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Minnesota FoodShare

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

cc: Susan
from: Johanna 1/28/98

JAN 22 1998

Reverend Christopher B. Morton
Director
Minnesota FoodShare
1001 East Lake Street
P.O. Box 7509
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55407-0509

Dear Reverend Morton:

Thank you so much for the kind invitation to speak at Minnesota FoodShare's first Annual Meeting on April 26, 1998, in Minneapolis. I look forward to meeting with the group.

My staff will be in touch with you in the near future to discuss the specifics of your agenda and to talk about organizing a listening conference.

Sincerely,

Shirley R. Watkins

Shirley R. Watkins
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services

April 07

Minnesota FoodShare

Minnesota FoodShare, an interfaith collaboration, achieves solutions to hunger through community action.

December 19, 1997

Under Secretary Shirley Watkins
Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition,
and Consumer Services
United States Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
Room 240E
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Watkins:

Congratulations on your appointment as Under Secretary. In the few short months that you have been in your position, I have heard some very good stories about your work, and equally strong comments about you, and your commitments. On behalf of Minnesota FoodShare's sponsors, I would like to invite you **to be our guest speaker at Minnesota FoodShare's First Annual Meeting on April 28, 1998, at 12:00.** Additionally, I have heard about the listening conferences, including the one that you did in Chicago. Minnesota FoodShare's staff and committee members would be delighted to work with you and your staff to organize **a listening conference in Minnesota** while you are here.

Minnesota FoodShare's Annual Meeting is scheduled to come on the heals of the close of the March Minnesota FoodShare Campaign, as well as the close of the 1998 Minnesota Legislative Session. Additionally, the Minneapolis Area Building Blocks Project will be prepared to unveil its work plan for the year ahead. The timing could not be better for you to come and reflect with us on your sense of our work in Minnesota, and what work you see that lies ahead.

Minnesota FoodShare is a statewide program which uniquely coordinates 250 foodshelves, seven Second Harvest Regional Food Banks, 2,200 congregations, 1,100 corporations and 1,500 schools and civic groups in a month-long, statewide campaign in March to raise resources for emergency foodshelves. Long-time partners with WCCO-TV, WCCO-Radio and Norwest Banks, this media-intensive campaign orchestrates timing, strategy, publicity, resource materials, and special events into a cohesive effort which in 1997 raised 3.97 million pounds of food for hungry Minnesotans.

The March Campaign is FoodShare's very public and widely known effort. However, Minnesota FoodShare has been, and is also involved in the Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (CTECH). As you are well aware, a new project of CTECH is

FNCS
#386

the Building Blocks Program. Minnesota FoodShare, through the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), has been awarded a grant from the Prudential Foundation to pilot the Building Blocks Program in the Minneapolis area.

Closely linked to the Child Nutrition Outreach is Public Policy Advocacy. FoodShare has long advocated for both the state and federal governments to provide an adequate safety net for people in need. While the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193) did much to remove the safety net, FoodShare and its partners in the Food First Coalition worked diligently to successfully re-develop the safety net with state funding. In 1998, FoodShare and its advocacy partners will be seeking additional funding for food assistance for legal immigrants and Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents, full-funding for WIC, restoration of reimbursement cuts to the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the establishment of a statewide Food Policy.

As you can see, there will be much for you to reflect upon, and, I trust, equally as much to challenge us with to move into the future so that children and their parents, the elderly, and the working poor do not go hungry, and, in fact, are able to receive adequate nutrition. I will call your office the week of January 6, 1998, to follow-up this letter. Until then,

Shalom,

CB Morton

Rev. Christopher B. Morton
Director

MINNESOTA FOODSHARE

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Goal II Child Nutrition Outreach: To ensure that there are adequate levels of child nutrition in local communities.

Goal III Public Policy Advocacy: To mobilize people as advocates for public policy issues which impact those who experience hunger and poverty.

Goal IV Human Development Initiative: To participate in statewide collaborative efforts which both empower people to meet their basic human needs, and eliminate structural barriers.

