

### **SAM One of Our Many Selfless Volunteers**

SFB-CRC relies on selfless and compassionate volunteers like Sally Anne McElwain, affectionately known as SAM by her “food bank team.”

As team leader of the produce section, the Green Valley resident has somehow managed over the last eight years to find the time to put in a total of 18 hours every week, even though she also works part-time, is an avid reader, and helps her son with his organic farm in Benson.

“SAM continues to impress me with her dedication and hard work,” said SFB-CRC Executive Director Carlos Valles, “making sure our clients have an abundant supply of fresh produce to promote healthy eating.”

SAM took over the leadership responsibility after only three weeks at SFB-CRC, and loves providing fresh fruits and vegetables for clients because she says “it is one of the fundamentals of healthy eating.”

It’s not an easy job, but each market day SAM and her team wash and prepare nearly 500 pounds of produce. She says she wants to give clients the feeling of shopping in a traditional grocery store setting.

“The produce section at the SFB rivals the produce sections at major grocery chains,” agreed one client. “I love coming to the SFB for the incredible produce variety.”

“We provide a much needed service to the food insecure in our community,” SAM added. “At the end of the day I am so tired, but I have a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.”

### **Helping Families Get Kids Ready for School**

SFB-CRC was there as always at the Kids Care Fair July 27 making sure each youngster had a healthy snack, along with erasers and sticky notepads, and more importantly, information for their parents/guardians about food bank services.

“As a contractor,” explained one father, “my income can vary greatly, and the food bank has been so valuable during the lean times.”

The Green Valley branch of the Salvation Army hosted the annual event at the Sahuarita Middle School with twenty local agencies on hand to help weary, stressed parents and excited kids get almost everything they needed to ensure they will have a positive back to school experience.

Each child received a new backpack from TEP filled with school supplies. Famous Footwear provided \$40 coupons for shoes, there were free haircuts, and Valley Assistance Services outlined their services for families, including employment preparation and housing and utility assistance.

Walgreens handed out water bottles and tote bags, and Rural Metro brought teddy bears (good to have a new friend to take to school that first day).

The Sahuarita Police Department, led by friendly school resource officer Big Al, came by to talk to the kids

and distribute fruit and water, and United Community Health Center had their mobile dental unit parked out front and provided lots of health-related giveaways.

“Our participation in the event is so important,” said SFB-CRC Board President Penny Pestle “as it lets people know that we are here if their family or a neighbor needs emergency food.”

### **New Facility Will Expand Our Impact on the Community**

The fall of 2021 is the target for the opening of the Sahuarita Food Bank & Community Resource Center’s expanded facility. With \$1.16 million already raised, SFB-CRC hopes to raise the remaining \$2.2 million this year through the continuing “Nourishing Our Community” capital campaign.

Groundbreaking is set for July 1, 2020. The new facility will expand space and the impact of the organization. Along with a larger and more efficient food bank, it will also provide expanded resources to advance economic security in the community.

“For now our campaign committee remains focused on face-to-face asks of community leaders and philanthropists,” said SFB-CRC Board President Penny Pestle, “as this approach has proven best for securing the size of gifts needed to meet our goal.”

Anyone who would like to learn more about the campaign and how to make a difference with a multi-year pledge should contact her at [ppestle@cox.net](mailto:ppestle@cox.net).

### **New Program an Extra Safety Net for Seniors**

“No one has ever cared about us like this,” said one of the recipients of the Commodity Senior Food Program (CSFP). Disabled from a snowplow accident, he is among 30 newly enrolled low-income seniors who qualify for CSFP, formerly Food Plus. You must be 60 or older and fall below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. It is at least partially paid for with funds from the USDA, distributed through local food banks.

In addition to what they would receive at their regular twice-monthly visits to SFB-CRC, recipients will be able to pick up an extra CSFP food box every month. If there are two people in the household, they may both receive a CSFP box.

Each box contains 40 pounds of food that includes two large boxes of toasted oat cereal, two apple juices, two boxes of shelf-stable milk, two cans of vegetables, two cans of fruit, powdered milk, a can of vegetarian beans, two pounds of cheese, and bags of pinto beans and white rice.

The SFB-CRC operations team introduced the new program with space for 106 who qualify. Sue Eaton is in charge, along with volunteers Bev Travers and Lynette Marksberry. Sue already sees the impact it’s having for these new enrollees from the local community.

“Many of them told me they have no food in their cupboards,” she said. “One man told me it made him cry to get the CSB box and be treated so well in the process.”

### **New ERN Program a True Win/Win for our Community**

Sara’s boss warned her that if she missed more work, he would have to let her go. What he didn’t know is

that Sara felt she had no choice at least one day every week to stay home to care for her grandmother who had become ill, and the whole dilemma left her worried and exhausted.

Maria owed a lot of money to her medical provider, but she spoke little English and had no computer. Her work suffered, so her job and credit rating hung in the balance.

After her divorce, Lynn struggled to pay her mortgage and tuition for her kids in college. She turned to gambling, which only made her financial plight more hopeless.

When a seemingly insurmountable problem leads to losing a job, it also adversely affects employers who are struggling to keep productive workers, and it puts more strain on community services.

