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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Women & Families Committee Meeting
Monday, March 29, 2021, 6:30 PM
*This meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom.***

Minutes

CB8M Members Present: Vanessa Aronson, Gayle Baron, Taina Borrero, Saundrea Coleman, Rebecca Dangoor, May Malik, Gregory Morris, Peter Patch, Peggy Price

1. Update on Programs Providing Food to the Needy on the Upper East Side

Last year, the coronavirus pandemic forced many food pantries and soup kitchens to close—even as job losses mounted, and the number of people needing free food surged. According to New York City data, 1.6 million New Yorkers are now food insecure. However, at least some organizations have responded by finding new ways to help the needy—not only with food needs but also with their broader economic issues.

Those were the messages conveyed at the committee’s March meeting on food insecurity. Speakers included Zanita Tisdale, of the Food Bank for New York City, Aaron Rooney, Khristel Simmons and Damion Samuels of the Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center, and Adam Bermudez, of the Office of Council Member Ben Kallos.

According to the Food Bank’s Zanita Tisdale, during March and April 2020, some 40% of food assistance programs—such as pantries and soup kitchens-- in NYC were shuttered temporarily. But the demand for food kept growing: Last year, the Food Bank last year saw a 60% leap in the number of needy people seeking food, city-wide.

The Food Bank for NYC (FBNYC)—which supplies food to local distribution centers, such as pantries--responded to this crisis in various ways. Beyond stepping up its food supplies to local pantries and soup kitchens, Ms. Tisdale said the FBNYC also took the following steps: It increased its focus on areas of the greatest need for food, and the kind of culturally relevant food, such as kosher meals, that is needed; provided its members with affordable feminine hygiene products; invested in equipment, such as commercial refrigerators and freezers for some pantries, which allow them to provide the needy with fresh produce and protein-rich products; and, it provided assistance to those seeking access to the SNAP (food stamp) program.

Beyond food, the organization addressed the broader, underlying economic issues that can make food unaffordable. According to Ms. Tisdale, the Food Bank’s “holistic” programs include a free tax preparation service to help people obtain the tax credits and other tax benefits. And, in partnership with the Department of Consumer Affairs, it provides financial health and wellness programs that address personal financial issues, such as budgeting and debt reduction.

“For us, it’s important to create access to resources, to share information and to address underlying issues, of which hunger is a by-product,” Ms. Tisdale explained.

Speakers from the Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center described the surging need for food in the Upper East Side, due to the pandemic and recession, and how the Center is addressing these issues. When the pandemic struck, “We saw an 18-to-20% increase in the need for food in the first month,” reported Khristel Simmons, the Center’s Director of Food and Nutrition Services. By tapping the young people in the Center’s culinary training program, the Center was able to significantly ramp up its existing Meals on Wheels program targeted to seniors.

The Meals on Wheels food delivery program serves meals to those who meet certain qualifications: They must be age 60 or older, have incomes of less than \$1,300 a month and live on the Upper East Side, East Harlem or Roosevelt Island.

Expanding its food services, Stanley Isaacs has recently launched a Soup’s Up food supplement program for people of any age in the community and will soon be launching an extension of its food pantry: a delivery of shelf-stable and fresh pantry items, which will be available to people without having to meet eligibility criteria.

During the pandemic, the Center also created a “Sunday Supper.” Since people could no longer come to the Center during the pandemic to enjoy a meal and companionship, the Sunday Supper provided a way to connect virtually: Meals were sent to 180 seniors, and a Zoom session was set up to enable these otherwise isolated seniors to connect with each other while enjoying their dinner.

How do people in need find local food resources? Speakers cited several methods: dialing 3-1-1 on the phone; visiting the website of the Food Bank for NYC, at www.foodbanknyc.org/get-help; or contacting Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center, at www.info.@isaacscenter.org.

Beyond local food resources, the City has recently launched a broad program, called Food Forward NYC, to tackle longer-term issues relating to the supply of wholesome, nutritious food in New York. According to speaker, Adam Bermudez, Legislative Director in the Office of Council Member Ben Kallos, the new food program is a 10-year initiative. It consists of five goals and 14 strategies that examines the City’s food network--from production, to distribution, to disposal, of food.

With a focus on these broad issues, the five goals include:

- Ensuring all New Yorkers have multiple ways—from schools, to grocery stores, farmers’ markets, online deliveries and more-- to access healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food;
- Providing better support systems to food workers and food businesses;
- Strengthening the City’s own food infrastructure as well as improving regional food connections and supporting increased urban farming;
- Ensuring that the City’s food is produced distributed and disposed of sustainably;
- Expanding the knowledge and systems needed to implement the 10-year food plan.

The Mayor’s Office of Food Policy will issue a report every two years on the progress made on each of the five goals.

2. Federal Aid for Families Caring for Children and Elderly Dependents.

Peggy Price gave an update on child care legislation. At its last meeting the committee passed a resolution supporting legislation in the NYS legislature addressing child care costs. Since then, the

federal American Rescue Plan has been signed into law providing expanded tax credits to help cover the cost of child care and care for elderly dependent adults. These tax credits are in effect for tax year 2021 only, unless Congress extends them.

Two of the key tax changes in the American Rescue Plan include the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

Available to most families, the Child Tax Credit, expands credits annually to \$3,000 per child older than age 5 from \$2,000 previously. Tax credit for children younger than 5 increases to \$3,600. Gross income is set at \$75,000 for a single person and \$150,000 per couple. The credit is fully refundable—meaning that those whose tax bill is lower than they credit they are owed will receive a check for the difference between their credit and their tax bill. Half of the credit is expected to be paid monthly between July and December. This will provide more immediate financial help to lower income families who would otherwise have to wait until they received their annual tax refund to benefit from tax credits.

The second piece of legislation, the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, is being enlarged. It is fully refundable and covers children younger than 13 as well as elderly adults living with a family claimed as a dependent. The new legislation increases the tax credits by about 33%. \$8,000 may be claimed for one child or dependent elderly adult and \$16,000 for 2 or more children. Prior to the passage of this bill \$4,000 could be claimed for one child and \$8,000 for two or more. Income eligibility allows a family with an annual gross income of \$125,000 to take the full credit. The tax credit declines as incomes rise until the credit zeros out for those earning \$440,000 or more.

P. Gayle Baron, Peggy Price, Co-Chairs