

Salmon community uses dinner to build a sense of belonging

AT A GLANCE

Seventy-one percent of participants reported that a sense of community was one of the most important reasons they attend the Community Dinner Table events.

The Situation

Food security is one of the largest challenges facing rural towns across the nation. Salmon, Idaho is no different. In 2016, 15.4 percent of Lemhi County residents were food insecure. A group of citizens approached the University of Idaho to organize a hunger summit to help the community begin to address food security. A summit was held in 2015 and 2016. Several action teams were formed to begin to address hunger in 2016. A group decided to offer a free community meal once a month to help community members fill their food gap and bring members of the community together. The goal of the event was to not only feed hungry community members but begin building healthy relationships throughout the community to begin moving members out of poverty.

Our Response

A volunteer committee was organized and headed by Shayne Holmes, a local businessman concerned about hunger in the community. The group meets twice monthly under the guidance of the local UI Extension office to help organize the monthly dinners. Dinners are held once a month at the Elk's Hall and are free to the public. They are hosted by a different organization or business each month. The organization provides a majority of the food and supplies and the Community Dinner Committee operates on donations. Organizations have included five separate



Community members enjoy the Community Dinner Table hosted in March of 2017

faith-based organizations, two non-profits, a local business and the school district.

Program Outcomes

The group has hosted nine dinners since August 2016. An average of 250 community members attend each month with the highest number of 400 members at the December dinner. Participants were surveyed with an on-the-spot survey and an optional written survey at two dinners. 219 participated in the on-the-spot survey and 78 participated in the written survey. When asked what had changed since coming to a community dinner, 36 percent of respondents said that their sense of community had improved. 71 percent of participants reported that a sense of community was one of the most important reasons they attend and 32 percent came to meet new people. 83 percent of survey participants said they met new people at the dinners. Although only 34 percent of

participants said they were a little or very dependent on the meal, it is indispensable to some. One participant reported “I would be home struggling to feed me and my family. People care and are concerned for my situation. It reminds me that there are still good people in Salmon and that people in the community care.” The committee was excited to see both resource-limited and resource-abundant community members were coming together and meeting each other. One participant reported “These dinners have changed how our family views ‘community.’ We have never lived in a place, until Salmon, that brings the community together like this. We love it.” Another reported that “A town that eats together, stays together.”

The Future

The committee has dinner sponsors requesting to participate and scheduled through the fall. In September 2017, the group hopes to begin offering the dinners twice a month. In addition, the group has reached out to serve other food security programs in the area including local food banks and the backpack program, which sends backpacks of food home with children in need over the weekends.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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