It is often a no-win situation, so SFB-CRC is teaming up with the Better Together Southern Arizona Coalition, formerly called Sustainable Families, to help turn that around.

Unforeseen obstacles like a sick child or parent, a car that breaks down, or a bill that can't be paid can easily affect work performance and lead to termination. With funding from the Town of Sahuarita and the Freeport McMoRan Foundation, the coalition has hired Roni Singh as a navigator/coach through the new Green Valley/Sahuarita Employee Resource Network (ERN). The ERN concept began in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is now in more than twenty locations around the country.

“My role is to help employees become more sustainable by helping them navigate emotional, physical, or financial challenges,” Roni put it.

The idea is to assist local employers in retaining their people by being there to help employees overcome personal roadblocks, resulting in better focus on the job. That can only increase productivity and job satisfaction, which lead to reduced business costs, she said.

“I am a firm believer in the value of the ERN in improving outcomes for local business and in attracting new businesses,” agreed Town of Sahuarita Economic Development Director Victor Gonzalez.

Sara's ERN coach helped her convince a couple of siblings with flexible schedules to be with their grandmother during the week so Sara could take her turn on the weekends.

An ERN navigator worked with Maria's provider and together they established a payment plan that she could afford. She can now concentrate on her job and keep her solid credit rating.

Lynn's ERN coach persuaded her to get into a program that addressed her gambling addiction, ensuring that she could keep her job and, more importantly, a handle on her finances.

When problems like these are resolved for local citizens so they can remain employed, and their employers know they can count on them to help keep their businesses thriving in our community, it benefits all of us.

## **Summer Donations Needed**

In the summer, the Sahuarita Food Bank (SFB-CRC) continues to serve the same number of area residents. However, food and donations are way down because our winter visitors are enjoying northern temperatures.

Kids from families with limited resources can get breakfast and lunch at school, but during the summer vacation, they are home for these meals. By the beginning of August, our shelves are empty.

The SFB-CRC needs protein-rich foods—peanut butter, canned tuna, as well as canned beef stew and meat pastas. Non-sweetened cold cereals, along with the fruit and milk we provide, are very popular for

breakfast. Canned fruit in juice is also a hit.

Readers can make checks out to the Sahuarita Food Bank and mail them to 17750 S. La Cañada, Sahuarita, AZ 85629. Or, they can drop off non-perishable goods at the front of The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ (at the same address) anytime.

### **The Hungry—Who Are They?**

Next time you stop by a café for lunch, or dig into dinner at home, pause to think about what you have heard regarding hunger. Does it even exist here in the richest nation in the world?

You might say, oh come on, they just don't want to work. That's the problem. If they would just go get a job, they could provide everything their families need. We all see lots of obese people out there, so how can they be going hungry? Our government gives away food stamps, school lunches, and lots of other freebies, don't they?

The United States Department of Agriculture has stated that about 45 million Americans currently struggle with what is called "food insecurity," which means they are unsure from week to week, and sometimes day to day, if they will have enough nutritious food for their families. Yet, nearly three fourths of them have at least one person in the family who is working at least part-time, and almost half have someone working full-time. So how can this happen?

Pima County's stats are worse than the national average, with about 16 percent at or below the poverty line with one person working, and 1/3 of them make too much to qualify for SNAP benefits (food stamps). Even those who qualify can look forward to assistance that amounts to less than a buck and a half per person per day.

In more isolated rural areas, and in Santa Cruz County, for example, where closer to 22 percent are below the poverty level, there is less access to nutritious choices, and it can be a strain just to try to get to the market. Gasoline prices are higher, and a supermarket is often an hour or more away.

It is also much more difficult for people in rural areas to find work, and many suffer with obesity and its related maladies because they consistently rely on the cheapest and least nutritious processed or fast food offerings available to them. Medical care and community services are sparse and often inferior, especially much needed mental health and preventative screening assistance, or drug and alcohol counseling.

"Feeding America," a non-profit network of a few thousand food banks across the country and the third largest U.S. charity, points to a number of factors that prevent millions of families from getting the help they need. Wages have stagnated while rent, utilities, health care, medications, and food have spiraled up. Many of the nearly 15 percent of American families who live below the poverty line work hard at or near minimum wage, and yet some are unable to consistently hold a job because of transportation or health concerns.

A family emergency, a sick child, a car breaking down, a rent increase, a job loss—any one of these can easily become enough of a life change to force a parent to decide whether to try to pay a bill or buy food. The network estimates that 40 percent of families cannot even cover a 400 dollar emergency.

That's "food insecurity."

There are military families, college students, as well as about five and half million of the elderly, who rely on help from food banks. Older Americans often survive only on a single social security check. Increased

health and prescriptions costs and an underestimation of what they need to live on when they retire also contribute to an unexpected reliance on food banks among older Americans.

Yes, we are the wealthiest country in the world, but about 1 in 7 Americans faces hunger, compared to a 1 in 20 average in other developed countries. Imagine how wonderful it would be if we never saw another food bank in this nation again.

Until that day, each time we sit down and debate what to choose on the menu, or roll our overflowing shopping carts up to the cashier, let's remember those who continue the struggle to feed their families.