



NEIGHBORS  
HELPING  
NEIGHBORS  
SERVICE TOGETHER



SUMMIT ON  
VOLUNTEERISM  
A Response to  
Economic Crisis

## Laura Sodano, Community Food Bank of New Jersey

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for inviting The Community Food Bank of New Jersey here today. We're pleased to be here.

The New Jersey Food Bank was founded 30 years ago by a woman of vision who is still there every day with us. Her name is Kathleen DiChiara. As I tell the teenagers when I give this talk, don't ever think that one person doesn't make a difference, because one person in New Jersey did.

She was giving out cans of food out of her car to people in Summit, New Jersey, and we now have grown into the third largest food bank building in the country, a 280,000 square foot facility in Newark, right outside of Newark in Hillside, New Jersey. We distribute 23 million pounds of food a year to over 15 social agencies all over New Jersey. These are soup kitchens, pantries, shelters, after school programs, emergency shelters, battered women's programs, children's camps, etc., all nonprofits. This food comes to us from food drives, from the manufacturers themselves, from any of the large food companies that you can think of in the country. It comes from truckers who are out on the road who perhaps have a load that was refused by one of their customers, and rather than throw it out, they know that food is still good and they'll bring it to us. It comes from salvage warehouses where perhaps these are the dented cans, or the items need something done, they need to be labeled, they need to be repacked, they need to be cleaned off, they need to be looked at for the expiration date. This is all good food that would have otherwise gone to a landfill.

So I like to tell our volunteers when they come to our food bank that we save the environment because all this food isn't being thrown out, and we save people because these are people who really need it. We have found, and our pantries are telling us, that the need is up 30% in New Jersey. I don't have to tell all of you how expensive it is to live in this metropolitan area. If you're a young mother or father making \$8 an hour in New Jersey, that's not going to put gas in your car to get to work. If your kid gets sick do you stay home or do you go to work, put food on their table, and put school clothes on their back and buy them school supplies. So these are all issues that are facing young people today. And our senior citizens are, I think like Dr. Anderson said, trying to make a choice between their medicine and their food. It's just not pretty out there.

So what do we do? We get our volunteers to come to our warehouse and sort these food items to get them ready for distribution. We also like to tell our volunteers: just because someone lives in a shelter doesn't mean they don't have the same dignity as you or I. Treat them as if they were a member of your family, and indeed they are a member of your human family. So last year we had 20,659 volunteer visits, for a total of 50,000 hours. I know Dr. Anderson gave his hours, \$19 an hour. We're a nonprofit. We say \$10 an hour. So that would be \$504,000 worth of time, which is very, very special to us.



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Our volunteers come every day. We do offsite things. We collect food at food shows, at Giants games, Devils games, Springsteen concerts, other celebrities who have joined and partnered with us. We have great partners in a lot of our corporations in New Jersey, which we're very proud of. We have a lot of team building exercises. If you're a company which wants to have a day of sharing and rather than go to a conference center or something like that, you can come to the food bank, have your volunteers really bond that way because you know that you're helping someone.

Our food bank exists by these people coming to our warehouse. What's also good is some of the volunteers have said to me, I want to volunteer somewhere where I can kind of hop in and hop out. The training is very simple. If you're an office volunteer or if you're in the warehouse sorting these food items, if you're in our kids divisions putting together outfits for poor kids in shelters, our staff can show you right there, and then you can sign up and come and go as you want. So it's not a long time commitment that maybe people don't have. One thing that we're finding is that volunteers are coming in who were laid off by their corporations, and they've said to me I need to keep busy, I don't want to get depressed, and you're the first person that I thought of. So we're very busy and very glad to have them. If any of you have questions afterwards, I'd be glad to answer them. And thank you again.