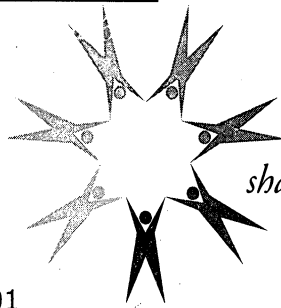


# Department of Human Service Programs



*sharing resources...building community*

**Date:** June 12, 2001

**To:** Robert W. Healy, City Manager

**From:** Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services

**Subject:** Council Order #0-16, dated 4/23/01 RE: Information on the tracking of the hunger population

## Overview

Within the food and nutrition services community, there is no comprehensive mechanism for tracking users of the system or for measuring hunger. Most indicators come from utilization of various food programs, and in many cases, households may be accessing multiple programs for which they qualify. Furthermore, there is no specific breakdown of "youth" versus "adult" in the hunger and food security information, except where the source is clearly youth focused (i.e. public schools).

The decentralized nature of food and nutrition services, along with the stigma some people feel requesting help obtaining food, impacts the detail of available information.

Qualifying for the Food Stamp program, currently the target of an advocacy-driven statewide Food Stamp Improvement Initiative, has long been considered very difficult. Food Stamp recipients may experience additional embarrassment when they use the coupons in grocery stores. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program has been more successful in making participation easy, pleasant and acceptable in the concept of health improvement. Utilization of food programs in the schools decreases as students grow older, and can also be stigmatizing despite the best of intentions. While people may feel embarrassed to use food pantries, many choose this method of food assistance because they feel relatively well treated at the pantries, and eligibility screening may not be as stringent as it is in some other programs.

Through its annual public hearing process, the Human Services Commission identified hunger as an important issue for the Commission to address with the department this year. Two initiatives are being explored. 1) Staff are working with City and non city programs that have outreach workers to explore the possibility that existing outreach workers can be trained to enroll individuals and families in the food stamp program. This is important since, as described below, food stamps are a significant way to meet food needs and the program is seriously underutilized. 2) Staff are working with the food pantry network to expand home delivery of meals, since this has also been identified as an important need.

Jill Herold  
Assistant City Manager

Ellen Semonoff  
Deputy Directorx

Childcare & Family  
Support Services

Commission for  
Persons with Disabilities

Community Schools

Community  
Learning Center

Coordinating Council for  
Children, Youth and Families  
(Kids' Council)

Council on Aging;  
Elderly Services

Low Income  
Fuel Assistance

Multi-Service Center;  
Homeless Services

Office of Workforce  
Development

Planning & Development

Recreation

Youth



As more information is available on these two initiatives, we will provide an update.

Outlined below are specific data sources relevant to Cambridge. Some track utilization of food programs, others describe the diverse range of people who access supplementary or emergency food services.

### **Cambridge pantries and meals**

- The Food Pantry Network managed by CEOC includes 9 pantries, and served an estimated 13,775 persons in FY00. This number is about four times the number from 1998. Note that CEOC cannot obtain individual, unduplicated counts of participants.
- Food for Free delivers fresh produce to 34 meal and pantry sites in Cambridge.
- There are 21 community meals open to the general public each week in Cambridge. While some participants are homeless, many others are individuals residing in the community, as well as some families.
- The Senior Center pantry is available for weekly use, and serves 242 seniors in a given month. This pantry notes an increase in immigrants using the pantry, as well as people residing in shelters. A large number of pantry users are aging in place, and becoming less physically able to come to the pantry and transport groceries home. It was noted that after each pantry session, 10-15 seniors who refuse to sign up for pantry food, wait to take leftovers home with them.
- The Pentecostal Tabernacle pantry works slightly differently. People needing food leave messages, and church volunteers contact them to set up an appointment at the pantry or to arrange for home deliver to the aged or disabled. This pantry serves 22-25 households a month, mostly repeat clients.
- The Human Services Commission recently met with Food for Free and several pantries to hear about their recent experiences in assisting Cambridge households and to discuss ways to serve more who are in need. Each pantry tends to serve a distinct clientele, and to experience problems related to that group. Margaret Fuller House, while serving a variety of residents, has a core clientele of about 80 low-wage earning families with children. Staff observe that most of these families do not use Food Stamps, and are only able to stretch their budgets to cover the month by visiting four different pantries a month. (Many pantries only offer one visit per month per household.) At Margaret Fuller House pantry, participants receive a well-balanced package adequate for 3-5 days worth of meals, valued at \$60-\$80. Unemployed people using the pantry tend to stop using the pantry once they have obtained employment. Middle aged unskilled persons with disabilities make up another group at the Margaret Fuller pantry.
- The Somerville/Cambridge Elder Services Nutrition Program served 3,100 participants in FY'00, approximately half of which are Cambridge residents. About 37% of the total of meals served were at congregate sites, with the remainder served by home delivery.

### **Youth data**

- The Teen Health Survey (2000) asked high school participants whether "In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry because there was not enough money to buy food for your home?" Of 1405 respondents, 116 (8%) said yes. When the same question was posed on the Middle Grades Health Survey

(1999) asked whether, "In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry because there was not enough money to buy food for your home?" Of 1509 respondents, 77 (5%) said yes, but it is uncertain whether the high school and middle school differences are significant, or whether younger students have less awareness and understanding of family problems and issues. In general, the numbers of students reporting hunger have increased over the years as the surveys have been administered.

- Participation in the free and reduced price lunch program in the public schools is 47%. Eleven schools offer free breakfast because ~40% of students utilizing the lunch program receive free or reduced priced meals.
- The summer meal program operated out of DHSP served 85,915 meals to children last summer. The average daily attendance was 996 children.
- The 2001 Cambridge Public Health Assessment refers to "...about 40% of the public school students, aged 10-14, are overweight or obese. Every year about half the students fail the physical activity assessments conducted in the schools" (page 96). Childhood obesity is receiving attention from food program advocates because of its relationship to nutrition and a family's access to nutritious food.

### **Family**

- Currently, 719 Cambridge households participate in the Food Stamp program. This number is approximately half the number of participants in 1998, and well below the estimated number of households eligible for food stamps. Some providers theorize that many former recipients of Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children do not understand that, even if they are employed, they may still qualify for Food Stamps and other benefits if their wages are relatively low.
- A total of 1671 individuals (mothers and children) are served by the two WIC offices located in Cambridge, a number that has remained remarkably constant since 1996. These WIC offices serve people who do not live in Cambridge, and Cambridge residents may use WIC offices outside of Cambridge if they are more convenient for any reason. (we are attempting to get Camb. Resident numbers.)





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**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT**

*Robert W. Healy, City Manager   Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager*

June 18, 2001

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 01-185, regarding a report on tracking the hunger population, received from Assistant City Manager for Human Services Jill Herold.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "H" and "Y".

Robert W. Healy  
City Manager

RWH/mec  
Attachment



2585

**Consent Agenda #19**

Awaiting Report Item  
Number 01-185, regarding  
tracking the hunger  
population.

**In City Council June 18, 2001**

**PLACED ON FILE**