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HANDBOOK FOR RESCUING FRESH FOOD AND OTHER PRODUCTS:
OPERATIONS OF FOOD PANTRIES AND DONATIONS NETWORK

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE...RESCUE

FRIENDSHIP DONATIONS NETWORK (FDN)

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(72006)

Non-profit, 501(c)3, 100% volunteer run, almost no-budget agency

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PROLOGUE

Food is the gift of life: the Earth's supreme treasure! Without nutritious food, the minds and bodies of children do not develop properly; some are left with lifetime mental, social and physical disabilities. Malnutrition has a debilitating effect on both adults and children. It is a sad paradox that in the richest country in the world, 38.1 million people in America are living below the poverty line. Nearly 22 percent of these people are under the age of 18. Of the poor over the age of 16, 41 percent work, and 11 percent work year-round, full-time (U.S. Census Bureau).

Daily, four million low-income children under the age of 12 are hungry. According to The Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, one of every five children is living in poverty: this translates into hunger, food insecurity and deprivation of every day needs for healthy, normal development. 54.8% of children under 6 living in female-headed households with no husband or partner present are living in poverty! 30 million adults experience hunger and food insecurity at least once every month.

In contrast, the nation's 13,000 richest families, 1/100th of one percent of the population, receive almost as much income as the poorest 20 million families in America. In 2005, 9 to 15 million persons are unemployed. This figure may be higher because millions of people feel that they have no hope for gainful employment and the dignity that it provides. They experience a life of hopelessness about their economic situation. 11 million people are paid minimum wage. This salary does not meet basic needs for food, shelter clothing, transportation and medical care . 3.5 million or more adults and children will experience homelessness this year, many of them are the working poor and lower middle-class. 1.3 million of the homeless are children. 42 million people lack any health insurance. (Sanders Scoop, Fall 2003). During the course of the year, 71 million will lose their health insurance. Jobs in technology, manufacturing and office work are lost daily to overseas markets where salaries are a fraction of American are paid.

In Tompkins County (Upstate New York) poverty is identified as one of the top 5 issues facing 10% of its residents. Not having enough food is a critical problem. 27% of all households make less than \$25,000 p/year which defines them as low-income households. 77% of low-income households live in food insecure homes (they do not know where they will obtain food or they do not have sufficient varieties of food). 39% of low income respondents experience hunger (they miss a meal). Nearly 5,000 children live in low income households; 43% of these families with children experience hunger. 22% of the elderly skip meals or cut the size of meals. Homeless and independent youth are at high risk for food insecurity. Many of the working poor are not eligible for services and do not make enough for basic needs (2004 Compass Survey by Lisa Horn, United Way of Tompkins County).

Meanwhile, in excess of 96 billion pounds of edible "surplus" food—an estimated 27 percent of our food supply—is wasted and dumped at the farm, retail, consumer, and food service facilities. According to the USDA, that amounts to the equivalent of 130 pounds of food for every man, woman, and child in America ends up in

overcrowded landfills.

It doesn't make sense to dump good, life-giving food into dumpsters and then haul it at great expense to overcrowded landfills. How long can we ignore hunger and human suffering while simultaneously wasting precious food?

Food is available in great abundance to those willing to rescue it from donors who no longer want it! WHY? Communities often lack the organization, infrastructure, transportation, and distribution sites to get surplus food to those who need it most. Consequently, most of this food goes to waste. On average, American families waste 14% of their food purchases...\$590 worth of good food – meat, vegetables, fruit, grain products. Nationwide, they waste \$43 billion worth of food (2004 study Univ. of Arizona in Tucson). We need only to move past the blocks that inhibit our ability and willingness to organize and rescue good food that is unwanted and unsalable.

The Bill Emerson "Good Samaritan Food Donations Act" (1996) provides a measure of safety from liability for donors and volunteers who had previously feared frivolous lawsuits. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages and supports the rescue of unwanted, safely handled good food from supermarkets, stores, schools, universities, institutions, farms, corporations, and other entities. The USDA is trying to discourage food waste.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

A SIMPLE PATH

"People are unreasonable illogical and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish and ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, if you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest anyway.

What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People really need help, but may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway."

-Mother Teresa

OUR NATION'S ABUNDANCE

Mother Teresa's words are an inspiration to many of us in the hunger relief business. The United States is a land of abundance, as well as challenging opportunities! Many of the resources and products we consume daily are free and available when stores deem them unsalable, and individuals or organizations want to donate or discard them. Anyone may take advantage of the "gifts" that are dumped daily. The list of where and how to find

free food and non-food products is endless: your apartment house, your neighborhood streets, stores, supermarkets, bakeries, department stores, public and private agencies, hospitals, universities, public schools, corporations, social and professional organizations, businesses, factories, and so on. Non-food items that are new, used, and usable are also discarded by manufacturers, companies, corporations, schools, business organizations and others.

