

**ALACHUA COUNTY
and the
CITY OF GAINESVILLE**

**MEAL SERVICES
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP**

JUNE 29, 2010

**Facilitated by
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INTRODUCTION

Alachua County and the City of Gainesville sponsored a community workshop to receive input on the meal services in the county. Approximately 50 people attended the session which was facilitated by Ms. Marilyn Crotty, Director of the Florida Institute of Government at the University of Central Florida.

After opening remarks by Fred Murry, Gainesville Assistant City Manager, the group heard presentations by Ralph Hilliard, Gainesville Planning Manager; Eileen Schilling, Program Administrator for Food Stamps, Department of Children and Families; and Barbara Green, Director of the Homeless Emergency Project, Clearwater

The participants were then divided into five small groups and asked to discuss the following issues:

- How can we provide a safe environment for participants in meal programs and for the community?
- How can we allow for the distribution of prepared bag meals?
- Explore the potential for increased meal services at new or existing sites.
- How do we increase the participation levels and utilization of the food stamp program?

This report is a summary of the group discussions at the workshop.

1. How can we provide a safe environment for participants in meal programs and the community?

There appears to be consensus concerning improvements to the physical design of the facilities where meals are provided with suggestions for increased landscaping and courtyard areas for participants to gather before and after meals. In addition several groups agreed that respect for and by recipients of meal services is essential to maintain an environment that is safe for them and the community at large with both the management of food programs and participants taking responsibility for establishing and following behavioral guidelines.

2. How can we allow for the distribution of prepared bag meals?

No real consensus emerged regarding the provision of bag meals. There was some concern about additional litter, the lack of nutrition in packaged meals, and no sense of community when not sitting down to a meal with others. On the other hand, those who favored the use of bag meals felt it would increase the number of people who could be served, would disperse feeding programs throughout the county, and would eliminate the need for a facility.

3. Explore for the potential for increased meal services at new or existing meal sites.

There appeared to be agreement on increasing the provision of meals in the community with an array of suggestions of how that might be done. Several groups identified the need for better communication and coordination among providers to minimize duplication and address unmet needs. A concern about meals being healthy and using locally grown fruits and vegetables was emphasized by several participants.

4. How do we increase the participation levels and utilization of the food stamp program?

Expansion of the food stamp program generated a lot of discussion. It was clear that improved educational efforts should be made to increase awareness and participation. Many groups supported increasing sites (grocery stores, churches, etc.) for the application process. There was interest in expanding the pilot “restaurant program” to include healthier options and applying for some of the grants available through DCF.

1. How can we provide a safe environment for participants in meal programs and the community?

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The following ideas were generated in the small group discussions:

- Provide a covered courtyard for after meal congregation
- Design of emergency food sites- courtyards, landscaping
- Safety- enclosed courtyard, path to the facility- concentrate away from 4th Place. Create different entry.
- Provide a courtyard/green space public space to congregate
- Volunteer core or police to aid in creating a safe environment
- City ordinances that allow transitional housing in locations that are favorable to the homeless
- Is the concern the homeless or area residents? Criminal activity appears to arise from the nature of being homeless. Area residents complain
- Better communication- Are fears/feelings of being unsafe based on truth? Perceptions become reality. Publicize rules of behavior, help neighbors know of enforcement effort
- Define mission, rules- encourage respect both ways
- Raise levels of expectation- 2 way street- respect, include giving not just taking “sweat equity”
- Difference between behavior on property of program vs. behavior off property which program has no control over
- Management accountability
- Borrow idea of large scale “homeless communities”
- Make exceptions to property rules to allow for property use for outdoor day shelter (alternative to downtown plaza)
- “90% of conflict is appearances”
- Consider satellite facilities to dispense food
- Collect data (HMIS) for food service

- Problems caused by soup kitchen being a drop off and pick up site for other programs.
Move to RTS plaza?
- Don't limit numbers, instead limit serving time. Will decrease large crowds.
- Better coordination of meal providers. Need conversation among meal providers
- ID Cards
- GPD substation at soup kitchens
- Enhance advocates work with those causing problems
- Compared to years ago, there are improvements in neighborhood. We forget that.
- Are advocates serving on plaza just to stick it to the city? Or because it's easy to do there?
- Designated place for excess meal service

2. How can we allow for the distribution of prepared bag meals?

No real consensus emerged regarding the provision of bag meals. There was some concern about additional litter, the lack of nutrition in packaged meals, and no sense of community when not sitting down to a meal with others. On the other hand, those who favored the use of bag meals felt it would increase the number of people who could be served, would disperse feeding programs throughout the county, and would eliminate the need for a facility.

The following ideas were generated in the small group discussions:

- Exchange litter cleanup services for bag lunch
- Amend so that community partnership can be encouraged
- Too one size fits all approach- overcome with contact with local farmers, gleaning
- Expand solicitation bins
- Recyclable/reusable bags provided by bag meal providers to clients to reuse when they return for meals
- Provide opportunity for sense of community if NOT handing out brown bags

3. Explore for the potential for increased meal services at new or existing meal sites.

There appeared to be agreement on increasing the provision of meals in the community with an array of suggestions of how that might be done. Several groups identified the need for better communication and coordination among providers to minimize duplication and address unmet needs. A concern about meals being healthy and using locally grown fruits and vegetables was emphasized by several participants.

