

# FOOD RESCUE IN SCHOOLS

In the United States, 40% of food goes to waste either at the farm, grocery stores, restaurants, or at home. The Tacoma Pierce County Health Department and Emergency Food Network have partnered to improve access to healthy foods, because it can help prevent and manage chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Together they started a school food rescue program that also diverts food to the emergency food system instead of the trash.

Currently, ten schools in Pierce County are participating in the food rescue program. The entire Eatonville School District, four schools in the Clover Park School District and one school from Tacoma Public Schools are addressing food waste and food insecurity in their community through this program.

Through the food rescue project, students leave unused food on a share table. The food is weighed with scales provided by EFN and stored in refrigerators provided by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. The food can be available for afterschool programs and at the end of the week is picked up by the neighboring food pantry.

The Eatonville School District was the first district to sign on, setting up a food rescue program at all of their schools. Food is now saved at the end of lunches and sent to the Eatonville Family Agency so that it can be served to the community. So far in 2017, the Eatonville School District has donated 4,565 pounds of food to the Eatonville Family Agency. Most of the food donations are milk, apples, and oranges, nutrient packed sources of food that are often in high demand at food pantries. Dairy is one of the most highly requested types of food, but it only accounted for 3% of the food EFN distributed in 2016. The food rescue program is bringing more dairy into the emergency food system.

Eatonville Family Agency is also able to accept donations of prepared foods, like pizza and salad, and provide them



to families or serve them to seniors visiting the senior center. The senior population is experiencing the fastest increase in need, with visits by older adults increasing by 30% since 2011. Providing more hot food to senior meal sites is an important part of supporting some of the most vulnerable in our population.

Another benefit of the food rescue program is the relationship it has built between the agency and schools. In small, rural towns, there are not a lot of resources available to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. By connecting places that have an abundance of food with agencies that can utilize it, we can strengthen the services that are available in underserved communities.

Involving students with food rescue has been a great way to encourage leadership and thoughtful discussion surrounding food security and food waste. Every day, a pair of students at Jason Lee Middle School collect food from the shared table and bring it back to the office to weigh and put away in the refrigerator. The students are talking to their peers about why it is important not to waste food and how the shared table is helping the community. Teaching people to be thoughtful about food waste at a young age can build life-long habits of limiting food waste.

