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Understanding the challenges facing our neighbors in need
Striving for 75 million meals

We at Northern Illinois Food Bank have so much to thank for this holiday season. With the generous support of our vast network of donors and volunteers, we were able to distribute 60 million meals to our neighbors in need during the last fiscal year! While we are encouraged by these record-breaking results for our Food Bank, we are also grounded by the fact it isn’t nearly enough. According to Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap study, each year our hungry neighbors in northern Illinois are at risk of skipping 70 million meals, simply because they don’t have enough for three meals per day.

With this sobering statistic in mind, we at Northern Illinois Food Bank recently announced a strategic plan to increase the number of meals distributed throughout our network to 75 million annually by the year 2020. Our goal is to fill the “meal gap” and make sure we are providing every meal, every day, for every hungry neighbor.

Based on data collected in the recently released Hunger in America study, we know we need to do more, and do it with purpose. Our hungry neighbors are facing difficult choices, with 77 percent of households choosing between buying food and paying for utilities and 69 percent choosing between buying food and paying for transportation.

We want to make sure our neighbors in need have access to three nutritious meals per day, when and where they need them.

This is why our strategic plan includes a systematic look at the 13 counties we serve that involves overlaying census data with our own data on where we currently distribute food. The results show us the specific areas where we need to focus our resources to better reach the families and individuals in need of food assistance.

Our 75 million meal goal is ambitious, and we need your support. Increasing the number of meals we distribute by 50 percent in five years won’t be possible without our food and fund donors, volunteers and advocates. We are incredibly thankful for your gifts of time, food and funds, all of which allow us to continue building bridges to help our hungry neighbors.

With your help, we can ensure no one goes hungry in northern Illinois.

Warmly,

Julie Yurko, president and CEO


Your generosity will brighten the day of hungry neighbors like Lisa, who we met at Holy Family Food Pantry in Waukegan. Lisa is a cancer survivor who stopped working during eight months of cancer treatment. She and her husband are now struggling to keep up with their bills on one income as they care for their 6-year-old grandson, Jaydin.

“Having the pantry here definitely helps to make ends meet,” Lisa said. “Things can be tough around the holidays, and when you are living on one income it seems like there is never an easy time. It is just such a blessing to be able to receive this food.”

Our Holiday Meal Box program is one way we work to bring joy to the holiday season for our hungry neighbors. Northern Illinois Food Bank staff and volunteers are busy putting together the boxes, which provide a family like Lisa’s with a 12-pound turkey, canned vegetables, fruit, instant mashed potatoes, gravy and dessert to feed up to eight people.

Getting more food to hungry neighbors

Joy … no better word describes the holiday season. Sadly, for the 600,000 children, seniors and families served annually by Northern Illinois Food Bank, the prospect of a joyful holiday can seem out of reach. Simply put, it is difficult to find a reason to celebrate without food on the table to share with loved ones. You can spread the joy of the holiday season and help provide a full plate for everyone by making a donation to Northern Illinois Food Bank. Each $10 you donate helps us provide $80 worth of groceries.

Send your donation back in the envelope attached to this newsletter or give online at www.SolveHungerToday.org/donate.

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Feeding America’s Hunger in America 2014 study was released in August and offers important insights about the people who seek food assistance in the 13 counties served by Northern Illinois Food Bank.

Conducted every four years, the study reveals that many of our neighbors in need are working. In fact, 77 percent of households include someone who worked for pay in the past 12 months. However, in many cases, our hungry neighbors’ incomes are not enough to make ends meet, as two-thirds of households have incomes at or below the poverty level.

As a result, our hungry neighbors are frequently faced with having to choose between food and other expenses. For example, more than three-fourths report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities in the past 12 months.

The following graphics further illustrate some of the important information the Hunger in America 2014 study reveals about who is hungry, the circumstances of their lives, the challenges they face and the tough choices they make.

**Number of People Served**

1 in 7

1 in 7 people in northern Illinois rely on Northern Illinois Food Bank and its partner feeding programs

71,500

Different people are served weekly by Northern Illinois Food Bank

600,000

Different people are served annually

**Age**

36%

are children under age 18

9%

are age 60 and older

**Employment**

77%

of households have a member that has worked for pay in the past 12 months

**Ethnicity**

- 40% White
- 17% Hispanic or Latino
- 10% Black or African-American
- 33% Other

**Health**

53% of households report at least one member with high blood pressure

26% of households report at least one member with diabetes

**Education**

78% of our hungry neighbors have a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED)

30% of our hungry neighbors have some post-high-school education (including a business/trade/technical degree, some college or a four-year degree)
Volunteer Appreciation

