

Come together to increase food security, cultivate community security

Editor's note: *This is part two of a two-part series on food security.*

"Food insecurity is real, it is in our community and you can help," written by Brynna Bowden, appeared in the Jan. 11 Tribune.

**BRYNNA
BOWDEN**



What does food security have to do with

Women's Services? Although I have served as an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) for only seven months, this is a question that I have been asked many times in my role as "food security advocate" at the agency. At first glance, the correlation between Women's Services and food security seems ambiguous. However, according to Oxfam, a hunger relief agency, "Hunger isn't about too many people and too little food. Hunger is about inequality. And women and girls face the greatest inequalities of all."

The majority of the food on our planet is grown by women. In fact, a United Nations report found that, if given the same agricultural resources as men, women could provide food for 150 million more people. As a result of these imbalances in accessing resources, however, women are the majority of the hungry on our planet. When women are hungry, they are faced with making difficult decisions and taking risks that make them susceptible to rape and abuse. When women leave abusive relationships, they are often left financially unstable and food insecure.

Thus, it is time to talk about the amazing culture, community and power of food. Food security is community security. And community security happens when we join forces and work together. So how can you do this in Crawford County?

One way is through the Women's Services garden. Women's Services recognizes that risk factors for violence include increased levels of poverty and

decreased community participation. Our garden initiative encourages neighbors to get to know one another better by gardening together. Become a part of our volunteer garden group and help us to prepare, plant, maintain and harvest our garden.

Moreover, consider starting your own neighborhood garden. You'll get to know those in your neighborhood and together grow a bountiful harvest while building an empowered and food-secure community. If you are new to gardening, stop by Women's Services after Memorial Day to pick up a gardening kit, which will include tools, seeds and an informational "how-to" booklet.

Women's Services recognizes the importance of community collaboration in achieving our goals. Increasing food security in our community is no small feat and something that we cannot do alone. That is why we are actively establishing partnerships with community members and organizations involved in local food security initiatives.

One such partnership and another way to get involved in this movement is through the Community Wellness Initiative. This initiative is a collaborative community effort that includes a community garden located at the Meadville Area Recreation Complex. If you don't have room for a garden, the right growing conditions where you live, or you'd like to garden with others, renting a box at this garden location provides the tools and space to grow your own food. For more information, contact Kerstin Martin at kmartin@allegheny.edu.

Additionally, Meadville has the pleasure of hosting author Ben Hewitt for a public lecture on Feb. 19 at 7 p.m. at Ford Chapel, Allegheny College. On Feb. 20 from 10:30 a.m. to noon at the Lew Davies Community Center, hear Ben and other regional growers in a pan-

el discussion. These events, both a part of The Year of Meadville's "Our Local Food System" series which is sponsored by Allegheny College, provide opportunities to learn about how "... regionalized agriculture and food production holds the potential to reinvigorate our bodies, communities and economies." For more information, contact Autumn Vogel at avogel@allegheny.edu.

It is our hope that by increasing food security in Meadville, we will help to build a more resilient community.

We recognize that local food security initiatives constitute an important new arena for intervention as well as improving the quality of life of interpersonal violence victims and community members alike. It is our belief that community gardening and increased food security serve as a medium for decreasing violence. By establishing collaborative partnerships with local food security advocates, we are making communal food security a focus for our shelter activity. In doing so, we seek to extend beyond a crisis management framework to help those whom we serve not only recover, but to remake their lives.

Women feed the world — they deserve the chance to feed themselves and their families in an environment free of violence. Regardless of how you become involved, it is time for us to come together to increase food security and cultivate community security. There has never been a better time for us to take ownership over our food system by being proactive consumers.

For more information about any of the aforementioned suggestions, contact me at bbowden@womensservicesinc.org or 724-4637.

Recent Allegheny College graduate Brynna Bowden is an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America) at Women's Services in Meadville. Reg Henry did not write this week. His column normally runs on Mondays in the Tribune.