Honk if You’re Fed Up with Hunger!

Increasing access to food and nutrition, while on the road and in Colorado schools

By Michelle Ray

Honk if you’re fed up with hunger” covers the side door of a green RV that drives past a Denver middle school on a crisp fall morning. One might not think the two are connected, but they do have at least one commonality: Hunger Free Colorado.

The statewide anti-hunger advocacy organization, established through a merger of two nonprofit groups in 2009 with the support of The Denver Foundation and its Critical Needs Fund, leverages the power of collaboration, as well as system, policy, and social change, to end hunger in Colorado. The organization identifies, investigates, and exposes unnecessary gaps and barriers that prevent access to healthy, affordable food.

“Hunger is an issue that impacts everyone in our state, but it is solvable,” says Kathy Underhill, executive director for Hunger Free Colorado. “By working together, we can find and apply innovative solutions that ensure Colorado families are able to put nutritious food on their tables, older adults don’t have to choose between paying medical bills and buying groceries, and children start their days nourished and prepared to learn.”

Programs embedded in communities across the state assist Coloradans facing food hardship, which is estimated to be more than 800,000 people—from children to seniors. One such example is a new kind of food truck launched by Hunger Free Colorado in May 2013. Your Neighborhood Food Truck, a retro-fitted, 40-foot RV, serves up access to computers and one-on-one assistance for families and individuals who may qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly benefits on a debit-like card for purchasing groceries. Your Neighborhood Food Truck visits sites throughout Metro Denver, including health clinics, grocery stores, and other community centers, and partners with other agencies to provide additional screening and educational opportunities under the truck’s awning.

“SNAP is a vital safety net for those struggling to get by, and the first line of defense against hunger,” says Underhill. “Many families and individuals impacted by hunger may be unaware of local assistance options or unable to access services due to limited transportation. Your Neighborhood Food Truck simplifies the SNAP application and referral process and makes it easy to connect our neighbors to needed resources in a comfortable and confidential setting.”

Hunger Free Colorado and many partnering organizations also work with schools, legislators, and communities to address child hunger, since statistics show that one in five children experience hunger in Colorado. On May 13, Gov. John Hickenlooper signed a new bill into law that will provide more children and teenagers with access to a daily breakfast after the first bell in school. The Breakfast After the Bell Nutrition Program, which goes into effect beginning school year 2014–15, requires Colorado schools to offer an after-the-bell breakfast to all students, if 80 percent or more of their student body is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

“Breakfast After the Bell received bipartisan support, because it’s a cost-effective way to reduce hunger for school-aged children in Colorado,” says Maura Barnes, director of policy and advocacy for Hunger Free Colorado. “Our state’s economy will benefit, since we won’t leave dollars on the table, and since breakfast is critical to health and learning, it will help ensure Colorado children are set up for success in and out of the classroom.”

To learn more about the issue of hunger in Colorado, sustainable solutions, and how you can get involved, visit HungerFreeColorado.org. Families and individuals can be connected to food and nutrition resources by calling the Hunger Free Hotline at 855.855.4626.

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