

North Texas Food Bank's drive aims to Close the Gap on hunger

Dallas Morning News, The (TX) - August 15, 2010

- Author/Byline: ROBERT MILLER
- Edition: EDITION1
- Section: BUSINESS
- Page: D03
- Column: ROBERT MILLER

Hunger is everywhere, though sometimes it's hard to detect. It resides in the child who sits next to yours at school, across the street, down the block and in many of our workplaces. Few people know this better than Jan Pruitt, president and CEO of the North Texas Food Bank, and her staff. Knowing that is one thing; quantifying it is another. That's why Pruitt recruited two University of Texas at Dallas professors, Dr. Nathan Berg and Dr. Timothy M. Bray (at the time a member of the J. McDonald Williams Institute), to validate a food bank study that showed that two years ago "there was a 29 million-meal gap for those living at the federal poverty level and below in this 13-county service area," Pruitt said. At the time, "we already realized that we could no longer grow incrementally if we were going to truly impact the hunger crisis in North Texas," Pruitt said. With rising prices for food and fuel in the recession, the situation would only grow worse. Thus, Pruitt explains, the food bank created the 3-year-long Close the Gap Campaign. Its goal is to roughly double the food bank's overall access to meals from 26 million meals to 50 million by the end of the campaign on June 30. The overall need is being addressed not only by the food bank but also through individual efforts; food stamps; the Women, Infants, Children program; and the food bank's 260 member agencies. Second-year success Pruitt says the 50 million-meal goal is within reach, citing the way the campaign surpassed its 42 million-meal goal by 2 million in its second year. In addition to expanding food distribution, Pruitt said, "We will leverage the NTFB's extensive network of member agencies to launch a new food stamp outreach program." The North Texas Food Bank added staff members to help thousands of North Texas residents who are eligible for food stamps but have never applied for the program. "Millions of federal dollars which are allocated for the food stamp program in our region go unused," she said. "Expanding access to meals provided through the food stamp program is a critical component of our Close the Gap strategy." "Yes, we made it to 44 million meals this year. But only with food and funds from the community, pledges and volunteer hours from all of our partners and every single one of us raising our voices about the hunger crisis happening in our own backyard will we reach our target of 50 million meals by next summer. "Think of this in terms of four, three and two," Pruitt said. "Every fourth child in Texas is at risk of hunger. Every third child in the city of Dallas lives in poverty. And Texas ranks second in the nation in childhood hunger. "Our Close the Gap calculations were made before the global recession took hold. Now we've seen a 35 percent increase in first-time clients to our member agencies. We simply must reach and exceed our 50 million-meal goal this year." Getting involved Pruitt says that the North Texas Food Bank offers four key ways to get involved: Give your voice: Become an advocate for a hunger-free world. Give your time: Volunteer at the food bank warehouse, Community Kitchen or one of its member agencies. Give your dollar: Every \$1 donated equals four meals. Give a pound: Host a traditional or virtual food drive. Who benefits from the Close the Gap campaign? "Ultimately, the hungry person benefits from this initiative. However, a hunger-free community strengthens all sectors of society; that is, the children, seniors, families, the homeless and the working poor served by our agencies," Pruitt said. To learn more, call Sophia Sindalovsky at 214-330-1396, ext. 3103.

- Caption: PHOTO(S): (SHANNON AUVIL/Staff Photographer) Jan Pruitt helps sort donations to the North Texas Food Bank. The agency's president and CEO is promoting the Close the Gap Campaign.

- Record: 15411779
- Copyright: (c) Copyright, 2010, The Dallas Morning News