To: Liz Lyman
Candy MountJoy

ITINERARY

Shirley Watkins
Minneapolis, Minnesota
April 27-28, 1998

Monday, April 27, 1998

LV: National @ 5:35 NW 327 (Seat 5F)
AR: Minneapolis @ 7:30

Accommodations

Minneapolis Marriott
2020 E 79th Street
Bloomington, Minnesota
612-854-7441
(F)612-854-7671
Confirmation #: 83694663 Rate: $99 per night

Tuesday, April 28, 1998

LV: Minneapolis @ 6:35 NW 1767 (Seat 22F)
AR: National @ 10:00

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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1001 East Lake Street • P.O. Box 7509 • Minneapolis, MN 55407-0509 • (612) 721-8687 • FAX: (612) 722-8669 • Email: hn2783@handsnet.org

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Food Assistance Program Facts - City of Minneapolis

Food Stamp Program Statistics

Total Annual Issuance: $56,327,556
Average Monthly Issuance: $4,693,963
Average Number of Persons Receiving Food Stamps: 74,333
Average Number of Households Receiving Food Stamps: 32,504
EBT system implemented: ☒yes ☐no ☐partial
ABAWD waiver : ☐yes ☒no ☐specific areas: Minnesota has ABAWD waivers in several counties and Indian Reservations throughout the State, but none in Minneapolis.

Number of retailers currently authorized to accept food stamps: 470
Number of retailers disqualified from food stamps in FY 1997 : 4 civil money penalties
Number of retailers withdrawn from the Food Stamp Program due to a disqualification from the WIC Program in FY97 : 1
Other significant issues: 1) A class action lawsuit was filed against Dan Glickman on behalf of thousands of lawful permanent residents of Minnesota who recently became ineligible for food stamps as a result of the welfare reform legislation. 2) Minnesota requested that its welfare reform demonstration project, MFIP, be expanded statewide. This project, MFIP-S, received conditional approval from FCS to expand. As long as the State meets the conditions of FCS' approval, it is anticipated that MFIP-S will be implemented January 1, 1998.

Supplemental Nutrition Program Statistics

Total **WIC** Participation as of 9/97 :

	Retail	Farmers Market
Women		
Pregnant	1,861	(none in Minneapolis)
Breastfeeding	503	
Postpartum (not breastfeeding)	737	
TOTAL WOMEN	3,101	
TOTAL INFANTS	2,753	
TOTAL CHILDREN	8,036	
TOTAL PARTICIPATION	13,890	

Number of Clinics	13
Number of WIC Local Agencies	1

Approximate Annual WIC Expenditures (annualized as of 9/97) :

Administrative Grants to Local Agencies	$1,408,727
Food Expenditures	
Direct Federal Food Grant Expenditures	$7,679,130
Expenditures from Infant Formula Rebates	$2,060,915
TOTAL FOOD EXPENDITURES	$9,740,045

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Local Agency : yes
Number of Sites: 41
Entitlement $1,072,844
Bonus: $21,282

Total Participation as of 9/97 :

Women	195
Infants	85
Children	1,347
Elderly	3,837
TOTAL	5,464

Child Nutrition Programs Statistics

Number of Schools in School Lunch Program:
Minneapolis Public Schools: 101

School Lunch Program Average Daily Participation:
Minneapolis Public Schools: 24,403 students $37,632 (ave. daily reimb.)

Percent Free and Reduced Price:
Minneapolis Public Schools Free: 77.3%; Reduced: 6.4%

Total Lunches Served 1996-97 School Year :
Minneapolis Public Schools: 4,319,358

Number of Schools with the School Breakfast Program:
Minneapolis Public Schools: 100

School Breakfast Program Average Daily Participation:
Minneapolis Public Schools: 13,738 students $12,959 (ave. daily reimb.)

Number of Child Care and Adult Care Sites and Sponsors:
Sponsors: 49
Sites: 68 child care centers in Minneapolis
2,050 family day care homes (Hennepin County)

Summer Food Service Program:
Number of Sponsors: 1
Number of Sites: 177
Average Daily Number of Participants: 9,805 (July 97)
Total Meals Served: 342,396 (July 97)

Food Distribution Program Statistics

School Lunch Program Commodities - Minneapolis Public Schools (SY 1996-97)

Entitlement:	$511,747	410,397 lbs.
Bonus:	$15,817	103,410 lbs.
TOTAL:	$527,564	513,807 lbs.

