

Weekend Nutritional Support for Weakley County Seniors

Needs Assessment and Proposal

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NORTHWEST TENNESSEE
**LOCAL FOOD
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Executive summary

Community participants expressed a need for senior nutrition accessibility on the weekends at the Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network's (LFN) April 25, 2018 "Using Food to Build Community" forum and breakfast. Ms. Betty Baker, Director, We Care Ministries, Inc., advised LFN members that funding is available for such a program from her organization. She charged LFN members to assess the need in the community. LFN representatives have worked with representatives from Northwest Tennessee Human Resource Agency to assess this need.

Current Need

Number of Weakley County seniors with unmet weekend nutritional needs: 19.

Estimated costs

Two options exist for meeting the weekend nutritional needs of seniors in Weakley County. One option is an expansion of the existing Meals on Wheels program, the other is a senior "backpack" or nutritional box program with items from Second Harvest Food Bank. Costs are as follows:

Meals on Wheels: \$6.93 / hot meal, \$6.00 / frozen meal

Total approximate cost: **\$228.00 to \$263.34 per weekend**

Second Harvest Food Bank: \$16.00 (upper estimate) for a nutrition box with enough food for two weekends. The sixteen dollars is an upper estimate because the cost is dependent on items selected to fill the box.

Total approximate cost: **\$152.00 per weekend**

St. John's Community Services (SJCS) currently facilitates meal delivery for the Meals on Wheels program. SJCS has agreed to add delivery of weekend nutritional assistance for seniors and has offered to provide manpower to pack nutrition boxes.

Full report

Food insecurity has been defined as “the lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods” (Gundersen, et al. 2018). Other, perhaps more locally appropriate, definitions of food insecurity exist. As of 2016, Weakley County, Tennessee had an overall estimated food insecurity rate of 15.2%, or approximately 5,160 residents. While overall food insecurity rates have improved in Weakley County since 2014, the current rate is approximately 2% higher than the nation as a whole (Gundersen, et al. 2018). Although Gundersen et al. do not report data on seniors as a group, Strickhouser et al. (2014) estimate that the rate of senior food insecurity is approximately 2.3% higher than the overall food insecurity rate. Using these estimates, it is possible that the senior food insecurity rate in Weakley County could be as high as 17.5%.

Several programs exist in Weakley County to meet this need. We Care Ministries, Inc., located in Martin, TN, operates a food bank three days per week. Seniors are eligible for food assistance twice per month with a two-person household receiving approximately \$125 in food items. Overall, 1,050 unduplicated families in Weakley County received food support from We Care in 2017 (Baker 2018). Two Martin churches (Martin First United Methodist and Trinity Presbyterian) distribute meals on the third and last Wednesday of the month in their “Food for Friends” program. This program is facilitated by We Care Ministries. The Northwest Tennessee Human Resource Agency (NWTTHRA) provides congregate meals to seniors at the county’s three feeding sites: Martin, Dresden, and Greenfield. In June 2017, 1,426 meals were provided to forty-eight seniors in Weakley County: 370 meals at congregate sites and 1,056 meals delivered through Meals on Wheels (Moore 2018). St. John’s Community Services provides logistical support for the Meals on Wheels program. Other programs exist, including less-organized means of food distribution. Local senior centers distribute food when it is available to those known to directors and other organization representatives as having need.

There are, however, unmet needs in the county. Mr. James Moore of the Northwest Tennessee Human Resource Agency, reports that, as of May 2018, there are currently forty-six (46) individuals on the waiting list for home-delivered meals. The Local Food Network (LFN) is working with NWTTHRA and We Care to secure Meals on Wheels delivery for these individuals. The Sharon Senior and Community Center is not a current congregate feeding site. Sharon also lacks a grocery store. Some Sharon seniors are bussed weekly to Tate’s Family Foods in Greenfield; however, this service may be underutilized. One Sharon senior communicated to one of this report’s authors of her need for personal care items, which are not available for purchase with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds.

One unmet need, which was identified at the April 25, 2018 “Using Food to Build Community” forum and breakfast, hosted at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Martin by the Northwest Tennessee Local Food Network (LFN), was a lack of weekend nutritional support for seniors in our communities. While seniors with transportation can access food delivery at We Care, at congregate feeding sites, and through Meals on Wheels, currently the congregate feeding sites only provide meals during the week, and most participants from Meals on Wheels only receive deliveries Monday through Thursday (Friday meals being delivered on Thursday). With the support of the community, Weakley County Schools provides weekend nutritional support to its students with need through a “backpack” program in which students receive shelf-stable items at the end of the week for consumption over the weekend when school-provided meals are unavailable. A similar program was



proposed to meet to the nutritional needs of seniors on the weekend. We Care Ministries, Inc. Director, Betty Baker, advised LFN representatives that funding from her organization could be made available to support this need. She requested that LFN conduct a needs analysis.

LFN representatives met with Ms. Baker on May 1, 2018 to further determine We Care's needs and possible contributions to this effort. Ms. Baker indicated that further information, particularly regarding the number of those with unmet weekend nutritional needs, was required. LFN representatives contacted or met with directors and other representatives of the county's senior congregate feeding sites in Martin, Dresden, and Greenfield. LFN representatives also met with the Sharon Senior and Community Center although that center is not currently a congregate feeding site. On May 24, 2018, LFN representatives met with Ms. Susan Hill and Mr. James Moore, Northwest Tennessee Human Resources Agency, financial coordinator of the Meals on Wheels program.

Ms. Hill and Mr. Moore arranged for current Meals on Wheels recipients to express their interest in receiving weekend nutritional support as well as their willingness to share their names and contact information with outside agencies. Mr. Moore found that 19 seniors in Weakley County currently have such need. Mr. Moore provided a list of potential participants to Ms. Baker on June 11, 2018.

Two options for meeting this need are presented here. One option is an expansion of the existing Meals on Wheels program. Cost for this option is \$6.93 per hot meal (which could be re-heated over the weekend) and \$6.00 per frozen meal. The other option is the purchase as shelf-stable items from Second Harvest Food Bank. Cost for this option ranges from \$10.00 to \$16.00 per box. The price is variable as items are selected from a list of food options. Each box can meet the need of one person for approximately two weekends. Second Harvest Food Bank does not assemble these boxes. Items are ordered from Second Harvest and would have to be assembled locally.

Total approximate costs per weekend:

Meals on Wheels (frozen meal option): \$228.00

Second Harvest food box (upper limit): \$152.00

St. John's Community Services (SJCS) currently facilitates the delivery for the Meals on Wheels program recipients Monday through Thursday. LFN spoke with Mr. Dewayne Webb of SJCS, who indicated that SJCS would be willing to deliver senior weekend nutrition support on Fridays as well as provide any needed labor to assemble nutrition food boxes, should that be the chosen option.

Organizations and programs in Weakley County are doing great work in our communities to meet the nutritional needs of seniors and other residents. While there are unmet needs, dedicated members of the community, like We Care Ministries, Saks Thrift Avenue, Santa's Helpers, The NWTN Human Resource Agency, St. John's Community Services and area Senior Centers, and its benefactors, have offered their support to ensure that seniors in our county do not go hungry. The NWTN Local Food Network is dedicated to facilitating that goal.

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