

## **United Way Leads Discussion on Hunger in Nevada County**

United Way of Nevada County has been focusing on advocacy and collaborative work that addresses three distinct impact areas; the basic human needs of Food, Emergency Shelter and Access to Health Care. Through mobilizing the community, United Way hopes to make some impactful changes in Nevada County.

Food insecurity in Nevada County was the main subject of a collaborative meeting on basic needs facilitated by United Way of Nevada County. United Way brought together their partners that are experts and leaders in the field of food insecurity to discuss what the true needs and gaps are in Nevada County. Through this collaboration and the collection of statistical analysis, United Way hopes to learn what is most needed in Nevada County in the particular area of food insecurity.

At times during the year, Food Insecure households are uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they have insufficient money or other resources for food. Researchers find that food insecure adults face higher risks of chronic diseases (like diabetes and hypertension) as well as depression and poor mental health. Food insecurity is also linked to poor academic outcomes in children. Statistics collected by the national agency Feeding America, shows that Nevada Counties food insecurity rate is 13.8 %, which comes out to an estimated number of food insecure individuals in Nevada County of approximately 13,560. How many of these are children? How many of these are seniors? United Way wants to open up these discussions to learn where the community needs in helping to battle the fight against hunger. Over the last five years, United Way has contributed the largest percentage of their funds to programs that address hunger.

Through a United Way food insecurity collaborative meeting held two years ago, United Way was able to discover the need to create a food distribution program for working individuals. Food Access Saturday was conceived from the collaboration, and provides supplemental food every second Saturday to those people unable to make it to food distributions on weekdays. Since inception close to 2,500 people have received bags of nutritious food.

During the meeting United Way hosted in August, the main discussion focused on the question, “What are the gaps in Nevada County regarding Food Insecurity?” Through these meetings, United Way strives to learn what programs are needed in the community to help close the hunger gap in Nevada County. Once the gaps have been identified, United Way wants to create collaborative programs to help fill the community needs.

Some of the questions addressed: “Should the community join together to create a program that gives free backpacks of food to students in need?”, “Should the community strive to get food to the homeless and transient population, who have no place to store and prepare food?”, “Should we address delivering nutritious food to homebound seniors or the disabled?” “Should there be more food assessable to the working poor, who are struggling to make ends meet?” Where does

the community need to make the most impact in creating a healthier Nevada County? That is what United Way hopes to learn through these collaborations and discussions.

Representatives from Interfaith Food Ministry, Food Bank of Nevada County, Sierra Community House (formerly Tahoe Safe Alliance, Project Mana, and Family Resource Center of Truckee), County of Nevada Department of Health, Gold Country Community Services, Placer County Food Bank, Sierra Harvest and United Way of Nevada County attended this meeting with many great ideas and discussion points. The Food Insecurity Collaborative hosted by United Way of Nevada County plans to meet every 3 months.