingly become a very costly trip for low income folks, to sign up and qualify for even the most common governmental safety net programs. Oftentimes applicants were required to make multiple trips to a DSHS office to complete qualification requirements for their benefits or to maintain benefits. We embarked on an innovative collaboration with the nearest Public Health Office to provide ready access to at least the most basic governmental support programs right here in our community, without the costly trip. Our commitment was to recruit and work with a team of volunteers that would be present and available at all of our Food Bank distribution times. Public Health's commitment was to come out to our community to train these volunteers in taking people through applications for the State Basic Health and Basic Food programs to begin with, more being added to the repertoire over time. The Public Health Office we are working with has also committed to doing all the follow up with our applications, acting as strong and knowledgeable advocates for our customers. Through these efforts, members of our community, very much including but not limited to our customers, can finally access the help and support they qualify for without facing a huge financial and time burden to apply. We are able to educate and help people understand their ability to request phone interviews in lieu of DSHS office visits, and provide support for their application processes. For the first time, our customers can ask questions and find answers, right here at the food bank, as to whether they might qualify, and what kind of benefit amounts or costs they might be looking at. This accessibility is exactly what is needed to create the link between those in need and the resources available to help. Our success in launching this program makes a huge difference for our customers and our community.

We started with a dream. We wanted our customers to be able to sign up for basic programs they were not accessing due to transportation and cost of transportation out of our community to get to a DSHS office to go through the application processes. Our local public health nurse heard our dream. She worked with the Public Health office in White Center, and found someone who was willing to come out to us and train volunteers in taking people through the applications (for Basic Health, Basic Food, Medical Vouchers ). Meanwhile we worked with our landlords to come up with an agreement to build out office space on-site that would accommodate not only our administrative needs, but this kind of program as well. Upon completion of the office space, we recruited a team of volunteers and scheduled a few 3 hour training sessions with the representative from Public

Health. Public Health supplied us all the forms, as well as release forms that would allow them to advocate and follow up for our customers as their applications went through the qualifying systems at DSHS. We wrote articles for our local papers announcing the new office space and new services available, with income guideline tables included. We worked with Public Health to come up with ideas for reaching out to our customers, educating them about what benefits they could qualify for, and that they could qualify without having to leave the Island. We continue to engage in outreach and education. And we continue to coordinate periodic trainings to keep our volunteers up to date to best help our food bank customers.

Our program objective was to create easier access to basic government assistance programs for our customers right here at the food bank. The only real choice prior to this program for our customers, and our community, involved a \$15-\$19 ferry trip to a DSHS office in Seattle. We wanted to create a friendly and open atmosphere, matching that in our food bank distribution, in which one can openly ask questions and get answers about qualifying, applying and even going through the application process right here, with help. We wanted a private enough setting for working with people's personal financial and family information in a comfortably confidential manner. We wanted volunteers trained to handle all inquiries so that we are not diverting our limited staff from all their regular duties which keep the Food Bank running optimally. We live in a small community where person to person, face to face outreach can make all the difference in program interest and participation. Numbers were not as important to us, as we know for many of our customers, trust and familiarity is a prerequisite for sharing private information, and that takes time. We have however taken at least one person, per distribution day, on average, through the complete application process for either Basic Health, Basic Food, or both. We have provided many more with answers to questions or applications to take home and complete. We continue to look at and fine tune our outreach, making sure that our customers, and the community, know this program is here, at our Food Bank, and available, especially during these tough times. We feel that our efforts have been successful. We have achieved our goals and are always, as with every program here at the Food Bank, fine tuning at every step to continue to improve our services for our customers.

