



**Friends of  
South End Community Outreach Ministries (SECOM)  
Newsletter**  
August 16, 2010

Dear Friends,

As one of Heart of West Michigan United Way's partner agencies, we are required to give our performance report this time of year. This may seem like a dreadful experience, but in reality it isn't too difficult to do and there is usually some interesting data to be had from the exercise.

Typically it's the big numbers that people like to focus on. In the past year SECOM provided more food and personal care item services for clients than ever before (almost 20,000), but that is to be expected considering the ongoing unemployment situation. We are seeing the same individuals month after month because they can't find employment either temporary or permanent.

There is a smaller number that bears considering though. That number is 6052. It's the number of individuals that at one time or another last fiscal year came to SECOM for food. With a population of approximately 600,000 in Kent County that means that 1% of the people in Kent County came through our doors looking for food. And we are just one small agency. There are ten other key pantries in the ACCESS system in Kent County.

If SECOM is average with 1%, that means conservatively that 11% of the population in Kent County needs help putting food on the table. It also probably means that we will be experiencing a persistent poverty problem locally for quite some time even if we do see a dramatic turn around in the economy. If that is the case, what are we to do?

In low and middle income countries around the world (as well as New York City) the latest fad is conditional cash-transfer (CCT) programs. In these programs a stipend and food is given to families if they meet certain poverty alleviating conditions. For a better understanding of these programs see this "Economist" article:

[http://www.economist.com/realarticleid.cfm?redirect\\_id=16693323](http://www.economist.com/realarticleid.cfm?redirect_id=16693323)

For governments CCTs are logical. Reward people for acting responsibly. For faith based human services agencies it isn't so clear. Our interests are providing basic human services to people that are in need without interfering in their lives.

SECOM's mission is to "minister people living with hunger and poverty in Kent County". We don't believe in withholding services from those who don't act in the way we believe that they should. We believe that having enough to eat is a basic human right.

We also believe in providing additional food incentives to people that participate in our health and education programs

Aerobics participants receive fruit or a healthy snack after a session. Family education programs provide a meal at each lesson. Parents get food and child supplies when they involve their children in our preschool activities. That is our systemic approach to poverty.

With so many people requiring food in Kent County there is plenty of work to do for the foreseeable future. What is the best way to accomodate the demand? We would be interested in hearing your opinion on the best solution. Should we be more altruistic or are CCTs the answer?

Thank you for being a part of our mission.

Best Regards,

Robert Heys  
Development Director

P.S. Speaking of altruism, here's an update from the Steiners and Community of Christ church. So far this summer 1430 pounds of food has been collected by the Gracious Givers and Blessed Bringers. The goal is to hit 2,000 pounds. The Gracious Givers lead the competition by 810 points (not pounds).

Read the complete Steiner letter here:

<http://secomministries.org/files/Community-of-Christ-Food-Competition.pdf>

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