

Executive Summary
Hunger: A Hidden but Prevalent Problem
in Montgomery County

Montgomery County is one of America's most affluent places to live. On the other hand, more than 25 percent of Montgomery County residents are at-risk for hunger. The high cost of housing, health care, utilities, and other necessities make it hard for many of our neighbors to put food on the table. For example, in Montgomery County, an average two-bedroom apartment rents for \$1,200 and the median sale price of a single family house rose 18 percent last year.

According to the Community Action Board, a family of four requires an income of \$60,341 to be self-sufficient. The federal income limit to receive food stamps is \$18,850 for that same family.

Last year, Manna Food Center experienced a 9 percent jump in the numbers of households needing emergency and supplemental food and predicts another 10 percent increase this year. In FY 2005, Manna distributed food to 67,088 people, half of whom were children.

One in four Montgomery County Public School Students qualifies for a free or reduced price lunch; in some schools more than three-quarters of the students qualify. Hungry children are more likely to be absent from school, retain less knowledge, and repeat a grade. They are 90 percent more likely to be reported in fair or poor health. Hungry teens are twice as likely to be suspended from school.

No one ever climbed out of poverty on an empty stomach, and the food Manna provides can help many take that first critical step out of poverty. However, only by solving the larger problems of affordable housing and health care, ensuring all students succeed in school, and increasing wages will we end hunger in Montgomery County.

Manna Food Center kicks off its 19th Annual Thanksgiving Hunger Drive today, and the funds raised by the community through this drive will make a difference as we fight hunger and feed hope.

Hunger in Montgomery County occurs at a much greater frequency than most residents would imagine. Manna Food Center works every day to fight hunger in our own community by distributing more than two million pounds of food annually. Last year, Manna provided food 67,000 times to Montgomery County residents at-risk of hunger, a nine percent increase in the numbers of people needing emergency and supplemental food. No one ever climbed out of poverty on an empty stomach, and Manna Food Center provides that essential food to 20,000 households each year.

Hunger is a Hidden but Prevalent Problem in Montgomery County

Montgomery County is one of America's most affluent places to live. On the other hand, more than 25 percent of Montgomery County residents are at-risk for hunger. This irony occurs because of the high cost of living and the uneven distribution of wealth in Montgomery County. Additionally, there is a large gap between the amount of money a family must make to be eligible for programs like food stamps, school lunches, and WIC; and the much higher amount of money a family must make to meet the expense of their basic needs.

Affording Life's Necessities

Housing

- The average two-bedroom apartment in Montgomery County costs approximately \$1,200 per month.
- 42,827 renters and 40,000 homeowners,¹ use more than 30 percent of their income for housing
- 13,448 families use more than 50 percent of their income for housing².
- In 2004 the median sale price of a single-family townhouse was \$365,000, up 18.7 percent from 2003.
- The median sale price of a condominium was \$185,000 in 2004, up 25 percent from 2003³.

Child Care

- Childcare costs an average of \$8,000 a year for school-age children and \$9,000 for pre-school age children. A family of four who earns \$55,000 a year can spend almost a third of their income on childcare⁴ alone

Health Care

- Workers contributed \$2,661 or 10 percent more than they spent in 2003, for family health insurance coverage. For single coverage, workers contributed an average of \$558 toward the \$3,695 annual premium.⁵

Cost of Living in Montgomery County

If the minimum wage had risen with inflation it would be over \$8 an hour. But even \$8 an hour is no match for the high cost of living in Montgomery County.

Many families who are not considered “poor” by the federal government are still unable to pay for their basic needs, including food, due to the ever increasing cost of living in Montgomery County. A family is self-sufficient if they can provide for all their basic needs without public or private assistance. Currently, a family of four must earn \$60,341⁶, roughly 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Line to live in Montgomery County and be self-sufficient.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County — defined by the Community Action Board of Montgomery County under the Department of Health and Human Services—calculates how much money a Montgomery County family must earn to meet their basic needs without public or private aid. Using this standard over *25 percent of the total population of Montgomery County* is at-risk for hunger⁷.

According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a single adult living in Montgomery County must earn \$25,961 a year which translates to \$12.29 an hour. A family composed of two adults, one pre-school child and one school-aged child living in Montgomery County must have each parent earning \$14.29 an hour in a full time job to reach an income of \$60,341. The federal poverty level for this family as of June 2004 is \$18,850. For this family, the federal poverty level is about 30 percent of the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County.

In short, families making more than \$18,850 a year and less than \$60,341 do not qualify for most federal programs but are nevertheless not self-sufficient.