Our outreach program helps people of our community who are already struggling, many of whom are already using the food bank. Their limited resources are slipping away just trying to cover the very basics each month. Nutrition becomes a secondary choice to eating cheaply, and Health Care is relegated to emergencies only. Helping get people on the Basic Health program, those that qualify, at least can get preventative care when and as needed. Helping people access Basic Food helps people in our community stretch their dollars just that little bit farther to access enough food, or more nutritional food in an economy where food prices have skyrocketed, and in a community where traveling to a Costco or Trader Joe's is cost prohibitive. With the new Basic Food program income guidelines, our customers' children are getting enrolled in the free school lunch program, one that has been severely underutilized in our community, and one that can help many families provide the nutrition their growing children need right now to become all they can be. This program helps our customers take care of themselves, enables them to make positive choices for the health and nutrition of themselves and their families, while helping stretch their limited dollars further each month.

What It Takes: From the beginning we knew that we had limited resources if any to make this program happen. It has been a miracle of collaborations that has made it all possible. We were in a situation that demanded that we build or somehow acquire adequate office and filing space for our simple administrative needs. It made sense, if at all possible, to come up with a solution that would also allow us to start a program facilitating outreach to other services as the need has been so great, and access so limited, for our food bank customers. If ever we were going to achieve this goal, now, while we were securing basic office space, was the time. The successful collaboration with our landlords and a local contractor gave us the space we needed, and the space we dreamed of. We were very clear from the start that we did not have the budget to support staff carrying out this program. Again, this is where collaboration made it all possible. DSHS offices tend not to have the staffing ability to commit someone to being at our facility, and even Public Health couldn't commit someone. However, Public Health was willing to send someone out to us to train people. And, they were willing to commit to all the follow up with our customers. We could easily recruit a team of volunteers eager and willing to learn the ins and outs of what can be pretty harrowing forms, in the name of helping others in our community. Thus, with little expenditure of agency resources and time outside of our normal routines, we were able to institute a new program, one that creates access to government assistance programs and engages in outreach where there had been none, not just at our Food Bank, but in our community. We created not only an asset, a resource for our customers, but one for our community as well.

Excellence is stepping up in the best way one can to help our community. Through our collaborations, we have provided a readily accessible avenue to reach government assistance programs that otherwise had been cost prohibitive and inaccessible due to transportation limitations. These programs help people ride out hard times. These programs were designed as an important safety net for our society. No food bank can cover all the needs of all their customers. As a food bank we do the best we can to provide basic food supplies, but we don't, and cannot have everything. We can however put people in touch with other resources

that are available, that can supplement what we are able to provide every week. We saw a flaw, a hole in the safety net that is supposed to be there for us, for our community. We worked together with our community and other agencies to repair that hole, provide more comprehensive help to our customers, and to make our community a better place because of it.

## INCREASING ACCESS AND CONVENIENCE

### Eliminating the Line: Appointments

Hopelink - Redmond



Hopelink assigns its food bank customers specific appointment times to reduce customer wait time. This gives customers a specific time to aim for so they spend less time waiting for service, and it alleviates parking problems as well. Appointments are scheduled at 15 minute intervals, and the number given out is based on their calculation of how many families they can serve in each fifteen minute period. They have a lottery style system so people aren't always stuck with the last appointment and the system is perceived as fair. Each week when a customer visits, either they or a staff members draw a slip of paper for them that lists the food bank location, appointment date and time for the following week. The customer holds onto the slip, which serves as proof that they have an appointment. People without appointments and new customers can come through during the last fifteen minutes of open hours. "It works for us," comments Teresa Andrade, Food Bank Coordinator, Kirkland/Northshore Hopelink. "It takes the strain off of the customers. No matter what you say about having enough for everyone, people still have the mentality that they need to get in first. This makes it workable." She observes that this system is inherently less flexible, and Hopelink has developed guidelines for specific exceptions. Each food bank adopting an appointment system might have different exceptions depending on the community served.

**What it Takes:** First, decide to make a change and explain the upcoming change to customers (better yet—ask them if they feel appointments would be beneficial). Set up a template for printing slips (Hopelink uses a Microsoft Word label template to create slips each week with the correct date). Think through what your policies will be for people who lose their slips and under what circumstances you might make exceptions to the system. Train volunteers regarding the change and the rationale.