TEFAP Soup Kitchen/Food Bank

<u>TEFAP</u>

Entitlement:	$806511	(info not available) lbs.
Bonus:	$134,416	

Nutrition Program for the Elderly (Value of Cash Reimbursement)

Entitlement: $402,342
\# Meals Served: 686,942

from Monthly Briefing Update 3/31/98

MINNESOTA

FNS Issues in Minnesota

Minnesota has begun two programs for non-citizens that will provide food in lieu of Food Stamps:

MINNESOTA GROWN - The Minnesota Legislature has provided $1 million for the period 9/1/97 through 6/30/98 for adults and minors who were residing in Minnesota on 7/1/97 and lost food stamp eligibility due to citizenship status and are receiving General Assistance or Social Security Income. The requirement is that these persons must be pursuing citizenship. Each eligible person will be mailed a monthly voucher of up to $40, of which 80% must be spent on Minnesota grown products. Minnesota State law prohibits counting this food supplemental assistance as income to any remaining members in the household.

FAMILIES FOOD SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM - The Minnesota Legislature has provided $3.7 million for the period 9/1/97 through 6/30/98 for persons receiving cash from AFDC, FGA or MFIP, but not the food stamp/food portion due to citizenship status. The criteria is that the family must have been residing in Minnesota on 7/1/97. Each person is eligible for $63 or 100% of the MFIP food portion for a household of that size. Minnesota is not counting this supplemental assistance as income to any remaining members in the household. The State legislature will have to decide whether to continue to fund these programs after that date.

Welfare Reform: Minnesota has requested and received approval to exempt individuals living in several counties and Indian Reservations from the work requirements in Section 824 of the PRWORA regarding able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD). These waivers were approved because the areas either have an unemployment rate greater than 10% or the areas do not have enough jobs for the number of people who live there. Minnesota currently has waivers exempting eight reservations through March 31, 1998 and 18 counties through November 30, 1998.

As of January 1, 1998 Minnesota will begin converting Title IV-A cases to MFIP-S, the State's welfare reform demonstration project which FNS approved to go statewide as a hybrid program that determines Title IV-A and food stamp benefits under one set of eligibility rules. The original MFIP field trials will continue until June 30, 1998, at which time, all cases will be converted to the MFIP-S policies. The primary differences between the field trials and the MFIP-S cases are 1) the statewide cases have reduced transitional standards and food stamp portions, and 2) only the statewide cases are subject to quality control reviews of the food stamp benefit amounts. Because the determination of eligibility and allotments is quite different from the regular food stamp program rules, we are working with the State to determine just how the quality control procedures will be revised for MFIP-S cases.

Payment Accuracy: For FY 1996, the State's payment accuracy rate was again near the enhanced funding level. At 6.95%, the State's 1996 rate reflects continued strong performance. Data for FY 1997 show that the State is continuing to perform well, though it will probably again miss the enhanced funding mark.

Year 2000 Project: Minnesota's Department of Administration staff the State Y2k

Project Office. This office is responsible for building awareness, monitoring agency Y2k progress, and providing Y2k conversion consulting services as needed. The Project Office has produced and distributed a Y2k Best Practice Handbook that staff responsible for various resources can use in their conversion efforts. The Project Office has done considerable work in the area of Y2k tool analysis and is providing significant support in setting up Y2k testing resources for both mainframe- and network-based resources. DOA has created and updates a Y2k web site that summarizes Y2k budgets, time frames, and methodologies. Minnesota has allocated $27 million to help augment regular maintenance budgets, which will be used to help remedy Y2k bugs; DHS's share of this allocation is $2.75 million.

DHS has identified agency and application Y2k liaisons to the Project Office. Y2k repair work has begun on MAXIS and other critical applications as part of regular software maintenance. DHS intends to have all its critical systems ready for full-blown, end-to-end testing by the end of 1998. Minnesota has committed significant resources to Y2k testing and will conduct rigorous tests off-site in 1998-1999 using its disaster recovery vendor.

