



## ***Hunger In America 2006***

### **Local Report for Long Island: Executive Summary**

An estimated 259,000 Long Islanders turn to a soup kitchen, food pantry or emergency shelter for help with food each year. 93,000 of them are children.

More than two out of every five people who seek help from such emergency food programs on Long Island must choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage, and more than one out of four must choose between food and medicine or medical care.

These are some of the findings of Hunger in America 2006, a national study conducted by America's Second Harvest – the Nation's Food Bank Network (A2H). The study, conducted every four years, gathers information on programs and agencies served by A2H's network of food banks and food rescue organizations and the clients of their emergency food programs (soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters). The national effort included collecting data from more than 52,000 emergency food program clients and 30,000 agencies. The data was analyzed by Mathematica Policy Research to provide statistics at the national, state, and local levels.

Island Harvest, Long Island's Source Authority on Food Rescue, and Long Island Cares – The Harry Chapin Food Bank are the two Long Island members of A2H. Together, we serve about 787 emergency food programs and other community-based non-profit programs, all of which are addressing the serious problem of people struggling to get enough to eat in one of the wealthiest regions of the country. The local results are based on surveys of clients of emergency food programs that receive donated food from Island Harvest, Long Island Cares, or both.

This report summarizes the key findings of the Long Island report of Hunger in America 2006, including demographics of the 259,000 individuals served and characteristics of the agencies supplying food to them.

#### **The Face of Hunger on Long Island**

Like Long Island's overall population, the individuals receiving food from emergency food programs represent a broad range of demographics.

- About 37% are non-Hispanic white, 32% are non-Hispanic black, 23% are Hispanic and the rest are from other racial or ethnic groups
- 54% are women
- More than one third (36%) are children (under 18)
- 15%, or about 39,000, are senior citizens (65 or older)
- 4% are homeless

- 85% are U.S. citizens
- Among client households with children under 18, 45% are single-parent households
- Among individuals visiting an emergency food program, 62% have at least a high school diploma

The study also found that having a job does not guarantee having enough to eat. Nearly half (47%) of the Long Island households that rely on emergency food programs include at least one employed adult. Nor are Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients protected from need—34% and 23% of client households reported receiving income from these programs, respectively. In contrast, only 14% of households had received money from traditional welfare programs (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and General Assistance) in the previous month. 9% of households had no income at all, and overall, 57% of households had incomes below the federal poverty threshold in the previous month—which means that as many as 43% had incomes above the poverty line, but still had to turn to an emergency food program.

Among the other findings about the members of households served by emergency food programs was the fact that, despite government programs designed to keep children from going hungry, families with kids were more likely to experience food insecurity than those without, and about as likely to be experiencing hunger. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” while hunger is defined as “the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of food”. Among all households surveyed, 69% were food insecure and 25% were experiencing hunger. But among households with children under 18, those numbers jumped to 76% and 24%, respectively.

#### Tough Choices

Hunger in America 2006 found that 56% of households served by emergency food programs had to choose between paying for food and paying for necessities like utilities, housing, and medicine:

- 42% had to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel
- 45% had to choose between buying food and paying their rent or mortgage
- 28% reported having to choose between food and medicine or medical care
- 17% of all client households reported having faced all three of these situations in the last year

#### The Importance of the Emergency Food Program Network

The study shows the importance of emergency food programs in bridging the gap between people’s resources and their nutritional needs. In many cases government food assistance was not enough or was not accessible. Although 58% of households surveyed had applied for food stamps, only 27% were currently receiving them, and for those, the monthly allocation lasted an average of 2.6 weeks. 44% of families with preschool children participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and 54% participated in school lunch programs.

Only 14% of these families participated in summer food programs, meant to provide a nutritious lunch during the summer months. This disparity might be explained by the fact that 46% of the households surveyed did not have a working car, which could limit them to getting help at locations accessible by public transportation or within walking distance. The results suggest that these families turn to emergency food programs instead, since 38% of food pantries, 36% of

soup kitchens, and 13% of shelters surveyed reported that they serve many more children during the summer than in other seasons.

#### The Agencies on the Front Lines

In any given week, emergency food programs on Long Island serve about 44,000 people. Although the overwhelming majority (97%) of clients surveyed were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the amount of food they received from their emergency food program, 47% of the pantries and 32% of the kitchens that had turned away clients in the previous year had done so due to a lack of food. Funding and food supply are the biggest challenges faced by these emergency food programs as they work to serve growing numbers of people (67% of pantries, 54% of kitchens, and 32% of shelters reported that there had been an increase since 2001 in the number of clients who came to their sites).

These agencies are heavily faith-based and volunteer-driven, the study found. 74% of pantries, 53% of kitchens and 27% of shelters are run by faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious organizations (however, it should be noted that Island Harvest and Long Island Cares do not serve agencies that have a religious participation requirement). 90% of pantries, 88% of kitchens, and 54% of shelters use volunteers, with 51% of pantries and 59% of kitchens relying entirely on volunteers, having no paid staff at all.

Food rescue organizations and food banks are by far the most important source of food for the emergency food programs, accounting for 65% of the food used by pantries, 39% of kitchens’ food, and 40% of shelters’ food. Although all emergency food programs had other food resources, including donations from religious congregations, government commodity programs, and direct purchases, most rely on Island Harvest and Long Island Cares to survive. 91% of pantries, 68% of kitchens, and 83% of shelters believed that the elimination of the food rescue organization or food bank would have a “significant” or “devastating” impact on their programs.

#### Conclusion

Long Island’s hungry are a vast and varied population that includes all races and ethnicities, ages, and education levels. About 93,000 of them are children, and another 39,000 are senior citizens. Almost half the affected households include at least one employed adult, and the average annual household income is \$13,440. More than half of them must choose between food and other necessities. They turn to a network of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters to make ends meet. These agencies are largely faith-based and rely heavily on volunteers and on the food they receive from Long Island Cares and Island Harvest. Without us, many of these emergency food programs would not be able to provide the much-needed safety net they currently offer their clients.