### What's Cookin': Resource Hotline

Anti-Hunger Coalition Whatcom County - Bellingham



Everyday, Tutu Iverson, Board Vice President of Bellingham Community Meal (BCM), updates a Community Voice Mail (CVM) box message with information about which food banks are open and where to find free meals that day as part of her work with Whatcom County's Anti-Hunger Coalition. Food banks and meal programs send updates on their open hours, and she also reaches out to them to make sure the information she puts out is accurate. The coalition advertises their resource line via a card and inclusion in a resource guide. Social service providers have been especially appreciative of having a number to give customers.

**What it Takes:** Iverson says maintaining the voicemail is "not a lot of work, but you have to keep it up all the time." She has even called in while out of town to do daily updates of the information. At this point, her basic script is memorized. Interns or student volunteers could also be involved in updating the messages, or it could be done in various languages if volunteer interpreters are available. Of course, the most basic requirement is to set up a voicemail box. These are available from the phone company, or free of charge through your local Community Voice Mail provider or from several online services. To hear today's message, dial 360-788-7EAT.

### No Questions Asked: Self-Serve Food

Helpline House - Bainbridge Island



Bainbridge Island's Helpline House (HH) offers a variety of community services, including a food bank, a clothing bank, a medical equipment loan program, and counseling. One reception lobby serves all the programs, and HH has installed bread racks, a display freezer and refrigerator in the lobby area. This allows all customers – even those visiting another program – to access food, and there is no limit on the number of visits. The refrigerator features fresh produce donations from the grocery store and their community garden. Marilyn Gremse, Volunteer Manager, comments, “We have produce that comes in and we need to move it right away. This way, it's on view, people see it, and they take it.” They also use the front fridge and freezer for bulk things, like specialty flavors of ice cream, that people wouldn't think to ask for. Having this accessible food helps serve people with dignity, and they are finding that even people reluctant to use a food bank may come and access the front area. Check-in is needed to access the food bank.

**What it Takes:** Space in the waiting area, display refrigeration and/or freezer. HH's lobby is monitored by a volunteer at the check-in desk.

## Resource Access Project

### Resource Access Project (RAP)



**Connecting customers with a social services professional to increase access to referrals and information**

Food Banks are often the first place people turn to when they are in need. Increasing access to information and referral is one important step to improving stability in our customer's lives. The Resource Access Project (RAP) is a brief focused intervention to provide access specific resources regarding customer needs such as state food assistance, housing stability, referrals to health clinics, legal support, or to address any other need. Food Bank visitors are able to meet with a staff person without needing to make an appointment during food bank hours.

Participants are given specific resource information to address a problem, provided directions or phone contact for the resource, bus tickets if needed to make the trip, and a follow-up visit is encouraged. As an incentive, Food Bank customers can access the Food Bank an “extra” visit if they participate in a follow up visit or call. The follow-up visit is important as it provides helpful feedback for evaluation of the project. Those standing in our Food Bank line have more needs than food. While we may not be able to provide the financial resources needed, we might be able to provide one more idea or one more resource that someone did not previously know about. By offering this one-to-one service we can provide the Information and Referral (I&R) and support a customer may need to achieve greater stability.

#### **What is Takes:**

RAP has three basic components; recruitment, space and a social services professional.

1. We have found it very helpful to have an intern or trained volunteer speak with customers in line and screen them for RAP. Volunteers and interns increase the visibility of the program.
2. A private meeting space with convenient access to the Food Bank distribution area ensures that customers' privacy is maintained.
3. A case manager blocks off time for each food bank shift to be available for RAP.

The project requires a skilled staff (or volunteer) who can set boundaries and focus on the task of providing necessary and useful information.

## HOSPITALITY

## Redefining the Food Bank: Adding Services

### My Sister's Pantry - Tacoma



My Sister's Pantry (MSP) serves up a hot meal and provides groceries and clothing to low-income community members three times a month, working out of First Congregational Church in Tacoma until their new home at First Methodist is complete. They serve on average 250-300 families per month representing 1,000-1,500 individuals. The vision to provide a quality meal experience came from their founder, a woman who had been in need of the food bank at one time in her life, and felt there was no dignity for the people in line. Instead, she wanted the MSP experience to be like going to a friend's house for dinner. On entry, people can receive a number for service at the food bank and/or clothing bank. Then, they receive a meal. All services are provided during a two hour period.

