



Unmet Need for Food Assistance in Marion County

Executive Summary

The results of a cross sectional, telephone-based survey of 856 Marion County adults, commissioned by Indy Hunger Network (IKH) in 2014 and conducted by Rutgers University found that 196,000 people or 21% of Marion County residents need some degree of food assistance. Previous studies have measured food insecurity, but this is the first direct measurement of the number of meals missed. Collaboration among both non-profit and for-profit organizations in Indianapolis has created a food assistance “safety net” that is helping nearly 75% of food insecure households. However, it’s still not enough. As the survey results indicate, ongoing and increased support is needed to sustain the current food assistance system and address the gaps.

Key Study Findings

- An estimated 55,700 people still have unmet food needs
- The unmet food needs translate into almost 9 million meals a year
- Families with children, comprise almost half (48%) of those with unmet needs
- Winter represents the season with the greatest need for food assistance
- Poorer nutrition was associated with food need and missed meals

Conclusions

Overall:

- Over 40 million additional meals per year have been provided to Marion County since 2010, through the current hunger relief system
- With demand increasing since 2008, the combination of government and not-for-profit food assistance providers have met most of the overall need for food
- Charitable network members have significantly increased the amount of food available within the hunger relief system

Sustainability:

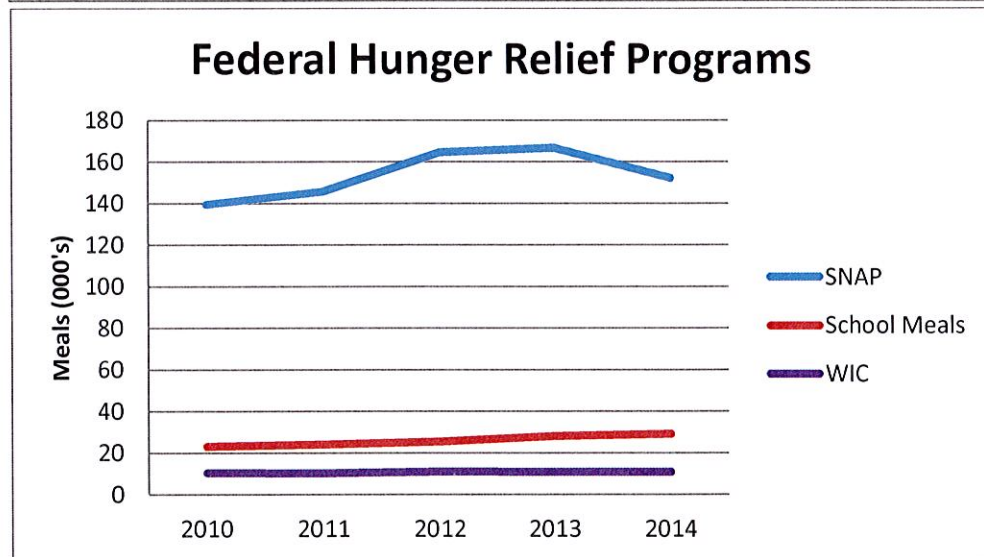
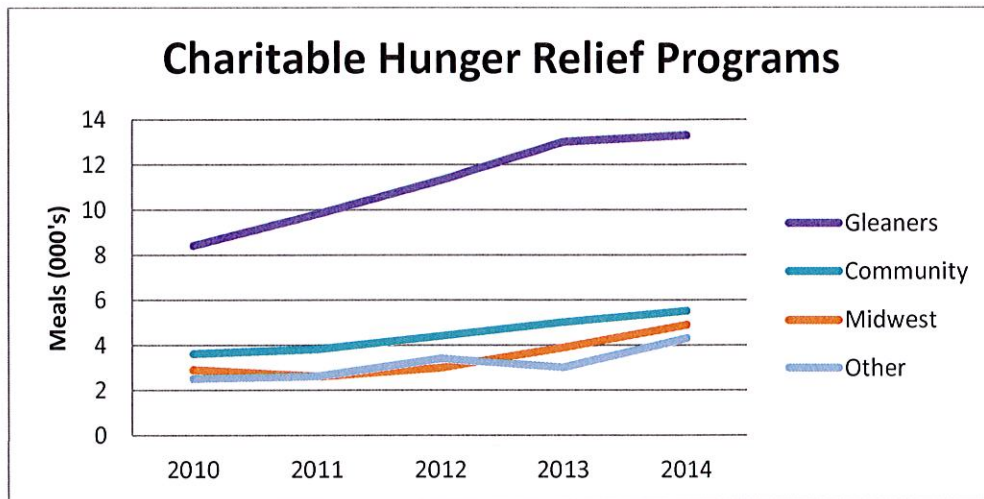
- Increasing the capacity and capabilities of Marion County’s food safety net will be important in coming years
- Any significant decrease in current levels of support from hunger relief programs, federal or non-profit, would significantly increase the unmet need
- A sustainable system is only possible with robust, stable organizations so community support of the charitable not-for-profits must continue

Access:

- Unmet need is dispersed across geographies and above and below the poverty line
- More than half (53.6%) of those who did not utilize food pantries cited access issues as the reason

Nutrition:

- The consequences of not having enough food results in lower academic achievement in children, lower work productivity in adults and poor health outcomes for both children and adults
- When income drops and family budgets shrink, food choices shift toward cheaper foods. The first items dropped are usually healthier foods more expensive foods and people with unmet need tend to have poorer nutrition
- Members of the IHN network have been working to improve the nutritional value of the food they provide



Closing Statement

The commitment and engagement of ALL stakeholders is critical to ensure a sustainable hunger relief system. Through a collaborative approach across public and private sectors, our non-profit organizations and the community at large, Indianapolis can serve as a model for creating sustainable solutions to address the critical issue of food insecurity.