

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2011

You can never over-estimate the power of a good idea supported by very dedicated and determined volunteers. Out of this recipe for success has come the Kansas Food Bank and more than 200 other members of the Nation's Network of Food Banks. We, and all the others, have come to be where we are by the grace of volunteers who care enough to give their time and talent to make their Food Bank the most effective force for good that they can. And they do it all for the sake of the greater community.

From its beginning, volunteers have entered the life of the Kansas Food Bank early and often. Initially, they sold the Food Bank idea to the community, then organized and started it up. Today, great numbers of volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life donate time, energy and material resources to their Food Bank. In last year alone they helped KFB employee team members handle more than ten million pounds of food for hungry Kansas families.

Today, volunteer-power provides an enormous share of the hours of human energy required to fully carry out the Food Bank's core mission to stop hunger before it happens in Kansas.

Throughout our 85-county service area, our hunger-relief agency partners are relying on volunteer power to provide the much needed food assistance to those who need a helping hand. Nearly two-thirds have no paid staff at all. Clearly, most of our hunger-relief partners rely totally on volunteer power, providing hunger relief in communities both large and small, allowing this much-needed work to be done.

We have thousands of volunteer-power people to thank. We simply could not do what we do without their indispensable help.

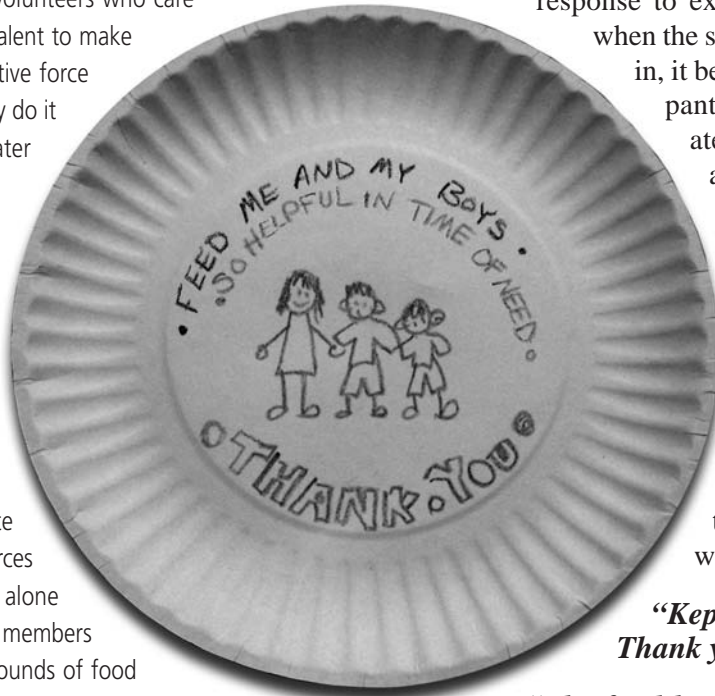
—Brian Walker, President/CEO

PASSING THE PLATES

Over the past several weeks some of our hunger agency partners were given paper plates and asked to invite their clients to express what their particular food pantry resource means to them or to present any other relevant thought directly on the plate.

Since this was an entirely new way for us to gather information, we could not predict the level of participation or the kind of response to expect. From more than 800 messages when the stream of inscribed plates began coming in, it became evident that the work we and our pantry partners do is profoundly appreciated. While all of us at the Food Bank are deeply confident that our work is exceptionally vital, we sometimes get so caught up in the day-by-day work of moving emergency food supplies where it is so urgently needed that we miss some of the personal touches that come with lending a helping hand. The messages on these plates truly gave us a reality check.

To give you an idea of what they told us, here are a few of the messages we wish to share with you.



“Kept my tummy from being hungry. Thank you.”

“The food keeps me from starving and helps me know someone cares. I thank God for it every day.”

“I need help with food, I'm a single father of a 12-year old son. I get \$694 disability and it is not enough to pay my bills and buy food for the entire month.”

“I am so thankful for the pantry. It has truly been a blessing to my family during the most challenging times.”

“It makes me happy to be here, without you, my family would go hungry.”

There are many similar messages written on the plates, all telling of the work we do and, more importantly, they let us know that what our supporters do really does make a dramatic difference in the life of those in need of something as basic as food.

—Debi Kreutzman, Director of Community Relations

VOLUNTEERS BEYOND THE DOORS

SOME MAY THINK THAT VOLUNTEERS ONLY HELP US INSIDE THE WALLS OF THE FOOD BANK. NOT SO. As your Kansas Food Bank continues to grow and to add new programs, we are reaching beyond the walls to bring the benefits directly into the communities we serve.



A GOOD CASE IN POINT IS THE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS who are sought out to help us with mobile pantries and produce distributions. Without these community champions, we would not have reached our present level of success with our new and expanded service efforts. In reaching that level we looked at food insecurity rates across our service area, then we analyzed where gaps might be and if there is a pantry present in the community that is not being served at all. Then we determined the capacity and whether it meets the needs of those seeking assistance. It is also helpful to find out if there has ever been a pantry in the county.

In all the places we have been with our mobile pantry distribution, we have found the need to be there. In our first community, the pantry was struggling to keep its doors open. They were quickly running out of money and worried

about how they could continue to help people in their county. Our mobile pantry provided a positive answer. And it was our community champion who helped make the difference by spreading the word. He sent out flyers, gathered other volunteers to help at distribution day and jumped in feet first to help set up, distribute and clean up afterwards. Since then, that volunteer has made a few trips to the Food Bank to take food back to the community for distribution.

RECENTLY, ANOTHER COMMUNITY CHAMPION TOOK THINGS TO THE NEXT LEVEL by arranging for the city to provide a forklift for our use, set up barricades, and to cover the whole nine yards of details. The volunteer made it her mission to see that we had all the tools we needed to make the distribution a success. One concerned citizen commented, "Clearly, our community is not doing enough. If there are this many people in need, we must do more." That was a light-bulb moment for him and it was a success for us knowing that he could help rally the troops so their community could be better served. The mobile pantry served 475 families that day. And now that community champion is going to join our community board for the KFB Independence Warehouse.

We are on our way to see that in every needful community there is a champion who pours heart and soul into making our mobile distribution successful and is doing so without ever stepping inside our doors. We are enormously grateful for all those volunteers beyond the KFB doors who make our present success possible.

—Debi Kreutzman

