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You Don't Need Any Special Talent to Join Fight Against Hunger

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You Don't Need Any Special Talent to Join Fight Against Hunger

By Terri Susan Fine
UCF Forum columnist
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The United Nations itself had not yet been officially established when its own Food and Agriculture Organization was formed, even though it was by just a few days. The U.N. was established Oct. 24, 1945, just eight days following the establishment of the Food and Agriculture Organization, and it was not until 1948 that the international body ratified its Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The way these events unfolded suggests that ahead of individual human rights and world security is one of the most basic human rights: access to food and nutrition. The chronology of events speaks to nutrition and food security surpassing all other human rights.

What is the value of other human rights if the most basic go unfulfilled?

It is also interesting that the U.N. named Oct. 16 as World Food Day and not World Hunger Day, or something focusing on the problem and not the solution, even though by focusing on food we have no choice but to look at hunger.

On Oct. 16, every year millions of people across the world focus their attention on world hunger with the intent of eliminating it. These activists focus their attention by taking part in public-awareness campaigns, educating the public about the severity of hunger in our local communities and in the world, and otherwise engaging in projects and activities that will alleviate hunger.

Recent statistics on malnutrition provide food for thought. In the United States alone, 49 million people, including 17 million children, live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. These numbers represent 11 percent of the entire U.S. population.

Worldwide, hunger is experienced by 923 million people, while almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes each day.

The impact of malnutrition on children affects critical life experiences, as preschool and school-aged children who suffer severe hunger tend to exhibit higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety, depression and behavior problems, when compared with children who do not suffer from hunger. Among the poor living in developing countries, 820 million are undernourished—they consume less than the minimum amount of calories and nutrients needed for sound health.

Across Florida, 17 percent experience food insecurity (that same percentage is mirrored in Orange County) although among children that percentage rises to 28 percent. Hendry County, between Fort Myers and West Palm Beach, experiences the worst food insecurity in the state as 23 percent of all Hendry County residents are food insecure. Thirty-eight percent of Hendry County's resident children experience food insecurity.

The opportunities for addressing malnutrition and hunger abound. Some take little effort, such as signing one of the multiple petitions available online, while others invite contributions of money and sweat equity. Grassroots events such as hunger walks, World Food Day dinners, meal-packaging events and food drives bring people together from all walks of life.

Beyond that, of course, financial support is needed. Food banks are connected with various networks so they can purchase food at a much lower cost than the average consumer. There are those who contend that food banks' purchasing power is multiplied by six when donors give dollars instead of food.

That can of beans on which we spend a dollar and give to a food bank is better used as a dollar donated to the food bank, which may purchase six cans of beans. Still there is the psychic value associated with purchasing a can of beans, placing it in a bag full of other groceries, getting one's friends to do the same, and taking the collection to a food bank or some other collection site such as a house of worship or civic organization.

Of course, food and nutrition security is one of those issues that activist, scholar and author Paul Rogat Loeb would understand as one that would freeze us because we would consider the issue insurmountable. What difference can I make if hundreds of millions of people in the world and hundreds of thousands in my community do not have access to the most basic of human needs? Should I even try?

According to Loeb, whose works have inspired thousands of activists to take action, perceiving problems as insurmountable is not the proper lens through which to perceive them.

“Start where you are,” Loeb suggests, using the talents and skills that you have and working with others who will bring their own diverse set of talents and skills. Loeb’s inspiration comes from demonstrating that we should take a committed stand even if we don’t know all of the answers.

No one needs special talents and skills to start, and confronting hunger is no exception.

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