The following ideas were generated in the small group discussions:

- Involve the homeless in the discussion of ideas for meeting their needs
- Create relationships with clients to reframe the issues

- Organize the homeless to assist with cleaning up the community
- Allow for greater numbers by having meal served two separate times
- Allow for meal and different time to pick up bagged meals
- Community gardens donating food to providers/shelters, individuals, utilize food stamps
- Open community kitchens- utilize neighborhood associations
- Educational component- what exists, distribution sites
- Explore community partnerships
- Increase food distribution sites
- Increased meal service
- Community coordination of meals- multiple sessions of lunch at meal sites.
- Coordination of services
- Research viability of sites
- GIS to determine needs and enable strategic planning
- Mobile food sites
- Bus routes to get meals- 1 bus, 1 route, 1 time per day.
- Indoors for less impact
- Take advantage of churches that are willing to provide services by lifting ordinance restrictions.
- New sites:
 - Convenient neighborhood location, satellite sites
 - People donate their school bus pass for riders to one stop
 - Need alternative dispersed sites
 - Lift the meal limit or reduce limits to force city and community to solve.
- Existing sites:
 - St. Francis- takes all the blame for all the problems
 - Churches, Salvation Army, home van, pantries, Fire of God, Sr. Hazel, Catholic Worker, Passage, Guerilla Lunchfare, Angel Foods
- All serving needs to be permitted and regulated vs. resistance to being on a list
- St. Francis House - deliver food left after 130 served
- Implement hunger abatement plan – in place, already recommended
- Expand meal services at existing sites
- Divert clients to diverse, non-stop kitchen providers and options. Partner with local restaurants with ‘credit card’ and vouchers.
- Create food alternatives that are healthy, fresh food

- Spin the restaurant pilot project to create a win-win “logo” or community helper business image
- Create a mainstream coupon/voucher purchasing card for clients to feel they are contributing to economy- no stigma
- Stagger hours at sites to minimize concentration
- Network with churches to help provide support with permitting
- Utilize church facilities that currently are designed/up to code to cook and serve meals
- Accountability and responsibility by clients by connecting with public services
- Participation in food services requires work/volunteering/returning with aid
- Do warrant checks to begin client entering the system- case management tied to use of assistance
- Create transportation to/from sites
- Project pride hours to connect to clients- giving back
- Food production/service opportunities
- Growing food/harvesting by clients at one stop centers
- Have a rich diversity of sites, franchises and systems
- Protein based meals to clients

4. How do we increase the participation levels and utilization of the food stamp program?

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The following ideas were generated in the small group discussions:

- Have homeless set up a shelter that operates on food stamps
- Online access to food stamp application- laptops set up in churches, local businesses
- Are homeless who are on social security on food stamps?
- Restaurant pilot program addressing hot food
 - Old USDA rule – should challenge prohibition on purchase of hot and prepared food in grocery stores
- Transportation between grocery store and restaurant a problem
- Education of public- Gainesville Sun- ongoing series, public library
- Education of eligible participants- advertising, TV, providing forms in grocery stores

- Educate the access sites to provide more courteous, understanding service
- Use DCF materials on increasing participation
- Educational component- send trainers to agencies- police, churches
- Educate crisis caregivers to the benefits
- Values - energy assistance; county Rx co-pay \$5
- Enable and encourage churches to provide access
- Provide information cards/flyers to police, med services, fire rescue, libraries, churches, schools
- Increase SNAP
- Outpost DCF worker once a week at St. Francis House
- Advertise being able to file even if homeless
- Will St. Francis House allow people to use their address, get mail there?
- One stop, allow mail delivery
- Increase gardens, sales to those with SNAP, expand use at farmer's market, teach the homeless and hungry to garden.
- S in "SNAP" is supplemental
- Max for one person is \$200/month
- Partner sites increased with staff cost-sharing with processing applications of clients
- Increase number of sites in diverse areas of community to include client service applications
- Make food stamp applications available at food service sites
- Increase application sites to source of food: Publix, Winn Dixie, etc. using DCF application sites.
- Enhance DCF follow up
- Expand restaurant pilot program to include farmer's markets
- Seek outreach partnership/participation grants

Miscellaneous Ideas

Additional ideas concerning the homeless were also discussed:

- Overarching concerns- Not in my backyard- we need to make this a community issue
- Another topic for discussion - How to reduce the impact to neighborhoods?
- Encourage local businesses to help
- Work with UF faculty to develop solutions

- Try to get area residents to build relationships with those who are homeless
- Try to change media perception, share positive stories
- Work with the Police Dept or Public Defender's Office, to refer homeless individuals who have been released to a shelter to break the cycle
- Dignity project- create self-help programs for the homeless, use the project to facilitate relationships
- Agriculture skills training for the homeless
- Legal tent city- access to services, case management, safe and supervised
- Sand bag shelters- tropical storm/hurricane ready shelters or transportation for emergency evacuation
- Collaborating with property owners- property tax incentives, landlord permit incentives
- Homelessness, elderly, working poor is not just a Gainesville problem, it is a county problem and outlying areas also deserve attention.
- Identify gaps and close them. Eliminate duplications.