



## MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NEW BRUNSWICK PANTRIES LOOK TO RECIPIENTS FOR DIRECTION**

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY** – Feedback from New Brunswick’s food pantry recipients could be shaping the future for a few Hub City pantries.

In April, the Feeding New Brunswick Network, a partnership of approximately one dozen city pantries and soup kitchens, hosted its monthly meeting. It was there that pantry representatives first pitched the idea of conducting a voluntary survey for their respective clients.

“In searching for ways to improve the system, we thought it best to look for direction from those individuals who have the most contact and the most at stake,” said Jennifer Apostol, a project manager for the Middlesex County Food Organization and Outreach Distribution Services, a Network member that services upwards of 100 regional emergency food providers through weekly distributions.

By mid May, two organizations, the Emanuel Lutheran Church soup kitchen and the Christ Church food pantry, jointly held a single focus group in which approximately 20 participants were asked a wide range of questions regarding their distribution experience.

Seeing a pattern of responses, survey organizers noted clients’ comparable preferences with regards to both the products and processes.

For instance, many of those polled frequented more than one New Brunswick pantry and leaned in favor of a centralized registration system.

“This might allow food recipients to register bi-annually in one location and provide them with a single identification card, traceable among all the participating food pantries,” Apostol said. “It would also significantly cut down on paperwork, streamlining the process for many of these organizations, as well as their clients.”

In 2011, a neighboring collaboration of pantries called the Perth Amboy We Care Network launched a similar registration system, leading Apostol to conclude that such a shift would be feasible for New Brunswick.

Surveyors noted other recurring responses from clients, who were reportedly more partial to a shopping experience in which they could pick and choose their products rather than the pre-packed bags they currently receive.

“Christ Church is considering converting to this shopping-style of distribution, thinking it might work in their location,” Apostol said. “Emanuel is still looking at the possibility, but dealing with the reality of its limited available space.”

Lastly, food recipients largely told focus group organizers that they would like to see more options for fresh produce, meat and dairy.

Of all the suggestions, Apostol said this might be the most challenging to accommodate.

“It really comes down to what’s available to us,” she said. “A good portion of our regular supplies come from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey in Hillside. If they don’t have the dairy, meats or produce to give, it becomes an obstacle of finding those donations through local avenues.”

For more information on the MCFOODS, an operation overseen by the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, interested parties may contact Apostol at 609-655-5141, by emailing [ja@mciath.com](mailto:ja@mciath.com) or by logging onto [www.mciauth.com](http://www.mciauth.com).

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