Project staff are concerned that available programming/testing resources may be stretched to both Y2k and non-Y2k software changes at the same time. They are also concerned that turnover of experienced technical staff could undermine the Y2k project; Minnesota has recently upgraded its technical positions to lessen this threat.

EBT: Minnesota converted the existing EBT caseload in Ramsey and Hennepin Counties to the Deluxe Data EBT system on June 22, 1997. Statewide expansion began in October 1997 with the addition of households in Dakota and Washington Counties. In November, Minnesota completed the conversion of the Minneapolis Metro Region with the conversion of Anoka, Carver and Scott Counties. Statewide expansion resumed in January 1998. Minnesota expects to have statewide EBT operations by the end of October 1998.

WIC: In response to the FY 1997 WIC funding shortfall, Minnesota reduced its participation projections for the remainder of this fiscal year. However, the State received funding in the WIC supplemental appropriation totalling $606,404. In addition, the Minnesota legislature appropriated State funds which became available July 1. Thus, the need to reduce caseload has been averted.

* In 1997 the Minnesota State WIC Agency drafted legislation that expanded existing state law to define fraudulent use of Minnesota WIC Program vouchers as theft, which carries staff criminal penalties. The new legislation contains wording that allows for criminal prosecution of WIC participant, employee and vendor fraud. Minnesota is only the third state in the nation to enact a WIC criminal statute.

OPINION

startribune.com

Opinion

Published Tuesday, April 14, 1998

Editorial: Congress contemplates new food-stamp treachery

Ever since Congress passed its landmark overhaul of welfare in 1996, President Clinton has been looking for ways to reverse one of the law's worst mistakes: a provision that cut off **food** stamps to hundreds of thousands of legal immigrants who had always been eligible in the past.

The **food-stamp** cutoff always stood out as one of the more cynical provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. It had nothing to do with the bill's central aim -- encouraging work -- because the **food-stampprogram** already required work or job-training. It had nothing to do with stopping abuse; nonrefugee immigrants already were less likely to take public assistance than American citizens. It was merely a way to save a lot of money by exploiting a group of people with few friends.

This year, Clinton found a way to repair some of the damage. The U.S. Department of Agriculture closed a loophole that had allowed governors to double-dip in claiming federal reimbursement for the administrative costs of certain welfare programs. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman sent Congress a plan to use half the savings, or $818 million over five years, to restore **food** stamps for about 250,000 legal immigrants. That's less than one-third of the people who lost their benefits in 1996, but it covers the most vulnerable: the elderly, the disabled and some children. The proposal got wrapped in a larger agriculture research bill that has won approval from a committee of House and Senate negotiators and now only needs final approval by each chamber.

But now Glickman's careful plan is unraveling because of a funding fight in the Senate. Republican leaders there are threatening to strip the **food-stamp** money out of the agriculture bill and use it to offset huge overruns in the massive highway and transit bill passed by both chambers this month.

This would be a double form of treachery -- betraying a group of people whom Congress already punished once, and doing it to bail out a group of lawmakers who got so greedy for infrastructure projects that they couldn't live within the budget targets handed down by their own colleagues.

It also would be an insult to members of the House Agriculture Committee, including Minnesota Representatives David Minge and Collin Peterson, who have been looking for ways to reverse the **food-stamp** cutoff and produced the bill that is now in jeopardy.

Granted, it's no fun to scale back popular transportation projects so Congress can help a group of people with no political clout. But the

http://webserv1.startribune.com/cgi-bin/stOnLine/article?thisSlug=ED14&date=14-Apr-98&word=program&w 4/15/98

food-stamp cutoff that seemed cost-free to Congress in 1996 is not cost-free to states with substantial immigrant populations. Officials estimate that 16,000 legal immigrants in Minnesota lost **food** stamps after 1996, and the Legislature has twice voted to replace part of their benefits, at state expense, to avoid hardship and economic ripple effects. Congress created this problem, and Congress should fix it.

