

Mobile Operations—Getting to the Forgotten

Seventeen Years of Mobile Outreach

For more than two decades, The River Fund New York has been feeding needy people from all five boroughs and empowering them to move beyond the lines of poverty. For almost seventeen of those years, serving this mission has drawn our attention to some of New York's most desperate populations—most notably in Coney Island, Brooklyn, and Jamaica Center, Queens. We address the need in these areas through our Mobile Operations.

In both locations, a disproportionately high number of homeless and shelter-resident families eke out a discouraging existence in the shadows of thriving entertainment attractions and vibrant, expanding commercial growth. Although these areas have benefited from substantial investment in recent years, the poor in both places seem to have been forgotten.

Why Mobile?

The rezoning that has accompanied the increased economic activity makes the establishment of new food pantries and soup kitchens in these parts of the city financially challenging—if not impossible. Serving under-privileged communities with children involves making provisions for Back-to-School Giveaways, Thanksgiving Feasts, X-mas Gift-Giving and other empowering initiatives. Given the economic constraints, the only practical solution for addressing this complexity in these particular neighborhoods is via Mobile Units.

The Impact of The River Fund

Over the years, according to the FeedNYC policy committee on New York City hunger resources, The River Fund's weekly Mobile Pantry Service has grown to become an important lifeline for more than 2,000 households every month. This includes some 2,850 children, 3,250 adults and over 900 seniors. Among these, persons with disabilities are particularly hard-pressed. Over 30% of the households we serve are seriously affected by critical mobility challenges and other major handicaps afflicting one or more of their family members.

Going beyond Emergency Food Assistance and Hunger Relief, The River Fund helps needy families through Nutritional Education, Income Support and a wide range of assistance referrals. These additional services are offered from our main location in Richmond Hill, Queens, and The River Fund has received numerous awards for this cycle-breaking approach to combating hunger, homelessness and poverty. Our volunteer-based culture of service enables us to do more with less. We are recognized as one of the most cost-effective community-based organizations in this arena—serving a total of 140,000 beneficiaries annually, among whom at least 40% are children, which makes them a key focus-demographic of our work. As such, we provide organically grown vitamins every month to the children of our clients and annual back-to-school supplies. In summer, youths 16 to 18 can join our basketball team, The River Fund Cobras, and/or our Summer Gardening Program.



A hot Thanksgiving meal for needy families in Coney Island.

Although our base of operations in Queens is tiny, measuring only 2,500 sq-ft., we have been able to develop several important components of our award-winning “Beyond Food” strategy. This includes a free tax service that repatriates into our communities more than half a million dollars yearly that would otherwise go unclaimed from the IRS. We are also a leading Food Stamp enrollment agency in New York City. In fact, The River Fund has become a primary partner for several community programs sponsored by The Food Bank for New York, the NYC Human Resources Administration, the NYC Office for Financial Empowerment and other Federal, State and City entities that need strong, community-based organizations to advance important poverty-reduction objectives in the neighborhoods we serve.

Enhancing our Mobile Operations

In Fall 2011, we upgraded our Mobile Operations by switching to the large-capacity and extremely fuel-efficient, Freightliner Diesel Sprinter from Daimler Benz. This Fall, we are adding a Mobile Office Unit to our Mobile Operations. This will enable us to bring instantaneous electronic Food Stamp Prescreening and other Benefits Assistance Referral processing to the extremely desperate communities that we have been serving through our Mobile Pantry Service.

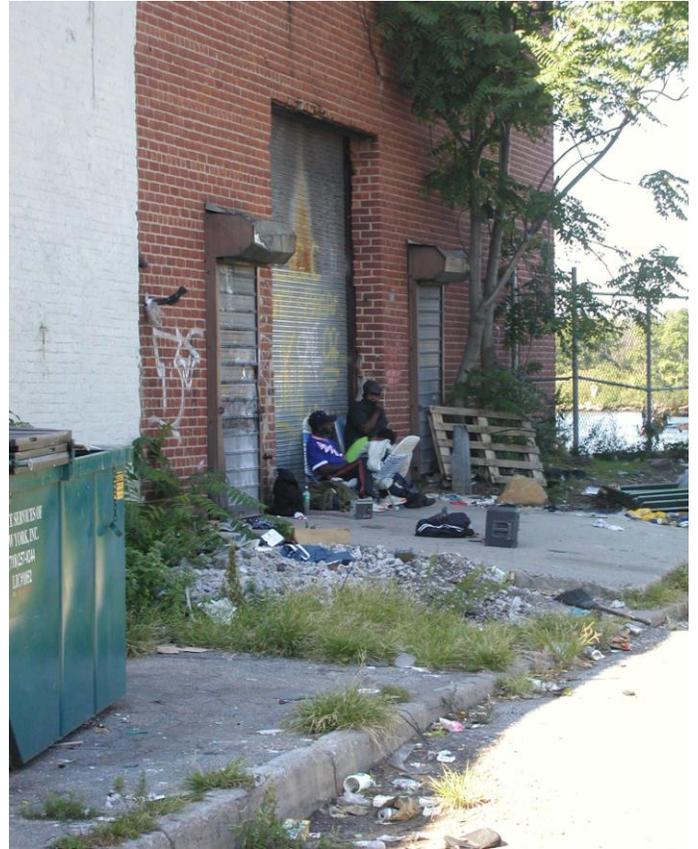
Our Mobile Office concept was enthusiastically embraced by City Harvest, which has provided us with a grant for \$18,000. This will cover just under half of this year's operations budget for the new Mobile Office Unit.

In addition to adding Mobile Benefits Assistance to our Mobile Operations, starting this October, we will also expand the number of our Mobile Pantry Service days from 52 to 76 per year—a 50% increase. The combined impact of these enhancements to our Mobile Operations will result in a doubling of our effectiveness in the Coney Island and Jamaica Center neighborhoods.

Mobile Operations—Getting to the Forgotten



A personal touch makes all the difference.



Here lives a family of three.



The pantry line at Coney Island.



Backpacks, school supplies and matching shirts for these twins.



What it means to be forgotten.



What it means to be found.



This is why we serve.



Our winter coat outreach means a lot for needy families.



Santa welcomes each child with a new furry friend.



Kids also get to pick out their own X-mas present.