This handbook describes how to develop an effective, efficient, low-cost donations network in order to reclaim nutritious food and other products and then, how to distribute this “bounty” through food pantries, soup kitchens, low-wage work sites and other programs that benefit low to moderate income people.

Developing a sustainable donations network is a gratifying and fascinating project. It requires:

1. An organization with a name, address, telephone number, cell phone, e-mail address, and website
2. A paid or all volunteer director and staff
3. A permanent site
4. A telephone, answering machine
5. A refrigerator and freezer (optional) either your own or space in someone else’s units.
6. storage space, if possible
7. Transportation(car, station wagon, mini van, small truck)
8. An organizational structure
9. A plan for rescuing products
10. Responsible agencies, such as churches, community centers, or other non-profit entities who are willing to sponsor a food pantry, soup kitchen or other program.
11. A plan for advertising the food pantry to those you wish to serve
12. Volunteers who are reliable and willing to take responsibility for organizing, transporting, displaying, and distributing the food to those in need (5 to 25 persons). Less than five volunteers is not advisable!
13. Volunteers willing to provide personal transportation or a program able to reimburse volunteers for transportation costs (\$5 to \$10 per day) to pick up and deliver donated food to the pantry.

WHAT IS WASTED AND DUMPED?

There is no way I can even begin to document all the waste in America! It is legend!! The following products that are of interest to the donations networks are only a drop of water in vast sea of treasures – billions of pounds of nutritious food, furniture, clothes, linens, appliances, books, and anything you may wish!

1. Products nearing the end of their shelf life; unsalable food; on, near, or post-

2. expiration date; foods and other products that are mislabeled; items with damaged outer packaging; perishable and non-perishable food; products that look less than perfect; and products that are not selling fast enough to merit the cost of shelf space.
 2. Leftover, high quality, safely handled restaurant, university and catered food.
 3. New and used clothes.
 4. New and used household products needed by most families: i.e. cleaning products, electrical items, housewares, kitchenware, furniture, rugs, and small appliances.
 5. New and used refrigerators, freezers, stoves, microwaves, dishwashers, washing machines, dryers, air conditioners, stereos and TV's. The owners may have tried to sell the items, but had no buyers! The owner does not want to store unwanted items or needs the space for other uses.
 6. Used cars that may be rusty, dented, or in need of small repairs or even perfect!
 7. New and used linens from private homes, motels and hotels, stores, factories, colleges, universities, and university dorms at the end of the term.
 8. Products for infants, children, and teens
 10. End of year at colleges and universities is a treasure hunt! Students dump used, or new household items, and a wide assortment of mostly unopened and opened food. In some universities there is a program called "Dump and Run" and/or Student "Recycling Project". Thousands of pounds of non-perishable foods is available.
 11. Computers, software, and supplies
 12. Leftovers after "Garage Sales".
- AND ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN IMAGINE THAT PEOPLE GROW, PRODUCE, IMPORT, OWN OR MANUFACTURE!

WHY DO SOME INDIVIDUALS AND STORES DONATE USEFUL PRODUCTS?

1. They receive a tax-deduction.
2. Environmental consciousness: they would rather recycle than waste useful products that are still in good condition.
3. They save on expensive hauling fees.
4. They feel caring and compassion for low-income folks.
5. They hate wasting good stuff.
6. Donations generate good will, community spirit, and positive publicity for the store.
7. They want to give something back to the community that supports their store.

WHY SOME STORES DO NOT DONATE

1. Some stores are reluctant to donate food or other products that they plan to discard because, in the past, employees have given away products that should have been

sold in exchange for favors from volunteers of the hunger program. This practice tarnishes good will and is highly unethical. It is stealing.

2. Agencies beg for food donations and then do not show up to get them. This makes donors angry and resentful.
3. Fear of liability. (See "Good Samaritan Act")
4. Fear that if they donate food, their customers won't buy it! (WalMart will not donate day old food that they do not wish to sell in Elmira, NY)
5. Insufficient space to store donations.
7. Perception that time costs money; it takes too much time and effort to train store staff

to set aside unsalable food and other products.

7. Attitudes of "It's not worth the bother" or "What do I have to gain?"

Be prepared to discuss these issues! Stress the positive aspects of donations.

