



Food pantries: Fewer supplies and more clients

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The city's food pantries and soup kitchens desperately need more supplies this year, due to the struggling economy and cuts in government funding.

"Last year it was truly hard," said New York City Coalition Against Hunger executive director Joel Berg.

"We said 59 percent of the agencies in New York City didn't have enough food to meet the growing demand; this year, it's 69 percent."

Staten Island is no exception.

According to the coalition, 11 of 15 Island agencies (71 percent) responding to its survey reported a decrease in government money and food in the past year.

This while demand is up: 13 agencies (86 percent) reported an increase in clients.

The data is open to interpretation because only 15 of 45 Island agencies participated in the annual survey.

Berg was joined yesterday at a press conference in Westerleigh by Beverly Neuhaus, executive director of Richmond Senior Services, and the Rev. Will Nichols of Project Hospitality.

Mrs. Neuhaus reported that Richmond Senior Services in Port Richmond has seen a 65 percent increase in clients year-to-year.

"We are seeing more people from the South Shore, and more people are underemployed, not making enough to support their families," she said.

With its pantry shelves emptied on several occasions, the agency has responded by limiting portions to just enough for one or two people, regardless of family size.

"We try to find other ways to help them," said Mrs. Neuhaus, by referring people to other resources.

"It is important to increase funding from government programs because the public can't donate enough to make up for the loss," said Rev. Nichols.

"During this economic downturn, we have to make sure that funding is not cut back, because we're in a situation where people need more food."

Berg noted that more widespread use of food stamps would help lessen the strain on food banks, and mentioned that President-elect Barack Obama is the first president to have benefited from food stamps as a boy.

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