

DIG THIS for 9-03-08 (Our Starving Local Food Banks) © 2008

Sally Santana, religious leader and local writer, recently sent out a plea to as many of us as she could reach. She knew that our local food bank cupboards are often bare. We were asked to spread the word to all local gardeners and community groups to grow fresh produce to donate to Kitsap's food banks and soup kitchens.

Kitsap WSU Extension Master Gardeners, Bremerton Urban Garden Society (BUGS), local p-patch gardeners and children at Poulsbo's Raab Park currently grow fruits and vegetables to donate to the food banks and soup kitchens. Other community groups do too, but if each of us who garden in Kitsap County would share our extra fresh produce with local food banks and soup kitchens, thousands of hungry people could be served.

On Monday, August 25 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. more than 93 people came to Bremerton Foodline. It was nearing the end of the month and their food budgets were stretched to the max. Many of them have to make the choice between transportation to their jobs or eating. Most of these Foodline visitors are part of our working poor. Some of the parents eat only one meal a day so their children can have three healthy meals. Others are seniors whose limited incomes cannot even begin to catch up with growing costs of living.

South Kitsap Helpline Food Bank's website says, "One-third of the households in Kitsap County made \$1200 or less per month in 2006." It's hard to even imagine how a family of two or more people with limited incomes can find money for groceries after paying rent (or a house payment), utilities and transportation to and from work.

The food banks are only open certain days and times, so make sure you call first before bringing donations. Our local food banks and soup kitchens are: Bremerton Food Line (360-479-6188), Brother's Keeper Meal Program, Central Kitsap Food Bank (360-692-9818), Bainbridge Island Helpline House Food Bank (206-842-7621), North Kitsap Fishline (360-779-5190), Bremerton Salvation Army Food Bank & Meal Program (373-5550), Sharenet Food Bank (Kingston and Hansville)(360-297-2266), South Kitsap Helpline Food Bank (Port Orchard)(360-876-4089), Stand Up for Kids (Central Kitsap), St. Vincent de Paul Assistance Office (Bremerton)(360-479-7017).

We can each help feed the hungry here in Kitsap County. Even if we don't grow vegetables and fruit, we can at least find a few dollars each month to donate to our nearest local food bank. If we ourselves don't have any extra dollars to spare, we can volunteer in a myriad of ways at our local food banks. If you can't help in any of these ways, say "thank you" to your local farmers market vendors and your local grocery stores, many of whom donate to local food banks and soup kitchens. If these merchants aren't contributing already, encourage them to do so. Ask your friends, neighbors and workmates to donate produce, dollars or talents to help feed the hungry of Kitsap County.