

## **Food Banks and Childhood Obesity**

For more than two decades, food banks have been the warehouses and trucks that provide millions of pounds of food to member charities and congregations, which in turn directly provide food to people in need. Food banks distribute food that has been donated by companies and individuals and provided through the USDA's commodity programs. As such, food banks' shelves are largely a reflection of the food flowing through the overall food system in America. In recent years, food banks increasingly have become the local clearinghouses for hunger information, education, and policy in their communities.

### **How can Food Banks and other emergency food providers help prevent and reduce Childhood Obesity?**

#### **1. Educate the board and the staff.**

Alameda County Community Food Bank's board and staff have begun discussing the connections between their work to end hunger and the overweight and obesity rates among their clients. One proposal was to stop accepting soda donations and therefore stop providing soda to member charities and congregations – and pull the soda machines from staff break rooms, too. After much discussion, the food bank decided instead to start with education: information about soda is now posted by the soda available in the warehouse and in the break rooms. A huge bag of sugar by the soda vividly makes the point about nutritional content!

*For more information, contact Suzan Walkup Bateson, Executive Director, at [sbateson@secondharvest.org](mailto:sbateson@secondharvest.org)*

#### **2. Recruit new food donors.**

Eleven food banks in Northern and Central California banded together to launch "The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Initiative," which aims to move surplus produce from California's growers and packers quickly and safely through the food bank network. In its first two years, the program worked with four packers to provide more than 750,000 pounds of fresh fruit to families. *For more information, contact Terry Witzel, Food Solicitor, Food Banks of Northern California, at [twitzel@secondharvest.org](mailto:twitzel@secondharvest.org)*

#### **3. Educate current food donors.**

Food banks constantly seek high-quality donations from all corporate donors, such as grocery stores and food manufacturers, and from individuals contributing in food drives. This year, for the first time in history, more food came into the national food bank network from the USDA than from corporate donors. As a result, food banks are beginning to dialogue with USDA about the nutritional content of those commodities. *For more information, contact Kim Wade, Education & Advocacy Director, Food Banks of Northern California, at [kwade@ccfb.org](mailto:kwade@ccfb.org)*

#### **4. Educate clients about nutritious eating habits.**

While food banks are primarily focused on improving the quality of food available to our clients, some food banks do provide nutrition education. A major partner in this effort has been the State of California's "5 A Day" campaign, whose posters and flyers have been enthusiastically received by hundreds of congregations and charities in the food banks' networks. *For more information, see [www.dhs.ca.gov/cpns/](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/cpns/)*

#### **5. Improve our clients' access to other nutritious meals.**

Food banks are increasingly working to insure maximum access to food stamps and to school and community meals funded by the federal government. We know that food stamps lead to better nutrition in low-income people's shopping, but only ½ of all eligible Californians receive them; that school meals can be the healthiest meals a child receives, but only 2 in 5 low-income children get a school breakfast; and that WIC provides nutritious foods to low-income kids and moms, but requires more funding to serve all those in need. Education and advocacy by food banks is promoting solutions to all of these problems. *For more information, contact Kim Wade, Education & Advocacy Director, Food Banks of Northern California, at [kwade@ccfb.org](mailto:kwade@ccfb.org)*