



Editorial | Inflation taking toll on groups fighting hunger

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THE ISSUE:

Facing unprecedented demands, food bank needs help.

OUR OPINION:

You can help by making a contribution.

Local groups trying to fight hunger in the community have been slammed by a pandemic that led to layoffs and greater demands, lower contributions and higher prices for everything from the food they provide to the cost of fuel for transportation.

This combination of factors led leaders of three local charities to show up at the Inverness City Council to seek government donation to shore up some of the widening gap between the rising number of families needing help and the resources available to meet that need.

Barbara Sprague, executive director of the Community Food Bank of Citrus County, said the demand for food on her organization is at record levels. The food bank serves Citrus, Sumter and Hernando counties and either buys food at reduced prices or receives it for free and then distributes the food to many of the local food pantries that provide food to individual families. There are seven food pantries in Inverness and 46 in Citrus County.

She said her food bank typically distributes about 2 million pounds of food annually. This year she expects a need for 5 million pounds, and her donations are down.

While we often think of the need for food from food pantries is limited to the unemployed or those in dire poverty, but many families with one or both parents working face food insecurity because that employment does not provide the income to afford necessities such as housing, food, transportation, health care, child care and education and technology.

A recent United Way report revealed that while 17 percent of all children in Florida were deemed to live in Poverty in 2019, about 39 percent lived in families defined as ALICE (asset limited, income constrained and employed).

ALICE families earn more than the federal poverty level, but less than it costs to live and work in a modern economy. This forces families to make difficult choices and risky trade-offs of whether to pay rent or buy food, receive medical care or pay for child care, pay utility bills or put gas in the car.

Food pantries provide some of the food for these and other families who are facing economic distress, but the food pantries are themselves facing economic challenges and are struggling to meet the growing need.

The Inverness City Council chose not to make a contribution on the grounds that there are other worthy charities and giving to one would deprive other equally worthy ones of support. They recommended that the need be met by voluntary contributions.

Our community has a history of generosity and stepping up to meet a need. This is a time for us to step up and help make sure people in our community are fed. Donations can be made to the food bank of your choice, or to the Community Food bank. Check the website at <https://feed352.org> to see how you can contribute. Maybe it is volunteer time, food or money. All are needed and will help assure that those who need food assistance in our community are receiving it.