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SINGLE PURPOSE CLUBS

Food Insecurity Clubs

Food Insecurity encompasses both the lack of access to sufficient food as well as lack of reliable access to nutritional food. A Food Insecurity Club is a Kiwanis Club that focuses on solutions to food insecurity in its community. Through a combination of advocacy, education, partnerships, fundraising and projects that help people receive sufficient healthy food, such a club can address and alleviate problems in its community caused by food insecurity.

Food Insecurity's Impact

Food insecurity impacts many sections of our communities. Over 11 million children in the US suffer from food insecurity. The impact of this is that without nutritious foods, children's attention spans are significantly decreased resulting in lower grades in school. One in six seniors in the US face the threat of hunger and not being properly nourished. The impact is that they are likely to develop diseases and illnesses that cut their lives short. In the case of black, brown and native Americans, food insecurity is often twice the severity expressed in the above numbers resulting in the highest rates for type 2 diabetes, and the highest risk of diabetes-related deaths. The impacts are measurable and significant.

How to begin

You should examine the needs of the people in your area, preferably using a community assessment. You want to determine the location of food deserts and other causes of food insecurity. You must identify the targets of your efforts, whether children, families, senior citizens, the homeless, Black, Brown, First Nation, other disadvantaged persons or a combination thereof.

The first step is to decide what projects will most likely appeal to your prospective members. Reach out to community leaders, such as governmental officials, non-profits, schools, chambers of commerce, religious organizations or other service organizations. Ask them where help is needed and request ideas on how a new Kiwanis club can assist meeting those needs. Analyze potential projects by your club's ability to make an impact. Food insecurity is an overwhelming problem world-wide and no single club or organization can eliminate it completely, even in a small community. However, a club can still make a major impact, particularly using partner organizations.

For more information about Food Insecurity and the problems it causes in our communities, see the Kiwanis Food Insecurity Guide. For tips and instructions on how to create a Kiwanis club generally, see *Opening a New Kiwanis Club Complete Guide*, www.kiwanis.org/clubopener.

Solutions/Potential Projects

Advocacy and Education

Become an advocate for helping reduce food insecurity. Fighting hunger and food insecurity is not only about providing healthy food to individuals – it also means taking action telling other people about the root causes of hunger and poverty. Affect positive change and support programs and policies that reduce the number of persons who do not have access to sufficient nutritious food. It



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takes both short term and long-term solutions such as food assistance, job training and economic development programs to change our communities and reduce food insecurity.

Educating the public and individuals is also a major component of fighting food insecurity. Many people live in food deserts and do not have access to nutritious food. Providing them access to nutritious food is not going to help them if they do not understand why they should choose nutritious food over the comfort foods they have been consuming. They need to know why the nutritious food is better for them, how to prepare it and what to avoid. In other words, help them help themselves.

Partnerships and Fund Raising

A Food Insecurity club can make a much bigger impact by partnering with another organization. Whether it is to help them with one or more of their projects or to recruit them to help you with a new project, they can help you spread your impact significantly. Many organizations are either dedicated to providing food to the needy directly or as one of their community outreaches. By joining with them, you will be able to add manpower and finances to your projects and make a much greater impact than working alone.

Many of the solutions to food insecurity involve significant financial assets. Therefore, fund raising can be a critical factor in the success of your efforts. Many organizations have funds set aside to support efforts to relieve hunger and nutritional deficits. Those funds can be available to your club through grants. Educate yourself on what is available and use them to make a bigger impact in your community.

School and Community Gardens

Even in a food desert, nutritious food can be grown and distributed by school and community gardens. School gardens not only can provide food to students, their families and needy people in their community, but they are also a wonderful way to teach children about nutrition and how to feed themselves. Schools have found that school gardens are excellent teaching tools as well as sources of food for school cafeterias, students and families. The biggest drawback to school gardens is the lack of students and faculty to tend to them during the summer, when most foods are harvested. Helping a school during both the school year and the summer is an excellent way to build a relationship with a school as well as to fight food insecurity.

Community gardens are likewise excellent ways to provide nutritious food to families in areas that have low access to food markets and in low-income areas. They help create a sense of community in neighborhoods in food deserts. They provide a source of healthy food in areas that that only have convenience stores for groceries. They also provide food at very low cost.

Vertical or hydroponic gardens can be successful in schools and a community setting. They provide continuous food production without taking up much space, which is almost always a problem in urban food deserts. They also reduce the amount of water needed for growing and eliminate or reduce the need for pesticides and fertilizers. However, the start-up and energy costs can be expensive so a dedicated support organization would provide significant benefit to the school or community.



Food Banks, Mobile Pantries and Food Backpack Programs

A food bank is a storehouse for large quantities of food and other products that go out to the community. They distribute food and grocery items through other programs and organizations that serve families, children, seniors and other individuals at risk of hunger.

Mobile pantries directly serve families by bringing in truckloads of food distributed in pre-packed boxes or by using a farmer's market style that allows people to choose to take what they need. They tend to set up in a centralized area of a community on a schedule. They expand the capability to provide food more quickly and efficiently to communities for people who lack financial or transportation resources or do not have access to traditional grocery stores.

Food backpack programs provide nutritious, non-perishable, easy to prepare to food to students when they are not able to be fed by school meals, such as over weekends and holidays. Many students rely on school meals for nutrition during the school week and are unable to receive nutritious food when they are not at school. Frequently, such backpack programs are run through or aided by food banks.

Co-ops

Co-ops are businesses owned by people of a community. They are a substitute for large supermarkets, but are run to serve the people of the community, not to make a profit. For that reason, they are better equipped than supermarkets to provide a sustainable source of nutritious food in impoverished areas. While some co-ops are for members only, many are open to the public at large. They often purchase overstocked food and bulk items. They tend to have a much higher concentration of produce and other healthy food than supermarkets. They also tend to support local and minority owned farms.

Getting started

The first step is to contact other people who are interested in fighting food insecurity in our communities. For more information on food insecurity and to learn more about the challenges faced by our communities and about the solutions to those challenges, see the Kiwanis Food Insecurity Guide.

Determine the project that is most appropriate and appealing to potential members. The possibilities are limitless. Email membership@kiwanis.org to obtain more help in identifying options for your new club.

Conclusion

Every community where Kiwanis serves is likely to have a food insecurity issue. This offering, focused on a new single purpose club, can just as easily be adopted by an existing Kiwanis club and by a new club satellite within a club. Make sure to review the companion document, Food Insecurity – Get Started Guide, to learn of the various challenges and options to delivering solutions.



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Kiwanis clubs that focus on food insecurity can make significant differences that benefit individuals, families and the overall community. The impacts affect individual health, learning abilities, and better decision making by those affected. Partnerships will greatly enhance your solutions. You offer a gift that changes lives. Best of luck undertaking this new initiative.