



COMMUNITY ACTION

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: How you can help relieve hunger locally

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Over the last six months, the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, aka food stamps, has taken two financial hits, first through rollback of temporary increases under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and most recently through passage of the federal Farm Bill that slashed \$8 billion from SNAP. In a state countermove, Gov. Cuomo has taken creative steps to ensure that SNAP benefits of 300,000 New Yorkers who would have been impacted by the new Farm Bill cuts are preserved.

This cloud of controversy surrounding food stamps is not new. SNAP has its roots in Depression-era policy under the Roosevelt administration, which for the first time authorized federal purchase of surplus farm commodities for redistribution to the nation's poorest unemployed citizenry. This radical concept spurred many a debate that continues even today about the fairness and impact of public welfare programs designed to relieve hunger and malnutrition.

In the wake of fluctuating funding and shifting public sentiment, charities like Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency and other members of the Cayuga County Food Pantry Provider Network play a key role in bridging the gap between public benefits and daily nutritional needs of our county's most vulnerable residents.

CSCAA's Auburn food pantry provides weekly food baskets to people in need. The value per basket is based on family size; a family of four may receive a weekly basket with an average value of \$91.75. During the last program year, CSCAA provided more than 3,200 food baskets to serve thousands of individuals and families with children in Cayuga and Seneca counties. Our staff also provides nutritional information and includes recipes and instructions on working with fresh fruits and vegetables. The majority of customers receiving food are working families with children, the elderly, the disabled and/or veterans. These statistics mirror SNAP recipient demographics.

On March 1, CSCAA launched a two-month-long Hunger Relief Campaign to raise food and funds for its two food pantries (located in Auburn and Waterloo). Last year, although the agency exceeded its goal of \$15,000 during the campaign, we struggled to keep food on the shelves of our food pantries during peak demand times such as summer months, when families don't have access to free and/or reduced price school lunches. Funding for more expensive items including fresh meats is always challenging.

Your support will help leverage existing resources that are stretched way too thin in order to meet this most basic need in our community. Visit us online at cscaa.com/hungercampaign.html to learn more. There are many ways to give, and every

donation is so important. Consider making a monetary donation to CSCAA Hunger Relief, 65 State St., Auburn, NY 13021, or through our secure online payment system. You can also collect food to drop off at either of our food pantries, located at 1 Brookfield Place in Auburn and 23 Center St. in Waterloo. If you are a business owner, consider making a corporate donation, spearheading an employee/customer food drive, holding a "jeans day" for this cause, or organizing a give-back to donate a percentage of sales back to the Hunger Relief Campaign.

We are so fortunate to be part of an extremely generous community comprised of compassionate individuals, businesses, service providers and faith-based organizations of varied political persuasion willing to give of themselves and their resources to help those in need. In this changing political environment, we must work together to help those who struggle daily to put food on their table, for they are our neighbors, our friends, our family — and maybe even ourselves. CSCAA's goal this year is to raise \$17,000 in cash and food donations for our Auburn and Waterloo food pantries. With your help, I know we can succeed.

If you are interested in coordinating a food drive or participating in the Hunger Relief Campaign and need more information, please contact me. Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, Inc.'s Marketing and Development Director at 315-255-1703 x155, tottley@cscaa.com.