

The Makings of a Thanksgiving Meal at Nutley Family Service Bureau

Submitted by Emma Cortese, PhD, NFSB Board Member

Nutley Family Service Bureau's goal is to decrease the impact of food insecurity in households by providing a nutritious and dependable resource for family meals. USDA data for 2018 shows that over 11% of US households were food insecure, which means that, at least sometime during the year, over 14 million households lacked access to enough food to sustain a healthy life regimen.

At NFSB, we recognize the many ways that food insecurity is experienced. Disrupted eating patterns and reduced intake means worrying that food will run out before there is enough money to replenish the shelves, cutting down on



the size of meals or skipping meals, being hungry even after eating a meal, and being hungry but not having food to eat.

It is well established that caretaker/parental responsibilities surrounding food insecurity often create stress from having to budget and parcel available resources and reserves for family meals. Now, there is growing awareness that coping with food insecurity may impact children more severely than previously known.

Sociologist Kate Cairns, an assistant professor in Rutgers University Department of Childhood Studies, indicates that children are tuned into their situation. They recognize when their parents pretend not to be hungry in order to save food; they know the cycles of hunger—that there's more food in the house after food stamps arrive, and less as the month progresses; and they know their parents prioritize feeding their children before themselves. (www.civileats.com/2018/03/26/what-children-understand-about-food-insecurity/)

NFSB supports our pantry participants' ability to maintain normalcy and independence in their daily routines as they cope with the overwhelming physical, financial, and emotional disruptions that often accompany food insecurity. Our annual Thanksgiving Initiative provides "all the makings of the meal" for a stress-free, abundant table. Families can enjoy a turkey roasting, an apple pie baking, and the medley of aromas that signal *holiday is happening here!* Additionally, the diverse menu provides food choices, from mashed white to candied sweet potatoes, to choosing carrots, peas, or corn as their vegetable. And there is no need to worry about the fixin's either—broth, gravy, and cranberry sauce are included.

The quantity of groceries distributed to each household depends on the number of family members.

From year to year, NFSB tries to improve the services we provide. We listen to the needs of our participants and take them into consideration. Small freezers, undersized ovens, and inadequate thaw time present certain limitations, so this year we are specifically asking for smaller-sized turkeys or turkey breasts to ensure they may be prepared within space and time constraints. As in previous years, Nutley Park ShopRite's reward program provides an opportunity for customers to effortlessly donate their free turkey or turkey breast to the Food Pantry.

This annual Thanksgiving Initiative is no small undertaking. An enthusiastic army of volunteers will help to organize, pack, and distribute over 150 holiday meals to our food pantry participants. In 2018, a record number of Nutley residents, civic organizations, church groups, and businesses generously donated all the items necessary to create a memorable and nourishing holiday meal. NFSB is proud to bring our community together, connecting those who are in a position to give with those who are in a position to receive.

Wishing everyone a warm and wonderful Thanksgiving. ■