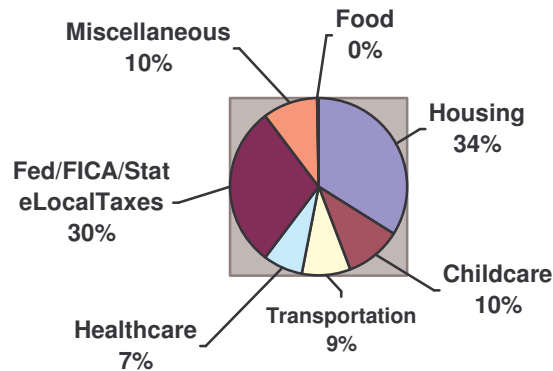
Many Montgomery County families struggle to put food on the table. After the rent, utilities, and other bills are paid, there is often little money left for food. A family’s food budget will often be used to pay an unexpected car repair or doctor’s bill because food is usually the only expense over which a family exerts some control.

Susan's Story

Imagine a single-parent, Susan, raising two children in Montgomery County. Susan earns \$40,000 a year with no benefits and earns too much for her family to qualify for food stamps.

According to the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, annually Susan will spend \$13,296 for housing, \$4,124 for childcare, \$3,432 for transportation, \$2,880 for healthcare, \$11,628 in taxes, and \$3,912 for miscellaneous expenses like clothing, shoes, and school supplies. After all of these expenses are paid Susan has \$6.50 a month to buy food; the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that Susan will need \$423 a month for food.

Susan's Budget



Children are far from immune to poverty and hunger in Montgomery County. In Montgomery County, 6.2 percent of children live below the federal poverty level⁸. One of every four MCPS students is eligible to receive a free or reduced price school lunch which means that 25 percent of our county's children are at-risk for hunger.

Montgomery County is one of the most vibrant counties in the United States; the number of residents who are at-risk for hunger deserves a call to action.

The Consequences of Hunger

The problem of hunger is not just a matter for statisticians and economists. Hunger has real immediate and long-term consequences on children, adults, and the elderly.

Health Consequences of Child Hunger⁹

- Hungry children are more likely to be absent from school, achieve at a lower level, retain less knowledge, and repeat a grade
- Hungry children are 90% more likely to be reported in fair or poor health
- Hungry children are 30% more likely to have a history of hospitalizations
- Hungry children suffer from two to four times as many individual health problems, such as unwanted weight loss, fatigue, headaches, irritability, inability to concentrate and frequent colds

Psychosocial and Behavioral Impact of Hunger on Children¹⁰

- Hungry children exhibit higher levels of hyperactivity, anxiety, irritability and aggressive behavior
- Hungry teenagers are more likely to be depressed and/or suicidal
- Hungry teenagers are almost twice as likely to be suspended from school

Pregnant women who are hungry put their babies at serious risk for health problems. Their babies are far more likely to be born at a low birth weight and will likely suffer delays in their development and have behavior and learning problems later in life. Stunting (low height for age) in children is a direct consequence of inadequate nutrition. The Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), designed to prevent the disastrous effects of hunger on pregnant women, infants and young children, has eligibility guidelines far below the Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard.

In Montgomery County almost 10 percent of elderly residents live below the federal poverty level. Given that the poverty level is estimated to be about 30 percent of the Montgomery County Self Sufficiency Standard, many more elderly residents are at risk for hunger¹¹. Hunger and malnutrition worsen chronic and acute diseases and speed up the onset of degenerative diseases among the elderly.

While children and the elderly are at greatest risk for serious and irreversible health consequences as a result of hunger, it is difficult for any hungry person to participate as a productive member of society. A hungry person cannot perform at their best at any job or potential job. A person at risk for hunger is at a greater risk of illness, and his overall quality of life is severely compromised. Poor nutrition results in lost knowledge, brainpower, and productivity for the nation¹².



614 Lofstrand Lane
Rockville, MD 20850
301-424-1130
www.mannafood.org

Manna Food Center— Montgomery County’s Food Safety Net

Manna was founded in 1983 by a unique collaboration of faith-based organizations, local government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Manna strives to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County through food distribution, education, and advocacy.

Since 1983, Manna Food Center has:

- Distributed more than 24 million pounds of food
- Served more than 1.7 million county residents including 800,000 children and 400,000 elderly or disabled adults
- Distributed millions of pounds of food to homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and group homes located in Montgomery County
- Provided food on a weekly basis to 24 low-income housing areas in the County

In FY2005, 67,088 people were served by Manna, over half of whom were children. 320 organizations including public and private social service agencies, churches, schools, emergency shelters, employee assistance programs, hospitals, and group homes refer hungry residents to Manna so that they can receive essential emergency and supplemental food.

