Agency Spotlight

LULAC Center in Topeka Helps Seniors Thrive

Walk into the LULAC Senior Center in Topeka and you can feel the energy of the center and hear the music. It’s a busy agency serving 20-35 seniors every day.

The LULAC Senior Center was founded in 1973 when members of the LULAC Council recognized the need for a support system for the elderly in Topeka’s Latin-American community. Today, the senior center invites members of the Topeka community from all walks of life and provides a central resource where community members can access services, socialize and maintain their independence and dignity.

Kathy Votaw, executive director, says the center is the only full-time senior center in Topeka.

“We offer a wide range of services including senior computer classes, gardening and cooking classes, occupational therapy twice a month, as well as transportation services, on-site activities, off-site outings, a senior food pantry and meals on wheels,” she said.

The center is also a member of Harvesters’ network, serving as a pick-up site for senior food boxes distributed through the federal Commodity Supplemental Feeding Program (CSFP).

The center also promotes a health initiative – Healthy Bodies, Healthy Lives and Healthy Minds. The program focuses on healthy eating, gardening, nutrition and exercise.

“The key to keeping seniors young is keeping them active,” Votaw said. “The oldest senior here at LULAC is 92 years young.”

In addition, several times a month the center hosts nursing students from Baker University who check center participants’ vital statistics such as pulse rate, weight changes, and blood pressure.

New Buses Transporting Food

Harvesters now has two buses, donated by Topeka Metro, to supplement its efforts to feed those throughout the food bank’s 26-county service area.

The large bus serves as a food pantry and will primarily be used to distribute fresh produce to seniors. The small bus will enhance the food bank’s SNAP outreach and provide meals for children through Kids Cafe, Harvesters’ after school and summer feeding program for children age 1-18.

The large bus had its first stop at the LULAC Senior Center in May. More than 50 seniors received an insulated red reusable bag filled with carrots, potatoes, apples and bread at the kick-off event for the bus.
Agency Partners,
As Harvesters’ kicks off its new fiscal year, I want to thank each and every one of you for helping feed hungry people today and working to end hunger tomorrow!

This past year, Harvesters’ Network distributed more than 52 million pounds of food, including more than 17 million pounds of fresh produce. We could not have done this without all of you.

While the latest Map the Meal gap numbers show a slight decrease in the number of hungry people in our region, we know the need is still great, with people in our service area missing an estimated 65.2 million meals. The cost of food remains high, and therefore the weekly budget shortfall for food-insecure families and seniors continues to climb.

Harvesters’ new three-year strategic plan includes goals to continue increasing the amount of food distributed, while also optimizing the desirability and nutritional value of the food. We will also work to maximize existing and new partnerships within and outside the network to improve operational efficiency and promote long-term client stability.

And, finally, we all need to work together to give voice to the issue of hunger and ensure federal nutrition programs stay intact. Charitable organizations can’t feed all those in need alone. It must be a partnership between our network, our community supporters and the federal government.

If you want to read Harvesters’ full strategic plan, please see it online at www.harvesters.org/strategic plan.

I look forward to accomplishing great things with our network this coming year!

Sincerely,

Valerie Nicholson-Watson
Harvesters President and CEO
Be a Voice for Partner Agencies
Join the Agency Advisory Council

Harvesters is actively seeking representatives from agency partners who would like to join their peers and be part of the network’s Agency Advisory Council. Council members are asked to serve a two-year term, attend quarterly meetings, and give practical input on operational aspects of agency capacity, interests, and issues. All agencies are encouraged to apply, but priority will be given to representatives from agencies in Group B and Group C to ensure equitable representation across the network.


Transporting Food Safely
Insulated Freezer Blankets Now Required

Food safety is a priority at Harvesters and throughout our Agency Network. To comply with requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act and Feeding America, Harvesters reminds you that agencies are required to provide active (coolers with ice packs or refrigerated vehicles) or passive (insulated freezer blankets) refrigeration devices for the transportation of refrigerated or frozen foods picked up at Harvesters in Kansas City or Topeka, regardless of distance.

Staff will not load orders until we verify your agency representative has appropriate active or passive temperature controls. Blankets are not required if you pick up with a refrigerated vehicle. If your agency is eligible for free delivery from Harvesters, we encourage you to consider this benefit. If you do not have freezer blankets, you can purchase them through online ordering on Harvesters Express. They are available in two different sizes.

Help with Diabetes

Did you know 1 in 11 Americans has diabetes? Although there is no cure for the disease, it can be managed. Having diabetes shouldn’t keep people from enjoying a wide variety of foods. A great way to get variety is by eating non-starchy vegetables like: spinach, asparagus, beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes. This handout, provided by our partners at the American Diabetes Association, is a great resource to help people Make Smart Food Choices. Visit Diabetes.org for more information on diabetes and how to help your clients eat healthier and participate in life!

Immigration Issues

Feeding America recently released guidance on immigration issues and a handout on ICE immigration at food banks and partner agencies. You can find this information on the Agency Resource page at www.harvesters.org/agencies/resources.
Making the Healthy Choice
New Nutrition Resources for Agencies

Are you ready to help make the healthy choice the easy choice for your clients? Do you need some additional support and ideas for incorporating health and nutrition into your organization’s food programs?

Harvesters has a new model for our Nutrition Services department, and we are creating new and sustainable programs for supporting this type of work at your agency. Watch for more information to come via email and Harvesters’ Agency website on the following opportunities:

**Train the Teacher**
Learn Harvesters’ curriculum and class guide to lead nutrition classes at your organization! Harvesters provides free training, cooking equipment, funds for needed ingredients for each class, and ongoing support. We can train any staff or volunteer at your organization who would make a great teacher. The trainings will include a mix of in-person and online sessions. If you are interested in learning more about the training, contact us at nutrition@harvesters.org.

**Healthy Pantry Partnerships**
Nutrition Services staff can consult with your agency to modify your pantry to become healthier, based on your goals and vision for your program. We can help you develop an on-site garden; move to a client-choice pantry model; acquire healthier food; help clients use food in a healthier manner; connect with resources like dietitians, nurses, and chefs; help with visual aids for healthy eating; provide nutrition training for staff/volunteer/board; offer cooking demonstrations; and more.

Depending on your goals and projects, partnerships may last 1-2 months, or be more intensive over 6-8 months. Watch for more information to come via email and the Harvesters Agency website on how to apply for one of these partnerships.

Questions? Contact us at (877) 353-6639 or nutrition@harvesters.org