

The Connector

Fall 2008

A publication of



Poverty on the Rise

I was saddened to read about the increase in the poverty rate for Kent County (August 27, GR Press). I work with anti-hunger and poverty programs every day, yet I was shocked by the number of Grand Rapids residents (22,497 in 2007 vs. 13,957 in 2000) living in “extreme poverty” which is \$10,325 annually for a family of four. How do they survive?

While many of us are dismayed at the escalating price of food and gasoline, these folks aren’t buying these essentials at all. Evidence of this is the alarming increase in families relying on food pantries to feed their families – over 7,000 served in Kent County in July. This safety net is ready to burst at the seams and we need both private and government response to hold it together.

Everyone can help. Fall food drives and holiday programs begin soon. Volunteers and donations are needed more than ever. Congress should act quickly in September to reduce poverty and boost the economy by increasing aid for home heating (how do you pay your gas bill on a \$10,000 annual income?), unemployment, Medicaid programs and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Setting a national goal to reduce poverty is long overdue. Our high poverty rate shows how badly such a commitment is needed.

Marsha DeHollander
ACCESS Program Director
(Grand Rapids Press “Letter to the Editor” 9/4/08)

County Wide Food Drive is Saturday, October 11

You can make a difference in the lives of nearly 7,000 households who use the ACCESS Pantry Network each month. Pantries help fill the gap for individuals who struggle to make ends meet because of scarce jobs or low wages. The number of individuals who use the pantry system is increasing and the need is getting higher. Our goal is to re-stock pantry shelves that have been depleted over the busy summer months. Join over 1,700 volunteers in collecting healthy foods and personal care items. Sign up on our website at www.accessofwestmichigan.org or call 616-774-2175.

Join us in thanking our sponsors: D&W and Family Fare Supermarkets, The Grand Rapids Press, Mercantile Bank of Michigan, 91.3 WCSG, and Presto Print.

Five reasons to volunteer as a family:

It’s a great teaching tool

It has lasting effects

Giving time is priceless

It’s a good real-world experience

Volunteering as a family is quality time

(The Grand Rapids Press, 1/8/06)

Reflections

..... from the Executive Director/CEO

Summer is over and the children are back in school. And if you are like my wife and I (a few years ago), you will sigh with relief that they are back in school. The food pantries in Kent County are relieved a little too, because when children are home all day they eat constantly and that places a larger burden on the food supply in all the pantries. However, this year it is a little different than last year.

The food pantries in Kent County are faced with this:

In the month of July, 21,512 men, women, and children received food services in the Kent County pantries. Unfortunately, this figure continues to grow.

With the State of Michigan's economy the way it is, we do not know when this figure will start to go down. We pray that it will be soon.

The pantries in our community are facing a crisis. The only way that they are even staying close to the increased demand is through your generous help with food and dollar donations.

The ACCESS Operational Second Mile caseworkers are faced with this:

In the month of July, 273 new assistance cases were opened with 95 cases still active from the month of June. These assistance cases were for food, medical, shelter, transportation, clothing, and utilities.

We need your help with this ever increasing demand.

Please prayerfully consider making a donation to ACCESS of West Michigan, to help us keep up with the increasing demand the food pantries and our Operation Second Mile Program face with every day.

Bruce Schlanderer
Executive Director/CEO

Calling all Holiday Providers!



We are preparing for increased holiday basket requests this year. Can you help? Requests for ACCESS food pantry

services are rising to record numbers. Whether it has been many years since you donated holiday baskets or you are a regular provider, or you have never provided a holiday basket before, we need your help more than ever. Requests for Christmas baskets far outnumber Thanksgiving basket requests, so please consider increasing the number of Christmas baskets you can provide. It is easy to sign up. Go to the ACCESS website and fill in the Holiday Giving Network web form or call Nancy at 774-2175 x 105. Sign up today – we are eager to hear from you.

If you know of someone in need of a holiday basket, tell them to call the holiday hotline at 459-2625. Registration starts October 1st. Help spread the word to sign-up early!

Care Week Food Drive: Kids Caring for Kids

During the week of November 10-14, we expect 25 Southwest area schools to participate in this huge food collection effort to benefit their neighborhood pantries. Many schools include a hunger education component during the food drive. Contests between classes and/or schools are fun for the students and increase the donations. If you are involved with a school in the Grandville, Wyoming or Byron Center area, be sure they are signed up for Care Week. Schools outside of the SW area may want to begin a similar effort in their own communities – contact ACCESS for more information.

Caseworker Corner

Operation Second Mile (OSM) warmly welcomes, Elizabeth Van Stee, a new intern for the fall semester from Calvin College. She is a senior Social Work major and will be assisting the ACCESS caseworkers with casework, administrative duties and workshop facilitation during the busy fall season.

OSM will be presenting two workshops this fall. The first is a Benevolence 101 training held at Grand Rapids International Fellowship on Tuesday, October 14th. The afternoon training will take place from 1-3pm and the evening session from 7-9pm. This is a two-hour session provided for area deacons, pastors, volunteers and church staff who work in the area of benevolence in their ministry and would like to know how they can work with ACCESS to meet the emergency needs in the community.

The second workshop offered this fall is a one-hour-long, brown bag lunch training on Tuesday, November 4th from noon till one at the Hartley Center. This training will be facilitated by Child Protective Services as they cover the details of Mandated Reporting of child abuse and neglect.

There is no charge for these workshops. If you are interested in attending these trainings, please rsvp to caseworker@accessofwestmichigan.org.

“Living on the Edge...” Can you survive a month in poverty?

“This was very eye-opening and educational. This is a good program and really made me sensitive to people in this situation; makes me want to help.”

-Simulation Participant

ACCESS invites you to attend a Poverty Simulation - a 2 1/2 hour program of experiential learning which provides a multitude of possibilities. Participants assume the role of various kinds of family members, living in the state of poverty. Volunteers and ACCESS staff create a village of stores and agencies with which families will interact for four 15-minute “weeks”. The community includes a grocer, police, pawnbroker, food pantry, employment agency, utility company and bank, as well as Department of Human Services. Facilitated discussion allows the group to take the experience even further, fostering understanding and giving insight into life in poverty.

Upcoming Poverty Simulation Dates:

October 15	November 5	November 18
GR Community College	Mars Hill Church	GR Community
5:00PM	6:30PM	College

Contact Betsy Thompson at 774-2175 ext. 102 for a reservation or e-mail questions to: betsy@accessofwestmichigan.org

Brochures are also available.



Attention Youth Pastors!

Souper Bowl Sunday is February 1

Join with other congregations to be a part of the Souper Bowl of Caring Sunday to collect money for those in our community who are hungry. It's a fun and easy way to tackle the problem of hunger.

It's Simple: Encourage members of your congregation to "kick in" a dollar each on Super Bowl Sunday for those in need. Have kids from your youth groups collect contributions using soup pots. Send your donations to your local pantry or to the ACCESS Pantry Network which serves all of Kent County.

Let us know if you are planning to participate or if you need promotional items. Call or email Mandy at 774-2175 x 109 or mandy@accessofwestmichigan.org or go to www.souperbowl.org for more information.

Volunteer Opportunity

The Holiday Giving Network program needs volunteers to assist with taking applications at various food pantries during October and November. Bilingual skills are especially needed. Contact ACCESS at 774-2175 for pantry locations and times.

Volunteers are wanted for the Kent County Sheriff Department's Victim Service Unit.

For a job description or more information, contact Sandy Jones at 616-632-6221

For details on these dates or for more information or questions, please contact ACCESS at 616-774-2175 or check us out on the web at www.accessofwestmichigan.org

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