At the Northern Illinois Food Bank, we jump at any opportunity to show our gratitude to the legion of volunteers who come through our doors. After all, without volunteers, the process of sorting and repacking food for our hungry neighbors would grind to a halt. Our volunteers donated more than 120,000 hours of their time last year, and we are grateful for the more than 120,000 hours of their time last year, and we are grateful to everyone who lends a hand, whether they come once a week, once a month or once a year. We’d like to introduce you to the people who received Volunteer of the Year honors during volunteer appreciation events at our three centers this summer. In addition to having huge hearts and being willing to do whatever is asked to help the Food Bank, these selfless gentlemen all downplay their recognition. “For me this is a way to give back,” said Dave Grutze, our Northwest Center Volunteer of the Year. “I’m not looking for awards, accolades or a pat on the back. I’m in a position to help, so that’s what I do.”

There is no downplaying our appreciation for these three dedicated volunteers. Here are their stories:

Fred Bernsee
Hometown: Bloomingdale

Every Tuesday and Wednesday morning, you can find Fred working behind the scenes in the office at our West Suburban Center in Geneva. Logging monthly volunteer hours into the Food Bank’s volunteer database is a thankless but important task, and Fred tackles it with determination. The retired civil engineer is also a leader for other office volunteers and a valuable resource for the Food Bank.

“When I retired I needed some stuff to do,” said Fred, who began volunteering at the Food Bank in 2013. “I just want to help out society in general, and I really like the people at the Food Bank. Plus, it’s a great facility to work in.”

The Food Bank continues to reap the rewards from this decision, given Dave’s passion. Not only does he help sort frozen meat and canned goods every Tuesday and Thursday, but he is also a volunteer at Mobile Pantry distributions throughout the Rock River Valley. "For me this is a way to give back,” said Dave Grutze, our Northwest Center Volunteer of the Year. “I’m not looking for awards, accolades or a pat on the back. I’m in a position to help, so that’s what I do.”

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Dave Grutze
Hometown: Rockton

Hitting the golf course was not something that interested Dave when he took a buyout from his job in the airline business just over a year ago. Instead, his first choice for finding an outlet to fill his newfound free time was volunteering at our Northwest Center in Loves Park.

"I really enjoy the Mobile Pantries because they give you a chance to actually see the system at work,” Dave said. The Food Bank continues to reap the rewards from this decision, given Dave’s passion. Not only does he help sort frozen meat and canned goods every Tuesday and Thursday, but he is also a volunteer at Mobile Pantry distributions throughout the Rock River Valley. Often traveling great distances to help make sure these events go smoothly and to provide a smile to hungry neighbors. "I really enjoy the Mobile Pantries because they give you a chance to actually see the system at work,” Dave said.

Ken Paton
Hometown: Gurnee

It always helps to have a handyman available, and Ken fits the bill for our North Suburban Center in Park City. From organizing a cleaning supply area to building a wall to cordon off the volunteer area from the rest of the warehouse, Ken is willing to take on just about any project he is presented with. A regular on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings, he helps maintain quality control among volunteers while also making people smile and laugh with his easy-going manner. And when things get slow with Ken’s painting and decorating business, his first inclination is often to shift his focus elsewhere by stopping by the Food Bank to see how he can help out. “Every time I walk away from there I always feel energized and uplifted,” said Ken, who has volunteered since 2013. “I really appreciate that everyone is on the same page in terms of wanting to help as much as they can in the time they are there.”

To learn more, log on to www.SolveHungerToday.org/volunteer.
Disaster relief turns into long-term support

Barb Kent will never forget the support that poured into her community after a tornado roared through the Coal City and Diamond area last November, devastating a subdivision and damaging buildings throughout the rural villages.

“I’ve never seen so many people come together in such a short period of time,” said Barb, the director of Coal City Food Pantry. “The support was really overwhelming and I was totally amazed.”

Northern Illinois Food Bank was part of the support system thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters who responded to our call for help by donating more than $100,000 in disaster-relief funding. As we approach the one-year anniversary of the storm, the generosity continues to make a big impact.

Sending truckloads of food to areas affected by the storm was our immediate response, but the outpouring of support also allowed us to work with food pantries in Grundy and Will Counties that were in the path of the tornado to build their capacity for distributing more food and serving more hungry neighbors.

At Coal City Food Pantry, neighbors in need are receiving three extra days of food on every visit thanks to the disaster-relief funding. Additional food is also being distributed at a half-dozen other food pantries in Frankfurt, Manhattan, New Lenox and Wilmington.