Finally, the cost of Glickman's **food-stamp** provision is minuscule compared to the transportation bill -- $818 million compared with $217 billion. That seems a very small price for a very honorable vote.

startribune.com
Opinion

METRO | REGION

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Metro

Published Tuesday, March 24, 1998

Study: Children aren't sharing in Minnesota boom

H.J. Cummins / Star Tribune

A strong economy may be putting more Minnesotans to work, but it's not necessarily delivering their children from distress, according to Kids Count Minnesota 1998, a comprehensive reckoning of children's welfare to be released today.

The latest annual report by the Minnesota Children's Defense Fund shows progress in some areas: Childhood immunizations rose, and violent crimes by juveniles did not.

But overall the report shows children still treading water in the midst of a buoyant economy and despite emerging welfare-to-work programs. Trouble spots in the report include high drop-out rates among students and growing numbers of low birth weight babies -- both strong indicators of future problems, according to study director Diane Benjamin.

The statistics in this report predate the welfare-to-work programs started here and nationwide this year. But they do cover years of high employment in the state. And while the number of children on welfare dropped by about 10,000 (to about 9 percent), the number of children receiving subsidized school lunches rose about 5,000 (a steady 27 percent, because the number of children overall increased).

The numbers indicate that more families have advanced from poverty to low-income -- where they still qualify for assistance such as subsidized school lunches, with a cut-off at 180 percent above the poverty line. State officials say this is progress and good news for the families and the state.

The Children's Defense Fund -- a nonprofit advocacy group for children -- reads the figures differently.

"What that suggests to us is although a lot of families are getting jobs, we're not getting people to the point of self-sufficiency," Benjamin said. It's a group commonly called the "working poor."

The trouble spots bode particularly badly for the state, Benjamin said.

"Our society has said, 'Now we're not just going to give people welfare, we're going to expect them to work,' " she said. "There's no way these children are going to be able to support themselves without a high school diploma.

Nave
APD

"Also, what's very quietly happening is we're getting more and more of these very small infants being born," she said.

"We know that later in life these babies are more likely to have learning problems and health problems," Benjamin said. "We need to be paying a lot more attention to this trend."

The new 'working poor'

Angel Jeffries' monthly budgets are typical of the intractable poverty suggested in the report A single mother of four, Jeffries left full welfare as of January. She now earns $6 an hour as a teacher's aide at All About Kids, her children's child-care center in Minneapolis.

Before she went to work, Jeffries received about $900 a month in welfare and food stamps. She paid $19 a month to rent a subsidized apartment. Now she earns about $900 a month at work. Her welfare and food stamps have been cut to about $600. That puts her income at nearly $1,500 a month, nearly $600 ahead. But her rent on the same apartment has gone up $300, based on her earnings, and now she pays $200 a month on a car she bought to get to and from work. Add her contribution to her child-care costs, and the totals are almost a wash.

"I like working," Jeffries said, "but when you're a person like me, using every dime just to take care of me and my kids, this is just not helping."

The state has a different perspective.

"We would say these families are in better economic shape," said Ann Sessoms, a division co-director in the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Here's why: Old welfare schedules paid families so little that they were still left at 50 percent below the poverty level. As of this year, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) is intended to get families off welfare and to work, bringing much more money into the family.

Sessoms sympathized with families like the Jeffries, but she said they are like most people taking their first steps to self-reliance.

"You start making money, and suddenly you have a car payment," Sessoms said. "But in our society you hope that when you hang on and you get good work experience, that leads to a better job and all the rest."

What's to be done?

As the Children's Defense Fund released its report, the group also urged the state to invest more money in children's programs. Specifically, Benjamin said she hopes the Minnesota House will follow the Senate in supporting a ballot proposal for a permanent children's endowment fund. It would provide $20 million a year for programs for children up to age 6, the state's contribution coming from the existing School Trust Fund.

"And we have a budget surplus of almost $2 billion," she said. "We took a look at it and we found that half a percent of that is being designated for early childhood programs. Tax relief is great, but there is quite a bit of spending in that on a lot of other things, so we're wondering why there isn't more for children."

Statisticians have criticized the Kids Count reliability over the years.

