

Coalition to Address Increasing Food Needs

By: Harold Ruelle, Marathon County Hunger Coalition Member

Did You Know That Marathon County Has A Hunger Coalition? Well we do! The Marathon County Hunger Coalition grew out of United Way's Basic Needs Impact Team. Margie Hackbarth, impact team member, and JoAnn Janikowski, Community Impact Director, began laying the groundwork for the Coalition in 2009, and it was brought to life when retired executive Dave Eisenreich agreed to chair the group.

In late summer of 2009 the Coalition grew in numbers and enthusiasm, to become a true community coalition. Members include leaders from Marathon County's food pantries along with representatives from churches, non-profit organizations, education, health providers, the business community and local government. The Coalition's mission is to expand, identify, promote and implement long-term sustainable solutions to the problem of hunger in Marathon County.

According to the Marathon County LIFE report, 10.3% (13,962) of Marathon County residents participated in the Foodshare Program in 2008. That is an increase of 22.1% from 2006. This trend line continues to escalate as more and more residents are unemployed or under employed.

Research shows when families are forced to cut back on the quality and quantity of food needed for an active, healthy life there is a much greater risk of malnutrition, especially for developing children. Even mild malnutrition can effect learning, development, productivity, physical and psychological health.

Mr. Eisenreich commented, "The need for food assistance is definitely on the rise, and since resources are tight, it is important for community leaders and food pantries to work together, share best practices, educate the community on growing needs and develop a more economical and cost effective approach to food acquisition, storage and delivery."

The Coalition has four sub-committees, each charged with one of its major goals:

- Develop and implement a continuous (year round) public relations campaign to educate the public about the need for nutritious food and to ensure consistent donations throughout the year.
- Support member food pantries in their efforts to meet the common goal of providing food to those in need.
- Develop strategies to optimize food acquisition and distribution.
- Develop a long-term sustainability plan for food acquisition, storage and distribution efforts in Marathon County.

If you are part of an organization that helps feed the hungry in Marathon County and would like more information on the Coalition or if you are interested in receiving

information on items needed by local food pantries, please contact JoAnn Janikowski at 848-2927 or e-mail her at jjanikowski@unitedwaymc.org.