

REPORT OF FINDINGS HUNGER

INTRODUCTION:

Why is California called the “Golden State”? It might be because 15 of the 20 wealthiest cities in the nation are in California; 5 of those cities are right here in Orange County (OC). How is it that we live in such an affluent county and according to Second Harvest, more than 301,000 people are at risk for hunger each month, and more than 117,00 children are at risk for hunger? These numbers are on the rise, placing the OC as ranking second in the state for food insecurity. Food insecurity is not having enough food to eat and a lack of access to a variety of nutritional food and is directly linked to income inequality.

A lack of access to food affects people of all ages and living conditions. Data reveals that a high number of students qualify for free and reduced lunch through the Federal Title 1 program (see Title I Federal data). The California State University (CSU) system reports that 1 in 5 CSU and 1 in 10 attending a University of California school do not have access to adequate nutrition. This is a huge challenge when the brain is craving glucose to learn. Included here are an increasing number of Seniors who need support for access to healthy food and water due to high living and medical costs.

Since 2010, Temple Beth Sholom has prepared and delivered food to local shelters and facilities, including Santa Ana Community College, weekly. An average of 1,000 meals are provided through donations and volunteers. A community focus on hunger and its related remedies through legislative action, increased direct service and community partnership can expand the work that began with the Mitzvah Meal project, while addressing action designed to reduce and eliminate the causative factors of hunger.

JEWISH VALUES:

Rabbi Richard Steinberg stated that, “no matter where one stands on the Jewish spectrum, there is no escaping that Judaism is mitzvah-centric.” This is to say that Jews are ‘people of deeds.’ Although the advancement of good causes is highly valued in Judaism, ‘being’ Jewish is not complete without ‘doing’ Jewish. ‘Doing’ Jewish is measured by doing ‘righteous deeds’.... because mitzvot are the center of Jewish existence.” In other words, actions evolve based on belief and commandment.

As a *people of the book*, we turn to the Torah for daily, life-long guidance. The following are just three of many references from Torah that guide and reinforce our call to action.

- Leviticus 19:9-10 “You shall not pick your vineyard bare or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD, I am your G-d.”
- Deuteronomy 24:19-22 “When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow.”
- Deuteronomy 15:7-8 “If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land, that the LORD, your G-d is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsmen. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient resources for whatever he needs.”

CAMPAIGN GOAL: Eliminate Income Inequality

“Income or economic inequality covers a wide variety of topics. It can refer to either income distribution or the distribution of wealth. Income inequality is the root cause of food deficiency. Besides measurements between countries or states, there are important types of economic inequality between groups of people.” (Wikipedia)

Another view of income inequality is that it “is an extreme concentration of wealth or income in the hands of a small percentage of a population” or “the gap between the richest and the rest.” (Investopedia)

Some current facts are;

- The richest 1% of the US population possesses 38.6% of the nation's wealth (2017)
- The bottom 90% holds 22.8%
- Top 1% brings in 23.8% of all income
- Between 1963 to 2016, the poorest 10% went from zero assets to being \$1,000.00 in debt.
- Although increasing since 1980, women of all races are paid 81.8% of the salaries paid to men.
- By race the hourly average wage for males is Asian \$24.00, White, \$21.00, Blacks, \$15.00, Hispanic, \$14.00.

Other areas of statistical importance could be age and income, family structure: single parent, number in family, number of adults working, etc., price of housing, rental and single family, medical applications, and rising cost of medication and medical services.

While providing immediate support for hunger, action and advocacy should address legislative action addressing the impact of the above listed statistics.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP:

After researching several organizations in Orange County, representatives of the Hunger committee met with the Development Associate and toured the Irvine distribution center of the Second Harvest Food Bank (Second Harvest). Second Harvest is a member of the Feeding America Food Bank Network and is the largest hunger relief organization in Orange County.

We learned that Second Harvest has well defined goals to guide the strategic plan they developed 5 years ago. Their plan states the following;

- Mission: To end hunger in Orange County
- Vision: together we are creating a future in which no one goes hungry. EVER.
- Values: Compassion, Diversity, Integrity, Service Excellence, Stewardship.

The Action Plan of their Mission, Vision and Values represents a wide range approach in addressing the elimination of hunger. Since the implementation of their strategic plan, Second Harvest has;

- *strengthening partners* who, at a current number of 180, represent 300 distribution locations
- *feeding children* through age 18 with 48 mobile school pantries and 1-6 permanent school pantries
- *feeding families* by increasing from 12 to 18 refrigerated trucks and from 500 to 700 mobile pantry stops, as well as increasing CalFresh applications from 1,352 to 4,473
- *feeding seniors* at 40 senior grocery program sites from dry to fresh

ADVOCACY: STATE AND LOCAL ACTION:

(move up from below.....add California Equal Pay Act: Labor Code section 1197.5 and section 432.3)

EXAMPLES OF LEGISLATION THAT HAS PASSED - 2018

AB 1957 Social Services Modernization, Efficiency & Due Process Protection Act of 2018: directs counties to maximize electronic means of communication & verification of information. (Berman)

AB1871 Charter Schools: Charter School students have access to Free and Reduced school meals. (Bonta)

AB1892 Initiate a workgroup to rethink impact and advise an action plan to improve distribution of produce and increase access to low-income consumers. (Jones-Sawyer)

AB1894 Will address college student hunger by allowing the CSU Chancellor to apply the Restaurant Meal Program on all CSU campuses even if the county does not participate. (Weber)

WIDE-SCALE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT:

Second Harvest Food Bank

- *Food Distribution Center* – Individual sorting and packing
- Corporate and *Community Group* sorting and packing shifts
- *Izzy's Corner* (for children 7-13) – children and parents will package food that will be distributed to families, seniors and others
- *Ambassadors* will 'spread the word' by speaking to groups and individuals to distribute information at fairs and community events
- *Special Events* need *volunteers* who assist with events throughout the OC
- *Skilled Volunteers* will share their talents and skills
- *Advisory Group* will participate in tracking state and federal policy development

Opportunities for Temple Beth Sholom participation:

- Establish a Second Harvest pantry
- Regular food donations program, including gift cards
- Weekly News announcements through media communication regarding volunteer opportunities
- Continue to support and expand TBS Mitzvah Meals volunteer program
- Legislative advocacy committee can monitor, inform and communicate all information and recent action related to hunger
- Education workshops throughout the year (i.e. nutrition, healthy meals, etc.)
- Develop a TBS garden to grow produce for distribution and/or Mitzvah Meals
- Organize a directory of local food distribution locations

SUMMARY:

The focus on hunger will ensure congregational attention to a primary survival need that is affecting over 300,000 of our neighbors in Orange County while addressing the broader cause of hunger, poverty. Poverty and hunger are parallel issues, therefore, we must monitor benefits to the poor at the local, state and federal levels, minimum wage increases and

decreases, support for bills that address related educational issues and taxes, including property taxes and zoning, just to name a few.

As poverty decreases, hunger will decrease. Our actions and diligence in addressing hunger at its core will impact the greater goal of income inequality as we 'do Jewish' as members of Temple Beth Shalom.