"It's not so much the data, it's the conclusions they draw from it," said Minnesota State Demographer Tom Gillaspy. "There are still large areas of statistical uncertainty around some of these numbers. I would be particularly suspect of any changes in medium or smaller counties.

"It's always good to take numbers with a grain of salt," he said.

Benjamin said past criticism has prompted her to eliminate at least one statistic -- pregnancy rates. Potential complicating factors could distort its meaning, she said, so now she reports only a straight count of births.

"We try to err on the side of being conservative," she said. "Some people say we like putting out bad news, but that's just not true. And really there's no need to exaggerate. Things are bad enough."

Minneapolis Star Tribune

STAR TRIB 3/11/98

3/11/98 MWRO

Date Submitted By

Working poor, women, children are the faces of hunger in America

A study finds that the need for food assistance is expanding beyond urban areas, and Minnesota echoes that trend.

By Ingrid Sanden
Star Tribune Washington Bureau Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Kim Anderson said she never thought she'd need emergency food assistance. But when the Twin Cities nurse decided to end her marriage and move out of her home with a 4-week-old baby two years ago, her perspective changed.

Anderson appeared at a Washington news conference Tuesday to help break the stereotype of those who use soup kitchens and food pantries for emergency help.

According to a new study, they are often women with children, jobs and middle-class backgrounds. And the need for help is not restricted to inner cities: In Minnesota and around the country, it is showing up increasingly in suburbs and rural areas.

"Hunger in America is largely hidden," Christine Vladimiroff, president of Second Harvest National Network of Food Banks, said in announcing the organization's report "The Faces and Facts" of hunger.

"Hunger may affect the child that delivers your morning paper, it may affect the elderly widow, it may be your neighbor or a co-worker living paycheck to paycheck."

The report, based on responses of 11,000 local charities and face-to-face interviews with 28,000 people who sought and got emergency food assistance, found that 62 percent of those served were women, 38 percent were children and 16 percent were elderly.

Meeting needs

Deb Gillis and Bob Rausch of Robbinsdale were among people picking up bags of groceries Tuesday at the PRISM food shelf in Robbinsdale. They fit the profile of food-shelf users found by the survey.

"Neither of us wants to be here," Gillis said. "But we *have* to be here."

Rausch, a plumber for the state of Minnesota, said he's struggling because of high payments he must make to his ex-wife. Gillis is working part-time as a personal care attendant while trying to care for an elderly aunt and Rausch's disabled daughter in the home they share.

Their combined incomes don't cover the needs of a four-person household. So each month, they stop by PRISM for two bags of canned goods, fruit and other food items.

"People who are helping themselves should be able to get a little help too," Rausch said.

According to some indicators, hunger in Minnesota is declining — numbers Richard Goebel, executive director of St. Paul's Second Harvest Food Bank, find encouraging.

He attributed the decline to economic growth in Minnesota and to legislative action.

Still, Goebel said he is alarmed by those who are affected. In Minnesota, the study found that in 49 percent of households receiving food, one or both parents worked. Nationally, that number is about 39 percent.

"The working poor, children and seniors are the faces that jump out in Minnesota," Goebel

more

Cont'd

Minneapolis Star Tribune

State 3/11/98 Date MWRO Submitted By

Star Tribune photo by Mike Zerby

Bob Rausch and Deb Gillis of Robbinsdale picked up groceries Tuesday at the PRISM food shelf in Robbinsdale. They both work, but their incomes don't cover the needs of their four-person household. The food they took home is expected to feed them for four or five days.

said. The report showed 73 percent of those served in St. Paul were women, 39 percent were children and 13 percent were elderly.

Goebel said that while inner-city recipients of food services seem to be leveling off, there's an increase in suburban and rural assistance.

For instance, from 1996 to 1997, the number of people using food banks in southwest Minnesota increased 6 percent to 20,800 and the total poundage of food delivered from St. Paul to southwest Minnesota rose from 1.58 million to 1.75 million tons.

Anderson found herself seeking assistance from Second Harvest in Minnesota under circumstances much like the other 26 million Americans who went to that organization's food banks nationwide last year.

Although she was working at the time, the sudden end of her marriage left her unable to pay rent and other expenses and still feed herself and her child.

