

A Story of Compassion

USDA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Community Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Indiana Fort Wayne, Indiana

Patricia Stevens is a 50 year-old resident of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Two years ago, during a time of general lay-offs in the region, she was let go from a position that she had held for two and a half years. She had a hard time finding another job and funds were running very low. Then, at a local food pantry, Ms. Stevens talked with a Food Stamp Outreach Associate who helped her apply for benefits from the Food Stamp Program.

It was from a friend that Ms. Stevens first heard about the Food Stamp Program, but it was the outreach associate at the pantry that made the difference for her. The associate was knowledgeable about the program, helped her fill out the application, and turned it in to the Food Stamp Office for her. Outreach associates were available as a resource at the pantry due to a grant awarded to the Community Harvest Food Bank, one of nineteen organizations nation-wide to receive an outreach grant from the USDA in 2002.

Receiving Food Stamp benefits offered Ms. Stevens some optimism and security during her ordeal. She claims that, "The Food Stamp Program helped me get by while I was looking for a job. It helped me get things like meats, fruits and vegetables at the grocery store that I wouldn't have been able to get otherwise".

Since Ms. Stevens originally applied for the Food Stamp Program she says that things have gotten a lot better for her. She has decided to go back to school and get her GED and when she's not teaching

bible classes to teenagers or leading prayer groups at her church, she is working on writing a book about her relationship with God.

Ms. Stevens is only one person of many to be helped by associates from the Community Harvest Food Bank.

Throughout the two-year period of the grant, over 15,000 people in North East Indiana were contacted by associates and given information about the Food Stamp Program. Those contacts resulted in over 1,000 applications submitted; over half of these were approved. The associates were available to clients even on nights and weekends. They wrote newspaper and newsletter articles, handed out brochures, and even appeared on billboards and on radio stations around town to promote awareness about the program.

In the end, people that might have fallen through the cracks - people like Ms. Stevens - were given the information and the confidence they needed to apply for the program. If an associate had not been available to tell Ms. Stevens about the Food Stamp Program she may have had to cut corners to make ends meet, possibly even compromising her health, but now when you ask her about the Food Stamp Program she says "It's great! It helped me very much because I was struggling, but God provided the Food Stamp Program for me".

How the Initiative is Helping

As part of FNS' support for the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, the Food and Nutrition Service encouraged all eligible faith and community groups to prepare grant proposals to be considered for FY 2002 Food Stamp Program



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Outreach Grants. Faith-based and community groups were highlighted as eligible applicants in the FSP grant solicitation which was released by FNS in early spring, 2002. As a result, the Community Harvest Food Bank competed for this grant, and was awarded \$285,766 to conduct a two-year outreach project.

About the Organization

Community Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Indiana has a mission to alleviate hunger through the full use of donated food and other resources, and to increase public awareness of and involvement in solutions to hunger. In pursuit of this mission, Community Harvest solicits surplus food and grocery donations from the food industry and through community food drives. The food is sorted, inspected for quality, and readied for distribution to the hungry via a member agency network of over 550 churches and social service agencies.

While Community Harvest is primarily a collaborator with member agencies to address the food needs of area residents, they have taken the lead in providing direct food assistance to those groups most vulnerable to hunger, namely, children, older adults, women heads of household, and "working poor" families.