The meal is served on dishes, with silverware and tablecloths on the tables. People eat family style at large tables. About half of the people served are Eastern European, and many families dine together. The food is generally cooked by professional chefs who donate their time. "A local restaurant owner comes with his family and co-workers," says Martha Curwen, Executive Director. "We jokingly call it Iron Chef Pantry — they don't know what they are cooking in advance, but come in on Monday afternoons and prepare everything (using donated and purchased food). Because of his commitment, I have had other cooks approach me, and they either handle Saturdays or substitute as needed on Mondays." The experience is almost like dining at a restaurant — without the bill. Diners often take an interest in the meal and ask for recipes, so it shows them what they can do with the food from the food bank. MSP makes an effort to offer things that can easily be made with food bank items, for example, a salsa made with canned corn, black beans, diced tomatoes, and onions, served at a sample table with chips.

The food bank asks customers to fill out a grocery list indicating items they would like to take home — the list is printed with English and Russian side by side. These lists are used by a corps of volunteers who bag up food while people are eating, in the order indicated by their assigned number. Customers can also visit a produce and bread station while they are there. Clothing bank customers enter a designated area, arranged like a clothing store, and have 10 minutes to choose 10 items.

**What it Takes:** Curwen stresses that MSP has chosen their hours to accommodate the individuals and families served — evenings and weekends. She recommends assessing the customers' needs and planning around this. The operation is very volunteer intensive, utilizing 40-50 volunteers each time they are open. She draws heavily on church groups, college and high school students. Naturally, a facility with a kitchen, dining space, and room to accommodate the food bank and any other activities is needed as well.

## Taking Hospitality to a New Level: Offering Take-Out

### Women's & Children's Free Restaurant - Spokane



By its very name, the Women's & Children's Free Restaurant (WCFR) strives to set itself apart from a standard soup kitchen. While they did serve soup in their early years beginning in 1988, they have always placed an equal importance on hospitality. WCFR provides two made-from-scratch dinners each week in the basement of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Since 2000, WCFR has been led by Executive Director Marlene Alford, a former caterer. In March 2004, to better meet the needs of families and provide something for the weekend when they were closed, they added Friday Take-Out. While Alford and her Board first thought they were just going to do another entrée, Friday Take-Out has become much more. In addition to offering an entrée to serve at least two, WCFR sets up a small "farmers market" with produce, bread, and a limited selection of dairy items — and serves lunch beginning at 12:30 p.m. A crew of volunteers spends Friday morning getting ready to open their "market" at 1 p.m. Before opening they make up the day's shopping list to distribute to their diners. "We would never choose for them," says Alford. Upon entering the program on Friday afternoons, the women are handed the shopping list of available items for their review and selection.



WCFR staff and volunteers work to think of everything, including portioning salad dressings from commercial size jars or washing and cutting whole watermelon to ensure that there's enough to go around and that diners can carry it home. They've also been adding recipes and continue to build their nutrition education resources.

**What it Takes:** Alford's food service industry experience has been valuable in launching the take-out service. To offer meals to go, you'll need to pursue a Class II Complex license from the health department. After that Alford acknowledges that you'll need a "huge amount of creativeness," food service knowledge, and the ability to be flexible, recognizing the ever-changing donation stream.

