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Brooklyn food pantries are stocked, but charities lack cash

BY BEN CHAPMAN AND JAKE PEARSON



'We can very well close,' says Reaching Out Social Services' executive director Tom Neve, though the shelves are well-stocked. ROSIER/News

BROOKLYN They're flush with food but short on cash.

Brooklyn charities are running out of money to operate and distribute ample food supplies - even though they've got plenty of food for the increased numbers of hungry people hit by the recession.

"We're working on nickels and dimes here," said Tom Neve, 46, executive director of Reaching Out Social Services in Bensonhurst, which has a well-stocked soup kitchen and a grocery-style food pantry, but needs the money to pay staff and rent. "We're financially nosediving as demand becomes greater."

The number of people served by Reaching Out has nearly quadrupled since 2007, but the group has been

rejected for 10 of 11 private and government grants this year and only has enough cash to stay afloat for four more months.

Charities that provide food pantries, soup kitchens and social services need cash donations in order to survive, said Neve. "If nothing comes in we can very well close."



The cash shortage is widespread. Fifty-eight percent of borough food programs received less financial support this year, according to the [Coalition Against Hunger](#).

"Having enough food is almost the least of their worries," said [CAH executive director Joel Berg](#). "They don't have enough resources to operate."

In Ocean Hill, the Neighbors Together

soup kitchen is relying on cash reserves to survive. It served 105,000 meals this year, up 40% from two years ago.

"Over the past year we've had plenty of food...but people have basically said, 'we can't give [money],'" said executive director Ed Fowler. "Really, we're living on hope."

Fowler, 38, said his group's \$720,000 annual budget lost a \$50,000 corporate sponsor this year and didn't land any of the 20 grants it applied for.

Even the borough's biggest food charities are feeling squeezed.

St. John's Bread and Life in Bedford-Stuyvesant has an annual operating budget of \$2.4 million, but cash donations are down 12% this year.

"This is what really keeps me up at night," said Executive Director Anthony Butler, noting that demand for social services is up 70% this year. "We need money to operate and distribute food, and help people access social services like food stamps."

If charitable groups like Reaching Out and St. John's close, needy Brooklynites who rely on them will suffer even more.

"If they go under I won't have that safe spot anymore," said Jessica Cabral, 22, from Bensonhurst, who visits Reaching Out twice a month to get food, winter clothes for her three children and apply for food stamps. "I don't know where I'd go."