SECTION II - HISTORY AND MISSION

HISTORY

The Friendship Donations Network (FDN) was started in 1988 as a result of a visit to five of 112 migrant labor camps in Sodus, New York. These hard working, yet impoverished people, lacked the funds to buy the barest essentials of living - food, linens, clothing, kitchenware, and personal toiletries. They lived in wooden or tin shacks or cinderblock rooms. Without money or job security, they needed help. Sodus is a poor community in upstate New York. The migrants received some help from a migrant advocacy group.

We visited with the Migrant Farm Workers agency and were able to forge a partnership to bring donations from Ithaca to Sodus. They agreed to take responsibility for transporting and distributing donations from Ithaca's supermarkets and other donors to Sodus' labor camps—88 miles each way, seven days per week. Often, they lacked the money for gas or van repairs. The Advocacy agency fell apart in 1994 when its director left. No one was able or willing to carry on her work.

In Ithaca, the flow of donations kept pouring in daily! Makeshift plans were quickly evolved to distribute the food to any entity that would take it and distribute it until reliable, stable food pantries were set up. The director of FDN canvassed numerous churches, community centers, social agencies, institutions, after-school programs and anyone else who might potentially run a food pantry. She publicized the availability of free nutritious food in articles for the local newspaper, radio, and TV. Finally, she was able to fill all the daily slots. At the beginning, the new pantries and programs were poor risks in terms of reliability, responsibility, staffing, transportation, and general ability to

operate a well-run food pantry. But the food needed to go somewhere! The director continued to canvass for better prospects.

The director replaced pantries and programs that performed poorly with church-run food pantries that had more resources, a ready supply of volunteers, and good organizational abilities. By 1998, all the pantries were church and non-profit social-agency sponsored. Each pantry was evaluated! Those whose performance was less than acceptable were closed. Pantries that served less than 40 people were also discontinued because they were unable to handle 1500 to 2000 pounds of food donations on their pantry day. In special situations, the food was shared between two smaller programs.

Today, FDN volunteers collect an average of 1200 to 2,000 pounds of mostly fresh perishable food each day. The donations are distributed mostly through food pantries, soup kitchens, after-school programs, eight to fifteen low-wage employment sites where workers earn less than \$10 p/hour. FDN serves hunger programs within a 35 mile radius of Ithaca. Hunger programs from neighboring counties travel to Ithaca for food donations because no organizational structure similar to FDN exists in their home communities (see Appendix for list of pantries).

About 200 volunteers from the hunger programs serve 2,000 (more or less) people per week..

FDN has no budget, very little funding or money. Transportation costs are paid to any volunteer who needs the money for transportation to pick up food from donors; deliver food to any program; and to volunteers to deliver food to low-wage worksites. This is known as the Outreach Program. To my knowledge it is the only program in America that has such a program. Annually, the director writes a grant to one or more funding sources for the purpose of soliciting \$2000 to \$3,000 per year for transportation expenses. Private donations and grants are accepted. FDN does not participate in fund-raising campaigns. Donations arrive mostly unsolicited because of FDN's reputation in the community!

FDN'S MISSION:

1. To rescue and distribute free fresh nutritious food and other products, which would otherwise be discarded.
2. To help provide low to moderate income individuals and families with free food as well as other products (linens, appliances, clothes, furniture, computers.).
3. To provide donated food in order of priority: first, to soup kitchens; second, to pantries; third, deliveries to low-wage employment sites; and last, to other non-profit human service programs.
4. To encourage and teach others how to develop and operate a donations network and/or a fresh food pantry.
5. To develop and provide an instructional guide that includes all the documents, forms, resources, and tools that a donations network or food pantry may need to operate a low-cost, safe, efficient organization without "reinventing the wheel."

6. To model an all-volunteer rescue program that functions successfully with minimal funding from the private sector, minimal bureaucracy and great flexibility.

SECTION III: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

HOW FDN WORKS:

FDN pantries and programs are similar to “franchise” operations like Pizza Hut, McDonald’s, or any supermarket chain:

*FDN is the “central office.”

*The director is the “CEO.”

*FDN staff and other volunteers are “employees.”

*All the pantries and programs are the “franchises.”

*They receive all or most of their food from donors solicited by FDN.

*FDN provides each daily program with a route and itinerary of markets from which they pick up their donations. Each volunteer driver uses his/her vehicle to pick up/deliver food.

*Pantries may also seek and are encouraged to solicit donations outside of FDN (some do, most do not).

*Every pantry abides by most FDN’s guidelines, rules, and policies as a condition of participation.

*FDN staff may be asked to teach new coordinators and pantry volunteers how to pick up food from donors and what to ask for, how to display it at the pantry, how to operate the pantry, how