

# Landmark Study Indicates Childhood Hunger Surging in Alameda County, U.S.

OAKLAND, Calif., Feb 02, 2010 (ASCRIBE NEWS via COMTEX) -- During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama announced his intention to end childhood hunger in America by 2015.

But with the release today of Feeding America's Hunger in America 2010 (linked below) - the most comprehensive research project ever conducted on domestic hunger - the President's goal now appears to be hopelessly adrift, both nationally and in one of the Bay Area's most vulnerable counties.

"We are headed in the wrong direction as a community and a nation," said Suzan Bateson, executive director of the Alameda County Community Food Bank, where 43 percent of the clients are under the age of 18. "Ending childhood hunger by 2015 is a noble pursuit. But the children we serve have no control of their destiny." In raw numbers, the Alameda County Community Food Bank - one of more than 200 county food banks taking part in the study - served 107,457 children and (under-18) teenagers in 2009, a 35 percent increase over the 80,605 minors identified during the quadrennial study's 2005 survey period. Nationally, minors represented 37 percent of the 37 million people who received food from one of the food banks affiliated with Feeding America, which commissioned the study. That represents a 50 percent increase over the number of minors identified in the Hunger in America 2006 study.

Alicia Macias of San Leandro has four children ranging in age from 13 to 3. Separated from her husband and forced to downsize to a one-bedroom apartment this month after her catering business lost its lease, Macias, 30, picks up a family-sized bag of food from the Davis Street Family Resource Center weekly.

"I've tried everything I can to pull myself up by my bootstraps, but this economy is making it so much harder," Macias said. "If it weren't for the food bank and Davis Street, we'd be in serious trouble." The quadrennial study showed a dramatic surge across every age, ethnic and geographic category despite a methodology that counts repeat clients like the five members of the Macias family just once each. In Alameda County, for example, the number of individuals visiting one of that food bank's 275 distribution agencies (including Davis Street) was 49,100 weekly - a 23 percent increase over the 2006 study - and 249,000 unique individuals annually. That's one in eight Alameda County residents, a figure that mirrors findings in the national study.

Few clients, however, avail themselves of food bank services just once a year; the Alameda County Food Bank distributes enough food for 300,000 meals on a weekly basis. At Open Heart Kitchen, an Alameda County Community Food Bank distribution agency which serves hot meals each weekday in revolving locations in Livermore, Pleasanton and Dublin, Fred Watson personifies the new face of hunger - a member of

the collapsing middle class who wasn't even on the radar when the Hunger in America 2006 study was published. Watson, 54, a Pleasanton homeowner now flirting with foreclosure, was earning six figures in the IT industry until a massive downsizing started him on the road to what he describes as "one of the hardest days of my life" - his first visit a year ago to Open Heart Kitchen, where he now eats meals daily and has been hired as fulltime employee (at a fraction of his former salary).

The nationwide study polled 61,000 food bank clients and 37,000 agencies - food pantries, soup kitchens, after-school programs, shelters and other community organizations that serve as grassroots distributions points for county food banks.