

Emergency food providers say child hunger is rising in New York City

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A report recently published by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) found numerous indications that hunger in New York City has grown substantially, especially among families and children.

FRAC, a non-profit organization that monitors the effects of public policies on hunger nationwide, highlighted the results of a report by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. Based upon a compilation of survey data from emergency food providers and soup kitchens in New York City, the research provides crucial information on the experience of the various organizations attempting to cope with hunger in the nation's largest city.

The report reveals that, while the number of poor people unable to earn enough to feed their families has increased, government programs to aid the hungry have been cut back. At the same time, many food pantries and soup kitchens are unable to cope with the increased demand. The confluence of these factors has created a situation in which "food insecurity," particularly among children, has become widespread.

The report shows that while emergency requests for food throughout the country rose by 14 percent between January 1998 and January 1999, New York City recorded an increase of 36 percent, two-and-a-half times the national rate. In January 1999 alone, emergency food programs were forced to turn away 74,280 hungry people, an increase of 27 percent from last year. 59 percent of those turned away were children.

The report also stated that 72 percent of the food pantries and 47 percent of soup kitchens surveyed noted an increase number of visits from families with children. The rise in families turning to soup kitchens was considered highly significant, because unlike food pantries that supplement families with groceries, soup

kitchens are a choice of "last resort" for hungry families.

The study pointed to inadequate child care and the lack of decent paying jobs as major sources of the deteriorating conditions of the poor. Specifically, the report criticized Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's new welfare rules. The majority of the respondents said the rapid restructuring and decimation of welfare and food stamp provisions were the most substantial factor in the increased demand on emergency food programs.

Despite the fact that a federal judge and the US Department of Agriculture have found many of the methods used to reduce the welfare rolls to be illegal, the damage has already been done. Nearly 75 percent of the emergency food organizations surveyed said that their patrons had come to them due to the recent denial, cessation, or inadequacy of food stamps. The mayor plans to cut another half-million dollars from the city's emergency food budget.



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