

November 2020

Southeast Missouri AHEC hosts mobile food pantries in partnership with the Covid-19 Response Network in the Missouri Bootheel

During the month of October, SEMO AHEC along with the Health in the Heartland/COVID-19 Response Network, hosted four mobile food pantries in the Southeast Missouri Area. Food insecurity has been a longstanding issue in the SEMO area, but COVID has exacerbated the problem exponentially. For example, in some Bootheel counties, like Mississippi, New Madrid and Pemiscot, about 27%, 25% and 26% of children, respectively are food insecure (Missouri food insecurity rate for children is 18%). The goal of the events was to assist the communities in the region in overcoming food insecurity, while helping to slow the spread of COVID.

Several local agencies and organizations volunteered their time, effort, and ideas to help this project come to fruition including Saint Louis University (SLU) School of Public Health and Social Justice, the SLU AHEC Program Office, Whole Kids Outreach, ParentLink, SEMO AHEC, health professional students, community members, and others. Pantries were held in the Southeast Missouri counties with the highest need and the following towns were selected based on population and lack of other resources: Doniphan, Steele, Malden, and Bertrand. The efforts of this group lead to nearly 850 families receiving assistance during the series of events. Food boxes including fresh produce and dairy, a variety of pantry items, protein items, and others purchased in collaborations with the Southeast Missouri Food Bank.

In addition to distributing food boxes, we were also able to provide free washable/reusable masks and a COVID-19 Resource Booklet to each family. This booklet included information about mask wearing, preventing the spread of COVID-19, and where to access other local resources such as food pantries, resource navigators, and more. During the food distributions, folks in line waiting for food were confidentially interviewed to gain more information about the needs of the local communities. The need for food was apparent based on the long lines, but other needs like transportation, utility and housing assistance, and medical help were also identified.

Volunteers and participants alike spoke very highly of the series of food pantries. Volunteers were tired but hearts were full all around. Our week of pantries culminated on World Food Day (October 16th) in Bertrand, Missouri. In a wonderful gesture of gratitude and community, the entire city government of Bertrand joined us and assisted us with the distribution.

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University
Kirksville
- University of Missouri-
Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- East Central Missouri
ECMO AHEC – St. Louis
- Mid-Missouri AHEC –
Rolla
- Northeast Missouri
NEMO AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri
NWMO AHEC – St.
Joseph
- Southeastern Missouri
SEMO AHEC – Poplar
Bluff
- West Central Missouri
WCMO AHEC – Kansas
City