



City of Ferndale

POVERTY TASK FORCE REPORT

MEETING DATE: July 3rd, 2019

SUBJECT: Hunger and Food Access in North Whatcom County

DATE: 6/28/19

FROM: Riley Sweeney, Communications Officer

PRESENTATION BY: Riley Sweeney

SYNOPSIS: Here is an overview of the issues and resources relating to food access and hunger in north Whatcom County.

STAFF NOTES: In many ways, this is the most straightforward of challenges facing those affected by poverty. People need access to quality, nutritious food throughout their life. While there are plenty of dimensions to this issue (local farms, food deserts, nutrient dense food, education), it is one of the few where we can control most of the factors involved.

BACKGROUND: At any given time in Whatcom County, one in every six residents does not have enough nutritious food to eat.

Economic pressures have pushed more residents to experience food insecurity while budget cuts at the federal level, including government shutdowns, have impacted services here in Whatcom County.

Visits to the Ferndale Food Bank continue to increase, with a 12.5% increase from 2016 to 2017.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program

This federal program provides supplemental food staples to women, infants and children based on income. The benefit varies based on the situation but can provide for formula, food staples and other food needs. The program also includes nutritional education.

In 2018, the Whatcom County Health Department was no longer able to provide WIC services (nutritional education) due to budget cuts. The only remaining source in the area is the Ferndale SeaMar facility.

Basic Food Program

This is the Washington name for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and is sometimes referred to as food stamps although the concept of "stamps" is long gone. It is a federally funded, state-administered program that provides up to \$194 of food each month – it is dispersed through a debit card and can only be spent on food.

To qualify for this program, you must be a legal resident and currently be working or looking for work. Exemptions for childcare situations are included.

Hunger takes many forms, students without lunches in the schools, families skipping meals, or eating empty calories because they are cheap. Here are some of the issues around hunger and some of the resources available.



Nutritious Food

In the United States, healthy food is expensive. Fresh produce can get pricey, while heavy calorie junk food is cheap. For those living near the edge of poverty, residents may find some food that gets them through the day, but it has long-term impacts on their health.

Similarly, good food takes time to prepare. Instant food is high in salt and preservatives. Cooking meals can be a luxury if you are working two jobs and raising a family.



Food Access and Food Deserts

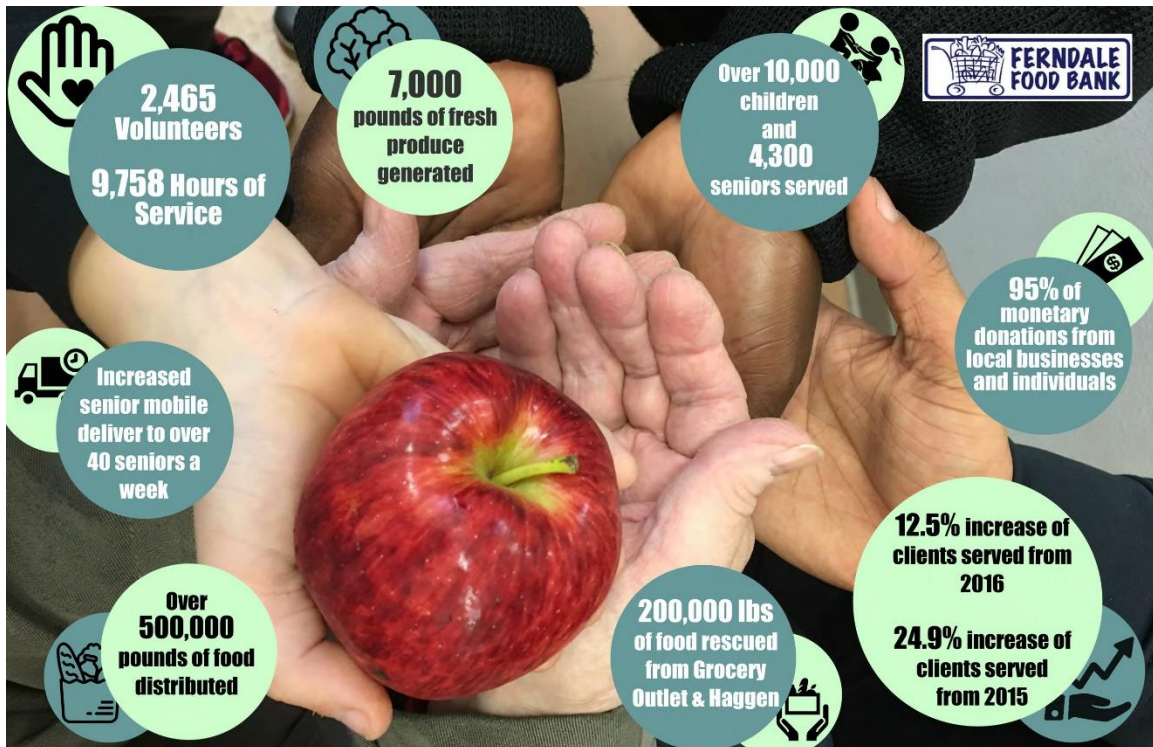
Sometimes, there are simply no locations to purchase quality food. Bellingham recently confronted a situation where Albertsons closed in the Birchwood neighborhood, shutting down the only grocery store within a three-mile walking stance. This forces residents

without transportation to rely on convenience stores, dollar stores and other non-grocery locations for their food, which drastically impacts the quality of their diet.

In east county, the situation is even dire, with most of the foothills without a reliable grocery store to purchase fresh produce.

Here in Ferndale, we have two grocery stores, however both are on the south side of the river. If there was a large-scale emergency that impacted the bridges, the north side of town would have to travel quite a distance by car to purchase food.

The Quick E-Mart on Portal Way has some produce but not a full spread of groceries.



Ferndale Food Bank

The Ferndale Food Bank provides a number of services and distributions to our community. Thanks to partnerships with our Community Garden and local farmers, they've provided fresh produce at minimal expense. Suzanne Nevan will attend our meeting and provide more details.