

Service to and service from older Americans

As we commemorate Older Americans Month in May, we celebrate the contributions that older Americans have made — and continue to make — in our country and our community. We take this opportunity to show appreciation and support for our seniors as they continue to enrich and strengthen our communities.

The anti-hunger movement has been a long-time beneficiary of the passion and dedication of seniors, and our local experience has been no exception. At the Food Bank of Yolo County, we benefit from the commitment of many seniors contributing their time and talent to us by volunteering to sort food, pick up donations, help with office work, and more. Our network of partner food pantries, soup kitchens, and human service organizations also benefit from senior volunteers, and some are even entirely run by retirees looking for a way to continue giving back.

However the unfortunate reality is that while some seniors are able to be a critical part of the help we provide, others are a part of the growing number in need of our help. Senior hunger is a prevalent and growing problem in America. According to a recent study, nearly half of older Americans between the age of 60 and 90 will encounter at least one year of poverty or near poverty across these ages. This is extremely troublesome given that seniors living below or near the poverty line are more likely to be at risk of food insecurity. This is especially troublesome because many have unique nutritional needs and may require special diets for medical conditions.

After a lifetime of work, many seniors are living on fixed incomes that often force them to choose between paying for healthcare or prescriptions and buying groceries. Because they often need medication to stay healthy, many elderly Americans forgo food. According to *Hunger in America 2010*, a study conducted by food banks across the nation, 30 percent of client households with seniors have had to choose between paying for food and paying for medical care. Additionally, complicating factors, such as limited mobility and dependence on outside assistance, make seniors particularly vulnerable to hunger.

Fortunately, the Food Bank, our partners, and the community at large are here to help. Efforts to provide food, resources, access to care, and social engagement ensure that seniors receive the support they need to thrive in their golden years.

In a message to Congress, President John F. Kennedy said that “On the basis of his study of the world’s great civilizations, the historian Toynbee concluded that a society’s quality and durability can best be measured ‘by the respect and care given its elderly citizens.’ ” Let’s take a moment in honor of Older Americans Month to commit to ensuring that one of the many signs of the greatness of our society will be evident in the way we help everyone in need, including our senior citizens.

— *Frances di Cristina is the Food Bank’s director of programs. For more information on the Food Bank please visit: www.foodbankyc.org or give them a call at (530) 668-0690.*

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