



## The 2013 “Freshy” Awards

### Best Performance by an Elected Official to Improve CalFresh

#### **Former Representative Joe Baca, Former Chair and Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Sub-committee on Nutrition**

##### **U.S. House of Representatives, San Bernardino**

Since his service in the State Legislature in the 1990's through his work on several Farm Bills as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Mr. Baca has steadfastly fought to strengthen SNAP. Mr. Baca pursued many provisions to strengthen Food Stamps, including the name change to SNAP, and convened an Agriculture Committee hearing in his district to highlight the underutilization of SNAP and identify strategies to increase participation. One of the ways that Mr. Baca effectively defended SNAP from budget cuts in recent years has been to tell his personal story, which is captured in this brief [public service announcement](#).

### Best Performance by a County Administrator to Improve CalFresh

#### **Dellora Ellis-Gant, Human Services Administrator I**

##### **Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (LADPSS)**

Dellora Ellis-Gant was the project lead for LADPSS's 2012 CalFresh Awareness Month Campaign. The month-long outreach effort sponsored daily events with partners throughout the county. Thousands of people were provided information on CalFresh and many enrolled. CDSS, FNS, and community/faith based organizations were all included. Ms. Ellis-Gant used 2009 census data to identify target communities and reached out to community organizations in these areas, encouraging them to promote CalFresh. In addition, federal immigration representatives were engaged to provide clarity on public charge issues and assure potential applicants that CalFresh would not impact their future residency status.

Ms. Ellis-Gant also collaborated with the Audit-Controllers Office to issue warrant messages on approximately 100,000 Los Angeles County employees to share CalFresh information in their communities. The messages included the DPSS website address and the health and nutrition hotline number. Special appearances were also secured to appear on a weekly radio program with the consulate to speak about CalFresh and CalFresh eligibility. Television, radio, and newspaper coverage of the month long event catering to potential applicants were developed and several articles were published.

CalFresh participation increased by approximately 26,000 cases during CalFresh Awareness Month and new partnerships were formed with Ralph's Grocers, Food 4 Less and more than 11 other community agencies.

**Nancy Swanson, Director**

**San Bernardino County Human Services, Transitional Assistance Department**

Nancy Swanson has directed and overseen outreach and efficiency strategies targeting increased CalFresh participation and improved use of technology with a focus on the customer experience. All while providing administrative oversight over a department which continually meets service goals in application processing (92%-95%) and payment accuracy. Ms. Swanson is a “creative visionary” and puts ideas into action. Additionally her willingness to share best practices, especially through her active participation in the C-IV Consortia, benefits other counties and their clientele.

Specific CalFresh impacts include:

- An increase of 15.6% CalFresh only cases in FY 2011/12 with approximately 30% of all CalFresh applications received online.
- Increased customer access most notably through the more than 1,000,000 calls handled by the Customer Service Center since its inception in August 2011.
- Implementation of task based approach for ongoing cases
- Piloting kiosks which have the ability to image and accept documents and provide receipts. Over 1,500 documents were received in May and June of 2012, which resulted in reduced wait times for customers in the lobby.

**Best Performance by a Community Partnership to Improve CalFresh**

**Riverside County Innovative Project Collaborative Partners – FIND Food Bank, Riverside County DPH, Riverside County DPSS, Riverside Unified School District, and UC Cooperative Extension**

In January 2012, Riverside County Welfare Director Susan Loew created a new Community Outreach Branch in order to increase CalFresh participation through innovative partnerships to reach senior citizens, homeless individuals and families, and very low-income individuals and families who live in geographically isolated and remote communities. Through this branch, the Riverside County collaborative, *CalFresh Healthy Eating and Wellness*, was formed.

