

## Census states MN poverty steady; yet food bank usage is high

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Tuesday, 06 October 2009 15:51

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ST. PAUL, Minn. - New census numbers show poverty in Minnesota didn't increase dramatically, but that doesn't mean food shelves are seeing less traffic; in fact, just the opposite. Food pantries are reporting that people who never imagined they would need assistance are now counting on help.

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, food stamp usage increased 30 percent in one year, and visits to food banks reached two million in 2008, for the first time. Colleen Moriarty, executive director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota, blames the increase on two different factors, the recession economy and the steady increase in costs for fuel, shelter and health care.

"There are set amounts that people have to spend in their budget; food is something they can make compromises on. The second thing is that there are so many newly-unemployed people unexpectedly finding themselves in a dire situation."

Moriarty says resources are available for everyone, and the food shelves have enough to go around because of the federal stimulus bill.

She says Hunger Solutions Minnesota is now also focusing on efforts to push the Child Nutrition Re-authorization Act. She says this federal funding is imperative.

"There's no lack of scientific evidence that children who are undernourished do not do well in school. So we want to close that achievement gap, and the best way to do that is to make sure that children are not hungry."

Congress looks at the Re-authorization Act every five years, and Moriarty says it will be on the calendar over the next six months.

For help with the food stamp program and for referrals to emergency food assistance, call the Minnesota Food HelpLine at 1-888-711-1151.

The Census Bureau statistics are at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)