While the temporary increase in food distribution is helpful, the disaster-relief funding’s deepest impact will be made through projects aimed at building long-term physical capacity.

Frankfort Township Food Pantry used the disaster-relief funding to purchase a two-door freezer, a two-door refrigerator, two carts and a generator. Elsewhere, New Life Church in New Lenox now offers hungry neighbors more choice in the food they receive, and Crossroads Community Church in New Lenox purchased a freezer and increased the number of households it serves.

“I’ve been here 12 years, and this is the first year our shelves weren’t bare in the summer,” said Jodi Gallagher-Dilling, director of Frankfort Township Food Pantry. “We’ve been so blessed by Northern Illinois Food Bank. I can’t be more grateful and thankful.”

For communities recovering from a disaster, the rebuilding process can take months and years. This is why Northern Illinois Food Bank turned its attention from temporary support to ways to strengthen the community for the long term once the need for immediate food assistance was met after last year’s storm.

In the Coal City and Diamond area, where the tornadoes were particularly damaging, the support is especially appreciated.

“Just the fact that we’ve been able to give more food has been a big help,” Barb said. “I would say we’re definitely in a better place.”

Generosity Update

Hunger Action Month

A little collaboration went a long way for Northern Illinois Food Bank and Crossroads Community Services during Hunger Action Month.

What began with an invitation to accept a joint proclamation from the City of Naperville turned into a community-wide campaign when the two organizations joined forces to raise awareness about the issue of hunger throughout September.

The fun started the morning of Sept. 4 as dozens of orange-clad residents came together in downtown Naperville to kick off Go Orange Day. The impromptu flash mob attracted local television and radio outlets and helped bring attention to the month-long festivities.

Food drives were held throughout September at City Hall, the Naperville Park District and the following downtown businesses: Country Cutlery, Egg Harbor, Launch Digital Marketing, Naperville General Store, Q-BBQ and Two Bostons. Naperville’s Millennium Carillon Bell Tower was bathed in orange light for a week, and downtown restaurants Noodles & Co., Q-BBQ and Rosedale all hosted Dine Out For Hunger fundraising events.

Credit goes to Jody Pettigrew, communications specialist at Northern Illinois Food Bank, and Jody Bender, director of community engagement at Loaves & Fishes. With less than a month to work out the details, the duo reached out to the Downtown Naperville Alliance and got to work.

Launch Digital Marketing is one business that became an especially key partner. The Naperville-based marketing agency developed the tagline “Jump For Food!” to accompany the campaign and created the website www.JumpForFood.com to serve as a hub for information about Naperville’s Hunger Action Month efforts.

For Loaves & Fishes, which is well known in Naperville for serving close to 600 families each week through its food distribution and outreach services, the broad scope of the Hunger Action Month campaign marked a big accomplishment.

“The Food Bank’s support in this was enormous because we had not done anything like this before on a city-wide level for Hunger Action Month,” Jody said. “Brandon has been amazing with organizing and coordinating everything. He’s made this an enjoyable collaboration.”

In turn, the Food Bank was able to form new partnerships in the thriving Naperville community and lay the foundation for future outreach opportunities. Plans are in the works to expand Naperville’s Jump For Food concept and bring in schools and other organizations with hopes of making the city’s Hunger Action Month campaign even bigger in 2015.

“I believe this is just the beginning,” Jody said. “The ultimate goal is to keep growing awareness and helping families.”

With the generous support of donors like you, we can be ready to respond in times of need throughout the year while also working toward our number one goal: ending hunger.

Jodi Gallagher-Dilling, director of Frankfort Township Food Pantry

Hunger Action Month a success

Thank you to everyone who went orange and helped raise awareness of hunger in September.

Supporters from all corners of the Food Bank’s 13-county service area got involved by turning their social media profiles orange, sharing their Go Orange Day photos, volunteering at the Food Bank or a local food pantry and hosting food and fund drives.

Food Bank representatives accepted proclamations and spoke at 22 county, city and village meetings during September.

Municipalities and public libraries in Batavia, Bloomington, Crest Hill, Downers Grove, Lisle, Lockport, Montgomery, Naperville, Oswego, Plainfield, Romeoville, Roselle and Wheaton also got involved by organizing food drives and hosting Hunger Action Month displays.

Join us in keeping up the momentum from Hunger Action Month by continuing to spread awareness about hunger throughout the year!

