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All Faiths Food Bank Creates New Pediatric Food Insecurity Screening Partnership

Sarasota, FL – “Do you have enough food at home?” That one simple question in the maternity ward has created a systemic change in how Sarasota County is addressing childhood hunger.

After a baby is born, a series of tests ensure that the newborn leaves the hospital safe, happy, and healthy. But what happens after that child arrives home? Funded by a \$674,628 grant from the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, All Faiths Food Bank recently established a three-year pilot program to reduce childhood hunger and its negative health effects. Aligned with the First 1,000 Days initiative, the Pediatric Food Insecurity Screen Project will be conducted in partnership with Sarasota Memorial Hospital and Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital.

“This investment in early childhood hunger is a game-changer,” said CEO Sandra Frank. “The grant affords us the opportunity to pilot a new program to screen families with newborns for food insecurity. Just imagine connecting those families with healthy, nutritious food from the moment of their baby’s birth throughout childhood. That’s the incredible potential of this program.”

This grant will provide support for a three-year pilot where families with young children can be identified as at-risk for food insecurity and connected with sustainable federal and community-based food resources and nutrition assistance programs. Food insecurity and hunger in infants can have a permanent impact on brain development. Inadequate food intake in children is associated with serious health, behavior and cognitive defects. Children who are food insecure are at greater risk of poor health, hospitalizations and developmental delays.

“Children were often not being identified as food insecure until they entered the public school system,” says Teri A Hansen, President | CEO of Barancik Foundation. “That’s four to five years without adequate nutrition during the most vital time of their brain development. Now these kids can be identified right from the start.”

“Healthy nutrition is a critical component in the development, learning and lifelong health of babies and toddlers.” Said Strategic Program Officer, Colleen Reinert. “This project allows All Faiths to work directly with Health Care partners to screen for food insecurity and intervene at a critical stage in life that impacts long term health outcomes.”

In year one of the screening Pilot Project, All Faiths will work with SMH Woman and Children’s Services and Johns Hopkins All Children’s Outpatient Center to develop a standard process to identify food insecure children, refer for services and report follow-up and access rates. Years two and three will be expanded to include other organizations. All Faiths will engage and incorporate the support and expertise of medical professionals at each healthcare organization to develop specific measurements and targets. Data gathered in the pilot will be used to evaluate the process, compliance and barriers to screening. Further, it will guide improvements to the overall project, client referral rates and access to food as well as to future healthcare partnerships.

In 2016, All Faiths Food Bank evolved its mission to reflect the critical role the organization plays in improving the health of our communities. This change shifted the Food Bank’s practices to include not only a large increase in fresh produce distribution – also funded by the Barancik Foundation - but also an expansion of the Food Bank’s partnerships to incorporate health care organizations. Inspired by the American Academy of Pediatrics’ 2015 policy report recommending that pediatricians screen children for food insecurity, All Faiths reached out to local health care providers and systems to determine interest and capacity to utilize the screening tool recommended by the Academy.

For more information about the Pediatric Food Insecurity Screening Project, visit allfaithsfoodbank.org or contact Colleen Reinert, All Faiths Food Bank Strategic Program Officer at creinert@allfaithsfoodbank.org.

About All Faiths Food Bank

All Faiths Food Bank is the only food bank and largest hunger relief organization in Sarasota and DeSoto counties. Rated 4-stars by Charity Navigator and a member of Feeding America, we provide millions of meals each year through robust programs and partnerships with charitable organizations in the community. In addition to food distribution, All Faiths Food Bank operates a roster of innovative direct service programs that not only solve the immediate problem of hunger but strive to end hunger by helping families and individuals gain long-term food security, better health outcomes and self-sufficiency. For more information visit allfaithsfoodbank.org.

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