## BEYOND FOOD

### The Doctor's In: On-site Health Clinic North Helpline - Seattle



North Helpline (NH) started as a call-in/drop-in resource center. They started the Lake City Food Bank in 2001, precipitated by a crisis when a food bank in a neighboring community outside the city limits said it would no longer be able to serve Seattle residents (North Helpline was referring its customers there). Now, Lake City Food Bank serves 1,000 people per week. Many food bank customers present with medical needs, and NH knew that most were using the emergency room at nearby Northwest Hospital & Medical Center as their primary care provider. NH had been working with Rotary and learned about RotaCare Clinics. They worked hard to bring the program to Lake City, partnering with Rotary and the hospital as a source of volunteer medical personnel and back-up for urgent care. NH now has a clinic on-site that is open Saturdays, with two exams rooms, a triage area and a pharmacy. A mobile dental van also visits monthly. The hospital is supportive because without the clinic present, they would see many of these patients in their emergency room at an increased cost. Bartell Drugs provides prescription drugs at cost to NH, who passes them on free of charge to patients. Executive Director Rita Anderson comments, "It's cheap insurance to support our programs. No one knows when they may need assistance."

**What it Takes:** Anderson advises making the connections and doing the legwork beforehand. Make sure you have partners, because it takes a lot of money and effort to operate a clinic. NH fundraises for the project, has received equipment donations, and engaged skilled medical volunteers. The clinic has been a welcome addition to the community.

## GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR KIDS

### Bringing it Home: Backpack Meals Des Moines Area Food Bank - Des Moines



The Des Moines Area Food Bank (DMAFB) started their Backpack Project to meet the needs of low-income children and their families. Children identified by the school administrators as at risk of weekend hunger are provided with backpacks of food to take home each Friday. DMAFB started the program when they realized that 60% of area children qualified for free and reduced lunch, and that the income guidelines for that program are the same as the guidelines for receiving USDA commodities. They began a partnership with Midway Elementary in Des Moines and have now expanded to serve six local schools as well, distributing about 400 backpacks each week. Kids take home full backpacks from school on Friday and return them on Monday – or, being kids, Tuesday. DMAFB volunteers pickup the backpacks from the school, refill them and deliver them back to the school by Friday. Two days worth of foods geared to kids is provided such as instant oatmeal or a breakfast bar with fruit for breakfast, microwavable macaroni and cheese or chili with chips, a cookie and juice for lunch and something similar for dinner, plus one or two snack items per day. They pay attention to nutritional density as much as possible. In order to offer appropriate foods, DMAFB does purchase some items, primarily single serve main meals, juice and fruit.

**What it Takes:** Backpacks, preferably ones that won't make the kids noticeable (DMAFB received a donation of a large number of backpacks from Washington Mutual), people to sort food and fill backpacks with appropriate food items, funds to purchase some items that are needed that may not be available regularly through the donation stream.

## More than a Meal: Recognizing Other Needs

### Sky Valley Food Bank - Monroe



Sky Valley Food Bank (SVFB) has expanded their services to include back-to-school supplies for kids as well as toys during the holiday season. They conduct a community drive that brings in donations and also increases their community visibility, stressing that supplies will go to the community's neediest children. Their goal is to provide the school supplies prior to school starting, so the children are able to fit in and be confident like the other children that have more resources on the first day of school. Supplies collected match school requirements, and are organized at the food bank by grade level. Neil Watkins, Executive Director, says, "If the parents can't even afford food, how can they get them through school? Items are expensive! If they are in need of food, they're also probably really worried, concerned and stressed about school supplies and toys for Christmas. Those are the two programs we chose to add for our

families in need, and they are both feel-good programs for the community as well." He adds, "The additional programs make your food bank look extensive. It can seem cumbersome when added to everything else, but it's such a great public relations tool as well as making a difference in the lives of people."

**What it Takes:** One or more volunteers will need to organize supplies by grade, and designated gifts will need to be tracked for the program. The drive is run by soliciting community partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Fire Department, Rotary Club and local businesses. Cash donations are used to buy backpacks or fill gaps in supplies. Before getting started, make sure your staff, board and volunteers support the effort.

