More will spend Thanksgiving at pantries

BY KERRY WILLS
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MORE New Yorkers than ever will get their turkey dinner at a soup kitchen this year, thanks to slow recession recovery and Superstorm Sandy.

Even before Sandy struck, hunger was at its highest levels in the city as one in six New Yorkers - 1.4 million people - didn't have enough food in their homes, according to a new report by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

"We've seen more individuals and served more meals than ever before this year, and we'll probably serve more in 2013," said Christopher Bean, executive director for Part of the Solution (POTS) in the Bronx, which has a food pantry and serves meals each day. Bean anticipates POTS will serve 600,000 meals by the end of 2012.

One in 10 city seniors and one in four city children struggle with hunger. While demand for emergency food services increased, more than two-thirds of agencies had a drop in government funding and more than half had a decrease in private funding.

Sandy's effect on demand for food is hard to gauge, but Bean said POTS served 650 meals the day after the storm, compared with a daily average of 420 meals.

"Sandy ripped away the wallpaper to expose the rot of the continuing hunger crisis," said Joel Berg, the coalition's executive director. "If we understand that people shouldn't go a few hours without food due to natural disasters, they shouldn't go a few years without food due to man-made disasters like recessions and program cutbacks."

City enrollment in SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, exceeds 1.8 million and has spiked by 62% since the start of the recession, according to Food Bank of New York City analysis of data from the city Human Resources Administration.

The situation is even more dire in the Bronx. More Bronx food pantries reported an increase in visitors and more ran out of food at least once a month, compared to pantries citywide.

- Part of the Solution provides meals every day from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. at 2759 Webster Ave.
- BronxWorks' Early Childhood Learning Center at Bronx Community Center on Wednesday hosts a party and dinner, starting at 11:30 a.m. at 1150 Grand Concourse.
- BronxWorks will host dinners for seniors at noon on Wednesday at three locations: Morris Senior Center, 80 E. 181st St., E. Roberts Moore Senior Center, 515 Jackson Ave., East Concourse Senior Center, at 236 E. Tremont Ave.
- Gethsemane Baptist Church hosts a free Thanksgiving dinner and a sermon Thursday starting at 10 a.m., at 771 Fairmount Place. Donated clothing will also be distributed.

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