St. Margaret's Center: Food Pantry Coordinator

Job Description:

The ISC Volunteer will assist the Center Director, Volunteer Coordinator and regular volunteers in coordinating the Food Pantry program. Will help in coordinating its systems, managing its volunteers, increasing its donations of food, marketing its availability, and assisting in its conversion to a “client choice” model (if that hasn’t already happened by the summer of 2016).

Duties include:

1. Help oversee operations of the Food Pantry, which is open for distribution of food on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, from 9 am to 4 pm. Approximately 1,000 poverty-level households receive groceries each month; about 300 sack lunches are distributed each week to homeless persons; and about 200 poverty-level seniors pick up extra food one day per month. Help train, place and direct volunteers. Order food as needed, coordinate pick-ups, and manage inventory.
2. Identify new in-kind donors and coordinate pick-up and delivery of food.
3. Market program to eligible participants and community organizations.
4. Become informed about the CalFresh (food stamps) program, educate clients, and train volunteers to educate clients about the CalFresh program and eligibility guidelines.
5. Coordinate work and activities with the NEOP (Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention) team on-site.
6. Assist in managing the conversion to a “client choice” model, including researching existing programs, “best practice” programs at other centers, and helping staff and volunteers to figure out the logistics in regards to inventory, staffing, process, policies and procedures.
7. Develop an operations manual for the Food Pantry, incorporating the “client choice” model, once the conversion has taken place.

Impact: The implementation of a Food Pantry Coordinator position will directly impact the quality and effectiveness of the food outreach programs for indigent families. The areas include:

- Increasing the amount and quality of food available for distribution by forging relationships with business, institutional and individual in-kind donors.
- Coordinating volunteer drivers for additional food pick-ups.
- Assisting with the transition of the program to a best-practices “client choice” model, whereby participants are more fully engaged in choosing appropriate foods for their families.
• Reinforcing the program as an environment-friendly one through the use of recyclable bags in place of plastic or paper bags.
• Coordinating the pantry in a more systematic fashion in terms of inventory, distribution and staffing. Creating a more efficient system for managing the details.
• Integrating the program with CalFresh participation for eligible households.
• Integrating the program with the new NEOP nutrition education efforts.
• Marketing the program’s availability to hard-to-reach populations. Increasing access for people in need of services.

Need to be addressed: For most of its history there hasn’t been a coordinator dedicated to the Food Pantry, within the multiple services provided by the community center, and as a result, improvements and growth have been haphazard. For example:

• Center staff receives reports of food availability in the community, but doesn’t have the time to research sources, solicit donations, forge relationships with prospective donors, and arrange for pick-up of donations. Instead of the “beggars can’t be choosers” philosophy in accepting any donations, even if unhealthy, a more efficient approach would be to seek out quality foods for our participants.
• Participants sometimes complain about the food selections, and give back or throw away foods that they do not need. With a client choice model, they would only choose foods that they will eat, increasing their active participation in the process while respecting their dignity.
• The city and county of Los Angeles have banned plastic bags and are charging for paper bags, which results in far fewer donations of these items for food pantries. St. Margaret’s is requiring families to bring their own bags but this is still an ongoing learning process that must be continually reinforced. For those who forget, the pantry will need some bags on hand to accommodate them. Ultimately, the requirement will have a positive impact on the environment, but necessitates a change in thinking and practice for all involved.
• The other food programs at the Center are not always utilized by eligible participants. There needs to be a more systematic approach for participants to be aware of all the programs for which they are eligible. Most importantly the CalFresh (food stamps) program is underutilized in California, and many low-income households are eligible but not receiving this significant support for their monthly budgets. Outreach and on-site application, while currently offered, need to be bolstered.
• Since the Center has operated for 28 years and is well-known in the local community, and staffing has been limited, not much effort has gone into marketing the food program. There are always new participants, though, who tell us that they hadn’t known about the program, although they’ve lived locally for years. How many others aren’t we reaching who truly need our help?