*"The additional programs make your food bank look extensive. It can seem cumbersome when added to everything else, but it's such a great public relations tool as well as making a difference in the lives of people."*

*– Neil Watkins, Executive Director Sky Valley Food Bank*

## It's in the Bag! Making Celebrations Possible

### Maltby Food Bank - Maltby



Knowing that children's birthdays can be expensive for parents, Maltby Food Bank (MFB) decided to start offering child's birthday bags to families. A typical bag contains cake mix, frosting, birthday candles, disposable plates and napkins, and party favors. Gender appropriate bags are available for boys and girls. Donations of party goods are solicited from community groups. So far, Scouts, 4-H clubs, bible study groups and schools have assembled and donated bags. MFB is currently well-stocked as the local Montessori school recently donated 60 bags. The bags have been a big hit with customers, who indicate that they may have been

unable to throw a party without the assistance. Fran Walster, Director, indicates that she started the program primarily because “I needed an idea to get the community to help us. People want to help, they just don’t know how. Once you tell them how to give, they’re willing.” She also has groups that assemble and donate gift bags for seniors with toiletries and gift cards.

**What it Takes:** This is an excellent community service project for a service club, scout troop or other outside group looking to make a specific contribution to your food bank. MFB publicizes the need, offers basic guidelines, and donors do the rest.

## Beyond the Box: Summer Meal Program

### Copalis Community Church Food Bank - Copalis Beach



Ten years ago, Copalis Community Church Food Bank (CCCFB) saw the need for a summer free lunch program in their community. They applied to OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) to become a sponsor for the Summer Feeding Program (In Washington State, OSPI is the state agency that administers the federal money from USDA for this program). After operating at a single site in the first year, the program has expanded each year and now serves over 8,960 lunches each summer all over the north beach community. Meals are served at fourteen sites, including the school district’s summer reading program, parks and recreation programs, and central community locations. Recently, the program was expanded to include three mobile sites at places where low-income children are concentrated. “The mobile program is our shining star,” comments former Board Co-Chairman Phyllis Shaughnessy. “We look for pockets of kids, like a modular home park, set out portable picnic tables and serve lunch. We’ve even incorporated a reading program where we take books and give them to the kids.” Shaughnessy reports that a faithful group of volunteers keep the program running. She also notes that it makes sense to have a food bank involved in this program, since they can use food from the food bank to lower the cost of making the lunches. Food banks considering running a similar program are invited to visit Copalis to see this operation in action. “It is something to behold. We deliver to many sites each day, and it goes like machine work.”

**What it Takes:** Startup funding to cover the costs of food until USDA reimbursement is received (CCCFB gets theirs from individuals and the county), volunteers to prepare and deliver sack lunches, a kitchen space for food preparation (they use their church kitchen), and a strong organizer to get out in public and encourage interest.

## Beyond the Box, Take 2: Summer Lunch Camp

### South Kitsap Helpline - Port Orchard



The South Kitsap Helpline (SKH)’s Summer Lunch Camp began in the summer of 2006 as an alternative to USDA’s Summer Feeding Program. This free, drop-in lunch program is designed to assist low-income families in the community in need of additional help feeding their children in the summer when free and reduced price meals are not offered because school is not in session. Children from pre-school to age 18 are invited to attend and receive a nutritious lunch and snack three days per week. If children are unable to stay, they pack lunches for them to take home. Extra food is also sent home with the children on Fridays for weekend meals. Parents are invited to stay with the children, or take a two-hour break for themselves. In addition to receiving food, children socialize, participate in an arts and craft project, read books, play games and receive one-on-one attention from staff and volunteers. SKH worked to create a summer camp atmosphere with “lunch camp counselors” who take kids’ orders. During the first year, the Summer Lunch Camp operated all summer long on a budget of just \$3,000.

**What it Takes:** Reliable group of staff and volunteers, building space during lunchtime hours, and lunches. SKH was able to partner with the First Lutheran Church who provided space in their centrally located church, which also had an appropriate kitchen space for meal preparation. When the program started, SKH did significant community outreach through the local schools, their food bank, posters at local community centers, laundromats and other community gathering places, and press releases to the local newspapers. They created parental consent/emergency contact forms, medical treatment and liability release forms and basic rules for parents and children, modeled on other summer camp programs.