The collaborative, which includes the County of Riverside Department of Public Social Services, County of Riverside Department of Public Health, UC Cooperative Extension for Riverside County, FIND Food Bank, and Riverside Unified School District, has accomplished all of the following:

- Building a foundation and opportunities to work with nontraditional partners by leveraging the existing strengths of each member agency to create new and inventive ways to teach CalFresh participants about healthy eating on a budget.
- Developing a new, interactive nutrition education curriculum
- Creating ‘hands-on’ cooking demonstrations and classes, and using them to make seven “Food Network”-style videos filmed at a local RUSD middle school featuring RUSD chefs and students. Those videos will be circulated throughout the community as education materials.

This collaborative has leveraged new partnerships and opportunities to promote CalFresh and connect with hard-to-reach populations. Susan Loew’s vision to dedicate staffing and resources to increasing CalFresh participation and working with community partners to assist in this effort comes during a period when DPSS is processing the highest number of applications in the agency’s history. It is truly making a difference.

## Best Performance by a Local Advocate to Improve CalFresh

### **Ecaterina (Cat) Burton, Advocacy and Education Associate & Keisha Nzewi, Advocacy Manager**

#### **Alameda County Community Food Bank**

Cat and Keisha consistently fight for CalFresh and are strong advocates for anti-hunger and food insecurity prevention. In the last few months they have:

- Played an important role in getting the hot meal initiative implemented in Alameda County.
- Organized a local candidate's forum specifically focused on poverty and food security.
- Developed partnerships with local agencies and community based organizations wherein they provide the information and tools necessary for clients to advocate for themselves. They help develop stories, as well as provide opportunities for clients to speak their truth.
- Played a significant role in Senator Liu's *Pathways Out of Poverty Tour*.

### **Cindy McCown, Senior Director of Programs and Services**

#### **Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties**

Cindy has managed extensive efforts at Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties to promote CalFresh outreach, including but not limited to, the organization of county-wide hunger awareness days in each of the two counties, promotion of the CalFresh mobile van, and engagement of community groups to serve as CalFresh application assistants. The hunger awareness days publicized the growing need for hunger relief and the availability of CalFresh to respond to this need. These efforts have resulted in increased CalFresh enrollment and increases engagement of community-based organizations in promoting CalFresh.

### **Pedro Toledo, Director of Community and Government Relations**

#### **Redwood Community Health Coalition**

In 2010, Pedro developed and implemented a CalFresh outreach and application assistance program in partnership with 7 community clinics across Sonoma County, Healthy Kids Sonoma County, and the Napa Children's Health initiative. Pedro successfully linked CalFresh screenings and outreach to health insurance outreach. His outreach and enrollment program has screened tens of thousands of uninsured patients for health insurance eligibility throughout the years. By adding CalFresh screenings to the process, these efforts, over the past two years have helped thousands of low-income households enroll in CalFresh and bring millions of dollars in nutrition benefit to local families.

This collaborative has greatly expanded access to nutrition programs. As a result of this effort, 4,000 households have received assistance in applying for CalFresh benefits, which has greatly increased CalFresh participation in these rural communities. The Redwood Community Health Coalition is leading the effort to expand this successful model to four additional counties: Fresno, Santa Barbara, Sacramento, and Yolo.

## Best Performance by an Outreach Professional to Improve CalFresh

### **Debbie Bilek, CalFresh/Food Stamp Coordinator**

#### **San Luis Obispo County Food Bank**

Debbie is very dedicated and develops an amazing trust and rapport with each family she works with. She has been integral in the development of effective partnerships to increase CalFresh access and participation in San Luis Obispo County, for example:

- Because many WIC families in San Luis Obispo County are receiving Medi-Cal, but not CalFresh Debbie developed a partnership with local WIC clinics to provide CalFresh outreach

and conduct initial benefit screenings. She is very flexible with her time and is willing to travel to any and all WIC sites.

- Debbie was a key player in developing a partnership between the Food Bank and Catholic Charities to improve CalFresh outreach efforts and increase enrollment.
- Debbie attends DSS outreach meetings and shares barriers that clients are facing in regards to completing the CalFresh application. In conjunction with Catholic Charities, Debbie has improved communication with the county and developed procedures for outreach.
- Debbie has increased CalFresh enrollment in San Luis Obispo reaching rural areas of the county and advocating on behalf of her clients.

