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ACCESS TO FOOD IS NOW JUST A TEXT MESSAGE AWAY

Second Harvest Food Bank Launches Text4CalFresh,
Possibly the First of its Kind in California

SAN JOSE, Calif., April 15, 2015 – Many low-income residents in Silicon Valley are unsure of where or when they will find their next meal, let alone how to begin to ask for government assistance. Only about half of those eligible for CalFresh (food stamps) receive this critical source of food. That’s why Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties has launched an innovative new texting program in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to connect hungry families to the nutritious food they need to thrive. Now anyone who needs food can get help simply by texting a keyword to “97779.”

While used in other parts of the country, the texting outreach program is thought to be the first of its kind in California. It may also be the first texting campaign in the Vietnamese language. Second Harvest could not find any other instances in the United States where a texting program was conducted in Vietnamese.

“There has been a significant shift in the way people communicate, with texting becoming a major communication channel,” said Kathy Jackson, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank. “Many local families and individuals are missing out on this critical source of food because there can be a number of barriers when it comes to applying for CalFresh. Second Harvest created this texting program to help overcome some of those barriers, one of which is that many people assume CalFresh is not an option for them.”

Anyone who needs food can use this quick pre-screening tool before taking time away from their jobs or caring for their families to complete detailed application forms, gather documents, and wait at the appropriate office for an interview. They can start the process by sending a text message.

“By adding texting capabilities, we have removed another barrier that prevents hungry families and individuals from putting healthy food on the table,” Jackson said. “With the texting option, users can easily determine whether or not they should consider taking the next step to complete an application.”

Now there are three ways those who need food assistance can get help from Second Harvest. They can text “GetFood” to “97779” (for Vietnamese, text “Free”; for Spanish, text “ComidaYa”). They can call Second Harvest’s Food Connection multilingual hotline at 800-984-3663. Or they can visit www.shfb.org/getfood.

Text4CalFresh Campaign

Second Harvest launched its Text4CalFresh campaign this month to raise awareness about CalFresh and promote the new texting option. The outreach campaign is being conducted in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese and includes [posters and advertisements](#) in those languages encouraging people to use the texting option if they need food.

“We recruited a wide range of community stakeholders to help us create a campaign that would speak to our target audience,” Jackson said. “We wanted to make sure the messages and images resonate. The texting program and outreach efforts have to be both culturally and linguistically appropriate.”

Second Harvest decided to use text messaging because statistics show that texting is an effective way to reach its target audience. According to Mobile Commons, the company managing the technical aspects of the texting program:

- Households earning less than \$30,000 a year send 58 texts per day - twice as many as households earning more than \$75,000
- Text usage among Hispanics is 156% higher than for Caucasians
- 99% of all text messages are read

How Does it Work?

After texting the appropriate keyword to “97779,” users will receive a text message back from Second Harvest that asks them to provide their zip code. Anyone outside of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties will be directed to the statewide CalFresh information line. Those who are located in the two counties will be sent a message that briefly describes CalFresh and asks for their monthly income and number of people in their family. They will then receive a message asking if they would like to receive a call from Second Harvest in the next few days.

Those who are interested will get a call from Second Harvest’s Food Connection hotline staff. In addition to receiving help with the CalFresh application process, they will also be connected to Second Harvest food programs.

“We encourage anyone who needs food to try this texting program, even if you have been turned down for CalFresh in the past,” Jackson said. “Eligibility requirements have changed in the last nine months, so even if you earned too much before, you may qualify now.”

Low Participation Rates

CalFresh is what California calls the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Benefits are provided on a debit card that can be used to purchase groceries and fresh produce at participating grocery stores and farmers’ markets.

California has one of the lowest participation rates in the nation. Locally, an estimated 43% of income-eligible San Mateo County residents and about 57% of income-eligible Santa Clara County residents participate in CalFresh, according to a 2014 report from the California Food Policy Advocates.

“We launched this campaign because too many of our neighbors are needlessly going hungry,” Jackson said. “That is unacceptable. Everyone needs nutritious food to thrive. Without it, kids can’t learn at school and adults can’t concentrate at work.”

Second Harvest has been helping local families and individuals apply for CalFresh since 2007. The Food Bank has a team of CalFresh specialists who work out in the community staffing tables at libraries, community centers, health care facilities, and other sites.

Second Harvest provides food to nearly 250,000 people every month. The Food Bank partners with more than 330 nonprofit agencies to distribute food at more than 770 sites throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, including pantries, soup kitchens, schools,

community centers, and shelters. Last year, Second Harvest distributed more than 55 million pounds of food. An additional 6.5 million pounds of food were provided through Second Harvest's efforts to connect people to CalFresh.

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is the trusted leader dedicated to ending local hunger. Since its inception in 1974, Second Harvest has become one of the largest food banks in the nation, providing food to nearly one quarter of a million people each month. The Food Bank mobilizes individuals, companies and community partners to connect people to the nutritious food they need. More than half the food distributed is fresh produce. In fact, Second Harvest provides more fresh fruits and vegetables than any other food bank in the United States. Second Harvest also plays a leading role in promoting federal nutrition programs and educating families on how to make healthier food choices. Visit www.SHFB.org to get involved.

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