"Of course, you pay your rent and your bills first," Anderson said. "You have to, otherwise you have no roof over your head. Then you try to make your ends meet."

— Staff Writer Jean Hopfensperger contributed to this report.

— For more information on this study, go to http://www.secondharvest.org/websechal/l—ff.htm

STAR TRIBUNE MINNEAPOLIS MN 12/29
Publication City State Date submitted by

Hubs will link new workers, employers

Ramsey County aims to help welfare recipients make transition

Welfare to work

The second in a series of occasional reports on how welfare changes are affecting families and communities.

By Lourdes Medrano Leslie
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Thousands of Minnesotans must start moving from welfare to work Thursday, and the state's 87 counties are gearing up to help them make the transition.

In one of the most ambitious efforts to connect the new pool of workers with Twin Cities-area employers, Ramsey County will mobilize a partnership of private and public organizations to serve poor residents in 10 neighborhood employment hubs.

At least three are expected to open in January, one each in St. Paul's Midway and East Side areas, and another in Roseville. Other sites will be created later in the year.

"Eventually, job seekers will be able to go to one place and get access to the various resources that will help them find a job, keep a job or get a better job," said Jean Hammink, a Ramsey County planning specialist working with the partnership.

The new federal welfare law instituted a five-year limit for parents on welfare when it took effect July 1. Now most recipients must find work or face financial sanctions.

Similar efforts are underway in other counties. In Hennepin County, employers can hire workers directly from an employment center recently created in the county's downtown welfare office. About 10 companies and temporary agencies recruit there each week. Other counties, such as Anoka, are holding job fairs.

Ramsey County officials are relying on neighborhood agencies to provide crucial assistance, on their own turf, in getting about 7,000 welfare recipients into the labor market next year. And with 10,000 welfare cases — the state's second-largest concentration — the county needs all the help it can get, Hammink said.

"Basically, what the community groups are buying into is that they're part of the solution," she said. "We'd never had the mandate, or the challenge, in the community to help these people successfully find work. In the past we focused on training; now we have to help people find work and be successful at it."

In response to the federal welfare changes, Ramsey County officials created a Community Employment Partnership to get business and other community leaders involved. A task force then developed the idea of creating employment centers, or work resource hubs. The county and neighborhood groups then selected hub sites based primarily on the area's concentration of welfare cases.

In the new centers, county workers who dole out welfare checks will work next to social-service providers and religious organizations to provide skills assessment, job leads and interviewing techniques. To make job hunting easier, potential workers also will be able to secure support resources such as on-site, drop-in child care, transportation and housing. If demand warrants, the hubs may offer evening hours as well.

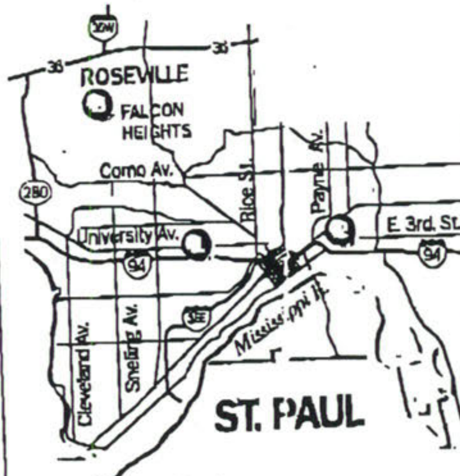
"We estimate that 60 to 70 people will walk through our program every day," said Xavier Escobedo, who will operate the East Side Job Bank out of a hub scheduled to open in late January at Metropolitan State University. The East Side has "a very big chunk of the [county's] welfare caseload, about 40 percent," he said.

By collecting the sometimes redundant and fragmented resources, Hammink said, the county hopes to make them more efficient and more accessible to both job seekers and employers. She and other county officials hope the new centers will end the frustration many welfare recipi-

Additional Pages

From welfare to work

Ramsey County will open three work resource hubs in January to help people move from welfare to jobs. At least seven others will follow later in 1998. One of the primary factors in deciding where to establish a center was the number of neighborhood families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The first hubs and the number of area families on welfare are:



1. **Frogtown-Midway area:** St. Paul Rehabilitation Center, 709 University Av. W., St. Paul; 1,350 AFDC families.
2. **East Side:** Metropolitan State University, 700 E. 7th St., St. Paul; 3,900 families on welfare.
3. **Western Ramsey County:** Fairview Community Center, 1910 W. County Rd. B, Roseville; 470 AFDC families.