**Liz Metzler & Elizabeth Hall, CalFresh Outreach Coordinators  
The Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank**

Liz and Elizabeth are a great duo! They share the same mission of helping to alleviate hunger in San Diego County by helping low-income people receive CalFresh and retain their benefits. They are successful at what they do because they treat their clients as people and not just an addition to their caseload. Liz and Elizabeth are dedicated to making sure their clients do not experience any hurdles in applying for benefits. On several occasions they have managed to get previously denied cases reevaluated and approved. Their advocacy efforts are very much valued. Liz and Elizabeth are always on the lookout for more partnerships and creating effective ways to encourage more people to apply for CalFresh. They have successfully begun to incorporate nutrition education and the nutritional value CalFresh has on people's health when facilitating presentations in the community.

**Alondra Ortiz, Outreach Specialist  
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Monterey**

Alondra was a key player in developing the CalFresh outreach program in San Luis Obispo County and cultivating the partnership with the San Luis Obispo County Food Bank. This partnership ultimately helped more families enroll in CalFresh. This is particularly true for families in rural areas, such as Nipomo, Oceano, and Sta. Maria, that had been neglected for some time.

**Patricia Ruelas, CalFresh Outreach Worker  
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank – CalFresh Outreach Program**

Patty is an outstanding member of the CalFresh outreach team and provides excellent client service with the goal of increasing CalFresh participation and maintaining benefits for ongoing clients. Patty is always willing to go the extra mile. She has participated in several large events, such as health fairs and farmers markets. In addition, Patty attends county meetings to gain knowledge and keep up with current regulations to better serve our communities. She also excels in searching for referrals that may be helpful for our clients, such as child care, medical, and housing referrals. Patty is a great colleague and an inspiration to our CalFresh team and entire organization.

**Amanda Schultz, CalFresh Outreach Manager  
San Diego Hunger Coalition**

In the short twelve months that Amanda has been with the San Diego Hunger Coalition (SDHC) she has had a significant impact. She oversaw the GIS mapping project that showed areas of poverty and identified CalFresh outreach sites. This project helped the CalFresh Task Force (CFTF) identify gaps in service and previously unknown area of needs. The CFTF can now make more data-driven decisions and allows partner agencies to be more strategic in identifying areas of need in their communities as they grow and change their programs. Amanda has also created a responsive communication loop between county staff and community outreach workers related to barriers in the eligibility process and brought various CalFresh recipients and community partners to testify to the Social Services Advisory Board. Additionally, Amanda worked with HeadStart and partner outreach agencies to develop a

system for HeadStart to educate families and refer them to partner agencies for prescreening and application assistance.

Amanda is an advocate for the agencies she supports and looks for resources and funding to ensure that they can do the important work of client outreach and assistance. In addition to her skills in developing the advocacy role of the SDHC, Amanda brings a positive spirit to her work and is able to engage a variety of new and existing stakeholders. Amanda's work is helping to end hunger in San Diego and across California.

**Natalie Tercero, Single Stop Site Coordinator  
Job Train**

Natalie has worked to increase access, participation, help clients maintain benefits and debunks common myths about CalFresh. She has worked with hundreds of clients in the peninsula area. She consistently follows-up with clients and builds amazing rapport. In addition, she has created positive partnerships and helps remove the stigma around applying for benefits. For example, she has worked with the local legal aid organization and LIBRE Project to debunk myths so clients feel reassured about applying for CalFresh. Partners often commend her for a job well done and the positive attitude with which she approaches every client, every step of the way.

You can cast your vote online at:  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2013FreshyVoting>

Voting is open until 5pm on Wednesday, January 30.

The "Freshy" Award winners will be announced at  
the 2013 CalFresh Forum on February 20, 2013 in Sacramento.