

MPR will bring awareness of the issue and of the efforts of the Hunger-Free Minnesota initiative via events and promotions. Most notably, funds from Hunger-Free Minnesota will provide for an MPR News reporter solely dedicated to cover hunger and hunger-related issues. While funded by the initiative, the reporter will be completely integrated into MPR's newsroom and independently making decisions on how to cover the issue.

It's a simple idea, wiping out hunger, a goal many people probably thought already existed. Even the executive director of Duluth's Second Harvest Northern Lakes Food Bank, Shaye Moris, unabashedly asks the obvious, "Why didn't we create this finish line for ending hunger before? Why didn't we think of this?"

Moris says the conversation started last November at a "pinnacle point in our hunger relief organizations." At that time, hunger rates were (and still are) soaring, and statistics, in addition to the above dollars and meals numbers, were calculated from reports from The University of Minnesota Food Industry Center, Target, Mathematica Policy Research, and The Boston Consulting Group, characterizing Minnesotans' hunger. It was a perfect storm, Moris says, of undeniable truths, which compelled the founding partners to create Hunger-Free Minnesota.

The clincher, however, was the Cost/Benefit study, the fourth and final of the series, funded by Target (another Hunger-Free Minnesota sponsor) and developed by University of Minnesota Food Center. This study tabulated the \$1.6 million cost of hunger, and estimated the astounding financial return Minnesotans would reap from investing in obtaining adequate food for all: For every \$1 the state invests in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps) Minnesotans reap \$34 in combined economic activity and savings.

SNAP was also the focus of another study, which concluded that only 45 percent of those eligible for the assistance program are utilizing it. The SNAP study went further to identify the obstacles that account for the missed meals and found three major themes: people not knowing they are eligible for enrollment; cumbersome administrative requirements; and the social stigma attached to "food stamps."

As the data filed in, the Minnesota-nice support for Hunger-Free Minnesota did as well; before the soft launch in September, Target, MPR and the Boston Con-

sulting Group had signed on as sponsors. Since then, Hunger-Free Minnesota's founding partners have been meeting with willing and able community, government and foundation leaders all across the state. Moris says that building off all four of the study's results means Minnesota is in a better shape than ever to identify just what needs to get done. In fact, Moris notes that "the train is moving fast, really fast," and that they are trying to catch up and plan for all the "fantastic" ideas coming out of the woodwork.

Moris talks how the public is also adding to the momentum as hundreds of Minnesotans log onto hungerfreemn.org and sign the pledge for a Hunger-Free Minnesota. "They make it exciting that we're creating a movement" says Moris. The pledge asks people to support the initiatives by volunteering, financial donations, and advocacy.

Startling Stats Behind the Hunger

- * Hungry Minnesotans miss on average 10 dinners a month
- * Almost half of the state's residents in need of hunger relief are children
- * 169,000 of the 670,000 Minnesotans eligible for SNAP don't know they qualify
- * Every hungry person costs the state at least \$2,329 and costs residents at least \$800.
- * Every \$1 invested in SNAP equals \$34 in combined economic activity and savings for Minnesotans
- * Hungry teens are twice as likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to commit suicide

Source: Missing Meals Unmet Food Needs study, Hunger in America/Minnesota study, SNAP Utilization study, Cost/Benefit Hunger Impact study

For more information, visit hungerfreemn.org