In addition to providing food to hungry individuals, Manna provides over half million pounds of food to 25 Montgomery County partner organizations including emergency shelters, group homes, food pantries, and soup kitchens. Food provided by Manna frees up \$1 million annually, allowing scarce resources to be used by partner organizations to instead fund drug rehabilitation, life skill training, child care, and shelter.

Manna Food Center— Improving the Quality of Life for Low- and Moderate Income Residents

Manna works to improve the quality of life for thousands of low-income, elderly, disabled, and unemployed residents of Montgomery County. Manna helps the working poor stretch their limited dollars so they can afford a better life. Manna gives families the opportunity share their day over healthy home-cooked dinners. Manna provides children with the chance to succeed in school by helping ensure their nutritional needs are met, offers strength to our neighbors who are ill or elderly and a helping hand to people who face temporary hardship or unemployment.

Manna strives to promote a healthy lifestyle by educating clients on proper nutrition. Manna also teaches clients how to stretch their food dollars to last all month to prevent food insecurity. The food distributed by Manna to clients, as analyzed by a Sodexo Corporation dietician, enables a family to adequately meet the USDA Food Pyramid nutritional guidelines for three to five days.

The Future

For 23 years, Manna has distributed food for Montgomery County residents preventing hunger and alleviating the hardship of poverty. Due to the skyrocketing cost of housing and healthcare Manna has seen a 9 percent jump in the number of households requiring emergency and supplemental food in 2005. Manna served record numbers of clients in the summer of 2005. With the continued support of our community we intend to meet this increasing demand and reach out to the many Montgomery County residents who remain at-risk for hunger. But we cannot do it alone. Government, the private sector, the community and Manna must combine their resources and talents not to simply feed the hungry, but to eliminate hunger altogether. Together, over the next few years we can:

- Help clients enroll in federal nutrition programs including food stamps and school lunch programs
- Distribute food at our Rockville warehouse one evening a week so working adults can pick up food without having to miss work
- Increase the amount of milk and fresh produce given to our clients
- Continue community outreach; many people in Montgomery County go hungry because they do not know that Manna can help them feed their families
- Strengthen our base of community support so we can increase the amount of food and funds donated to Manna

Footnotes

¹ “Unmet Needs of the Low-Income Population in Montgomery County, Maryland.” *The George Washington University School of Public Policy and Public Administration Capstone Project Prepared for the Community Ministry of Montgomery County*. 18 May 2005 p.9

² “Unmet Needs of the Low-Income Population in Montgomery County, Maryland.” *The George Washington University School of Public Policy and Public Administration Capstone Project Prepared for the Community Ministry of Montgomery County*. 18 May 2005 p.9

³ Shin, Annys. “2005 Real Estate Annual Housing Outlook: Montgomery County.” *The Washington Post*. 25 Mar 2005 PH07 www.washingtonpost.com

⁴ “Unmet Needs of the Low-Income Population in Montgomery County, Maryland.” *The George Washington University School of Public Policy and Public Administration Capstone Project Prepared for the Community Ministry of Montgomery County*. 18 May 2005 p.16

⁵ “2. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Employee Health Benefits: 2004 Annual Survey. 2004. 09 September 2004.

⁶ “The Self Sufficiency Standard of Montgomery County.” *Department of Health and Human Services Community Action Agency*. 2004 p.6

⁷ “Unmet Needs of the Low-Income Population in Montgomery County, Maryland.” *The George Washington University School of Public Policy and Public Administration Capstone Project Prepared for the Community Ministry of Montgomery County*. 18 May 2005 p.6

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. “Selected Economic Characteristics: 2003 American Community Survey Summary Tables, Montgomery County, Maryland.” Published 2003 www.census.gov

⁹ “Health Consequences of Hunger.” *Hunger in the United States*. Food Research and Action Center. 3 June 2005 www.frac.org

¹⁰ “The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies.” Heller School for Social Policy and Management: Center on Hunger and Poverty. *Brandies University*. June 2002 p. 7-8

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau. “Selected Economic Characteristics: 2003 American Community Survey Summary Tables, Montgomery County, Maryland.” Published 2003 www.census.gov

¹² “Health Consequences of Hunger.” *Hunger in the United States*. Food Research and Action Center. 3 June 2005 www.frac.org