

EMPTY BOWLS, HUNGRY CHILDREN

Nearly 13 million American and one million Canadian children go hungry every day, either because they don't have enough food or what they've been given is not sufficiently nutritious. Their parents may cut back on their own food or skip meals entirely to provide for the needs of their children.

The pandemic worsened the situation for many families. Even before we'd heard of COVID-19, the USDA estimated that some 30 million students were eligible for free or reduced cost lunches under the National School Lunch Program, as well as for free breakfasts under another federally-funded program. School food may be the only nutritious meals these millions of children may eat, and that's only Monday through Friday. On weekends, they simply may go without a decent meal.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF FOOD INSECURITY AMONG CHILDREN?

Studies show that a household's limited or unreliable access to food for all its members- even for brief periods of time- can scar children for life.

Not only can it affect their growth, but also they may suffer more acute and chronic health problems, such as asthma, fatigue, and lethargy. They often lack access to proper medical care and need to go to the emergency room more often than do properly nourished children.

Psychologically, they may suffer from depression, anxiety, and stress, which may impede both their ability to learn and to create meaningful relationships.

Obesity also may be a problem. Junk food often is less expensive than nutritious food. Additionally, once the crisis has passed, children may overeat for fear they could find themselves hungry, again.

PROJECTS

You, and your sisterhood or women's group can make an impact on childhood hunger both within your temple family and your community. Here's some ideas to consider:

DONATE...

- Garden surplus to food pantries, child care centers in need, etc.

- Nutritious canned and packaged food, as well as toiletries, to Jewish Family & Children's Service or your local food bank
- Plastic grocery bags to your food bank so they can use them to hand out food for families
- Gift cards or cash to your synagogue for families in need
- Money to Mazon, the Jewish Response to Hunger (mazon.org), your local Jewish Family & Children's Service, or to your synagogue's funds that can be directed to help member families
- To other charities aimed at providing funds or goods and services to needy families. We recommend you check with Charity Navigator for unfamiliar charities before you give. (www.charitynavigator.org)

CREATE...

- Backpacks filled with healthy snacks to schools or child care centers for children in need
- Food drives (congregation/Religious School) around a specific time of year (High Holidays), a particular secular holiday (Thanksgiving), or monthly.
- A volunteer day at your local food pantry, and bring the whole family. Even children can help inspect food for expiration dates, organize the food by product, or pack food. Food banks also may need office help.
- Offer to build food shelves if food pantries need them, and you have the expertise.

FACILITATE...

- Encourage b'nai mitzvah students and youth groups to create programs to help other young people who suffer from food insecurity.
- Raise money for food programs.
- Advocate for federal nutrition programs for hungry children with government officials. Urge elected officials to protect SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), formerly known as food stamps. For ideas on advocacy go to <https://mazon.org/take-action/>
- Consider #GiveHealthy, which links food pantries online.
- If you've ever suffered from food insecurity, please talk about it to reduce the stigma of government assistance program.

We look forward to hearing about your successful programs! Please submit them to the Sisterhood Program Exchange for consideration. (<https://www.wrjpacific.org/sisterhood-program-exchange.html>) Together, we can fight childhood hunger!

WRJ Pacific District Program Committee
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