For more information: Employers can fax job openings to Ramsey County's JobConnect, at 228-3169. Job seekers can call 228-3269 in St. Paul; 779-5666 in Ramsey County; and 1-888-438-5627 outside of Ramsey County.

Source: Ramsey County

StarTribune graphic

ents felt at being shuffled from agency to agency. Employers complain that despite listing jobs with several agencies, they still have trouble finding applicants.

"One of the biggest challenges in this new system will be to link together all the different services that we have, and get all the independent organizations to work in unison," said Ellen Watters, executive director of the Midway Chamber of Commerce. As a first step, she said, the partnerships in her area will put together a directory of agencies.

Child care key

"If this program is done right, it's going to make it less hard for people to get connected with the resources you need," said Sharon Doyle, a former welfare mother who now works as a social worker.

Doyle said the most difficult part of finding a job was securing child care for her toddler while she went on job interviews. "The problem is that few places offer drop-in child care," she said.

Most of the hubs will try to accommodate drop-in child care centers, organizers said, but it will take time to coordinate and phase in the various programs. There also are plans to offer language-specific services in centers that will serve large immigrant populations.

A big boost for the centers came from the McKnight Foundation, which will give more than $2 million to Ramsey County in the next two years to help with child care and other support services. The grant is part of a $20 million commitment that the Minneapolis-based foundation has made to help the state move families from welfare to work.

The sweeping changes are not just about welfare, Hammink said, but also about future economic stability and growth.

"We're hoping that under the new system we can eventually expand to cover job seekers who are not on welfare," she said. "This is a tight labor market, and employers want access to as many qualified workers as they can get."

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Published Saturday, October 18, 1997

Minnesota starts new food program for poor immigrants

Jean Hopfensperger / Star Tribune

Dozens of elderly Hmong immigrants are expected to pack Dick's IGA in St. Paul this weekend, clutching green coupons that represent a new public assistance experiment in Minnesota.

The coupons are good for Land O' Lakes milk, Gold'n Plump chickens, locally grown fruits and other Minnesota products. They're part of a plan to promote Minnesota goods while helping immigrants who lost food stamps because of federal welfare cuts.

The program has been a blessing to many low-income immigrants, as well as the grocery stores serving their neighborhoods. But many immigrants and store owners still don't understand it, immigrant leaders said Friday.

"We want to spread the word that this is money, not a piece of paper to throw away," said Chia Vang, coordinator of food issues for the Urban Coalition.

The Minnesota Grown Supplemental Food Program was created by the Legislature as a one-year, $1 million experiment. The idea was to make sure that low-income disabled immigrants cut from food stamps this year would have a backup nutritional plan.

Tieing it to the marketing of Minnesota goods was the idea of Sens. Becky Lourey, DFL-Kerrick, and Steve Morse, DFL-Dakota. They linked the food aid to Minnesota Grown, a 10-year-old promotional effort with about 400 participating members. The state Department of Agriculture runs the program.

About 3,000 immigrants, mainly those who receive Supplemental Security Income or General Assistance, are eligible for the coupons. They will get roughly $30 to $40 worth of them per month, depending on how many register, through June. The program will be reevaluated by the Legislature next year, said Lourey, who hopes to see it continue.

Boon to stores, too

Most people getting the coupons are elderly or disabled Asians, and most live in the Twin Cities, said Carol Milligan, program coordinator. Several hundred Hispanic immigrants also are using the coupons at stores such as Las Americas Supermercado in Minneapolis, said owner Selwin Ortega.

"When I heard about the program, I was so excited," said Ortega. "When I first came here with my wife and kids, we got on the WIC Women, Infants and Children program. I know something like that really helped us."

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It's also been a boon to stores such as Dick's IGA, located in St. Paul's Hmong