Community organizations looking to work with the Food Bank to develop their Hunger Action Month efforts in 2015 can contact Brandon Pettigrew at bpettigrew@northernilfoodbank.org or 630-443-6910 ext. 170.
Thank you to everyone who attended the 2nd Annual Stars and Cars presented by Fifth Third Bank at Greenbelt Cultural Center in North Chicago. The event featured classic automobiles from Northshore Sportscars, local celebrities and tastings from top restaurants, all while helping raise funds to provide more food to our hungry neighbors.

Special thanks are reserved for honorary chair Brian McCaskey, Chicago Bears senior director of business development, for once again making Stars and Cars a great success. We are also grateful to Ravi Baichwal from ABC 7 News for serving as the event’s emcee.

Look for photos in the next edition of The Full Plate or view them now on Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Facebook page. Stars and Cars was made possible thanks to Fifth Third Bank, Grainger, Nicor Gas and other generous supporters.

In this issue we feature Mark Walden, the 2014 recipient of the Jeanne M. Mulroy Volunteer Supervisor of the Year award. Mark has been a volunteer supervisor at Northern Illinois Food Bank for almost two years. On Saturdays he is known for being one of the first volunteers to arrive, often with donuts in hand, and one of the last to leave.

Why did you initially get involved with Northern Illinois Food Bank?
I was looking for something that would get me away from my 10-hours-per-day job and help me feel more fulfilled. As it happens, I have also found many friends at the Food Bank.

What is your favorite Food Bank moment?
I have way too many, but I’d have to say it was pushing a pallet of bread up the shrink-wrap ramp only to find boxes falling all over the place.

What are your hobbies?
I really enjoy listening to music. I can spend numerous hours per week perusing iTunes looking to add songs to my library. Bocce ball is a good time. And finally, I have to admit I am guilty of binge watching a TV series here and there.

What is your favorite quote?
“Simplicity is the result of profound thought.” I literally got it in a fortune cookie.

What do you like most about Northern Illinois Food Bank?
The Food Bank is just an amazing organization on so many levels. Most important is the conduit it provides for getting food where it is needed the most. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for growers, processors, manufacturers and retailers to support the Food Bank in many ways. It also provides the people living in the community with the opportunity to donate time, money and food. Finally, it provides a place where young people can learn to give back.

Our sincere thanks to everyone who attended the Hunger Scramble presented by West Suburban Bank at Prairie Landing Golf Club.

New look for SolveHungerToday.org
Northern Illinois Food Bank’s online presence recently underwent a makeover with the redesign of our website, SolveHungerToday.org. In addition to being sleeker, more visual and easier to use, the new look incorporates a more responsive design for mobile and tablet users.

With information about ways to get involved, details on upcoming events, stories about the Food Bank’s impact in the community and much more, the new SolveHungerToday.org is the perfect destination for anyone interested in helping our hungry neighbors.

Northern Illinois Food Bank has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for the 11th consecutive year. This puts the Food Bank in the class of only one percent of all charities nationwide that have earned the distinction from America’s largest independent charity evaluator over the same period of time.

Charity Navigator four-star recognition
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Upcoming Activities

See our complete calendar of events at www.SolveHungerToday.org

NOVEMBER
Volunteer Theme Night: 50s Night
Nov. 20 (5-7 p.m.)
Register at www.SolveHungerToday.org/volunteer
Location: West Suburban Center, Geneva

DECEMBER
Volunteer Theme Night: Holiday Sweater
Dec. 16 (6-8:30 p.m.)
Register at www.SolveHungerToday.org/volunteer
Location: West Suburban Center, Geneva

ONGOING
Bimbo Bakeries Fights Hunger
Through Dec. 31
For every seasonal baked good sold, Bimbo Bakeries will donate 5 cents to Northern Illinois Food Bank on behalf of Jewel-Osco.
Location: Jewel-Osco store locations.

Check Out Hunger
Through Jan. 1, 2015
Help feed our hungry neighbors by donating to Northern Illinois Food Bank at the register of your local Ultra Foods.
Location: Ultra Foods store locations

Still time to give
Make a donation by Dec. 31 to receive a year-end tax deduction.
To donate, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Donate

Host a food and fund drive
Food drives are needed throughout the year, and many people choose to donate money in addition to food items. To host a food/ fund drive, contact Hanah Papp at hpapp@northernilfoodbank.org

Bank of America Give A Meal

Through Dec. 31
For every $1 donated through Give A Meal, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation will give $2 more, offering donors the opportunity to triple their impact. Donate at bankofamerica.com/give. Be sure to enter your zip code and designate “Your Local Food Bank” as the destination for your gift.

“Like” us on Facebook to find out the latest happenings at the Food Bank.

Send comments/questions about articles in this issue to ejacobsen@northernilfoodbank.org