



news release

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CalFresh Forum unites community partners

Humboldt County's participation in the CalFresh program has increased by a record 83 percent in the last six years.

In May 2008, 10,209 local people were enrolled in the federal food assistance program that helps low-income households put healthy food on their tables. In May 2014, 18,641 Humboldt residents — including young children and seniors — were receiving CalFresh benefits.

"CalFresh enrollment is at an all-time high, meaning more people can afford the nutrition they need," said Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) CalFresh Outreach coordinator Barbara O'Neal. "That's a good thing, because with the recession more of our neighbors are living in poverty and food insecurity has increased."

For the last three years, DHHS has been partnering with nonprofit organizations, family resource centers, businesses, schools and churches to help improve the lives of the community's most vulnerable individuals. Currently, there are 40 community partners actively working on CalFresh outreach with DHHS.

"CalFresh benefits are vital to the families served by the family and community resource centers in Humboldt County," said Taffy Stockton, coordinator of the Humboldt Network of Family Resource Centers, one of the CalFresh community partners.

"The centers have used their CalFresh funding for a variety of projects targeted at informing people about this resource, with activities as diverse as the communities they are located in," Stockton said. "In the past, this has included community meals, cooking classes and community gardens, all accompanied with information on CalFresh."

Representatives from the local family and community resource centers, as well as a roomful of other community partners, recently attended the annual

CalFresh Forum, which was hosted by DHHS, Food for People and the California Center for Rural Policy.

“This strategic partnership between DHHS and dozens of nonprofits spread throughout Humboldt County has made the process of accessing nutrition assistance through CalFresh, even in the most remote corners of the county, more accessible than ever before,” said Deborah Waxman, Food for People’s director of programs.

Waxman said CalFresh has also indirectly saved many jobs in the grocery industry.

“In Humboldt County alone, participants spend more than \$2.6 million at local stores and farmers markets each month to stave off hunger and improve their nutrition,” Waxman said.

During the CalFresh Forum, which took place on June 5 at the Humboldt Bay Aquatic Center in Eureka, participants were given a CalFresh outreach update by O’Neal. They also heard from keynote speaker Jessica Bartholow, a legislative analyst at the Western Center of Law and Poverty with nearly two decades of experience in anti-poverty organizing, advocacy and program development at the local, state and national levels.

A series of afternoon workshops delved into topics like the CalFresh application and eligibility process, skill building for interorganizational collaborations and how to stretch CalFresh dollars to create healthy meals. Community partners also had the chance to talk to DHHS eligibility experts to hone their skills and understanding of CalFresh.

To apply for CalFresh, call DHHS at 1-877-410-8809 or Food for People at 707-445-3166, ext. 308 or 318. A map of CalFresh partners in Humboldt County offering CalFresh assistance is available at www.foodforpeople.org/calfresh-task-force.

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