



Soup kitchens and food pantries and homeless shelters how they help during the holidays

This time of year is different for everyone. You have some people who are able to celebrate and indulge in it without a worry and for them it's easy to not have to think that much about where they may go, their meals and if they'll be okay. For others the holiday may bring up different feelings of not knowing what to do for meals and needing somewhere to be during these cold seasons.

Some of the places that help elude these problems are soup kitchens and food pantries. These are people who devote their time to helping others, so I reached out to ask them some questions about their line of work.

Community Bridges

Questions answered by *Suzanne Schwilk*

1. In your own words, how would you describe your line of work?
 - a. I am the program coordinator for Mountain Community Resources (MCR) which is a Family Resource Center for the San Lorenzo Valley in the Santa Cruz Mountains. MCR is a part of the Community Bridges family of ten programs which provides essential services such as Meals on Wheels, Lifeline, WIC, Eldercare, and four family resource centers. We provide equitable access to resources and advocates for health and dignity across every stage of life.
2. To add onto the last question, how would you say your work helps others?
 - . Our programs give community members access to transportation, healthy food, health care, and senior adult day health care. We offer crisis support, case management services, early

education, grade school tutoring, as well as classes in breastfeeding, nutrition, parenting, and literacy. We help homeless individuals with showers, laundry service and lockers and snacks. Most of these and other services we offer, are available at no cost.

3. What is your favorite part of your job?

. My favorite part of my job is being able to be directly involved in helping the community I love. People are really grateful for the help they receive.

4. What could others do to further help soup kitchens (if that's where you work) or food banks?

. Volunteer and/or donate funds, if possible, to Second Harvest Food Bank.

5. Are there any kind of misconceptions you see people have about your place of work that you know of?

. Some misconceptions I hear are that low-income people are only in for free handouts. This is so untrue; food insecurity can happen at a variety of income levels. The cost of living in our area is so high that people pay way too much money for housing and may not be able to afford to put groceries on the table.

6. What are some of the hardest parts of your jobs?

. The hardest part is seeing people suffer. We sometimes get people in crisis situations, so we try our best to get them help that they need. It can be a slow process which can be frustrating.

7. If you could ask everyday people to help or do one thing that would make your job easier, what would that be (if there is anything)?

. Donate or volunteer.

8. What are some of the most helpful things people can do for your jobs?

. My day starts with brewing a pot of coffee for our clients, so they have something warm to drink when they walk in our door. We have a lot of homeless individuals that come in for their morning showers and drop off a load of laundry for me to do. After lunch we have advocacy appointments which may include signing up someone for CalFresh (used to be called food stamps) or completing applications for the California COVID Rent Relief, a program to help tenants that are behind on their rent. Really everyday can bring something new.

9. Could you describe a normal day in your work life?

. Giving out food to needy families every week, getting an approval for a client for a HEAP application so their heating bill gets paid, getting a client into a safe shelter for the night, getting seniors signed up for Calfresh so they have extra money for groceries, getting a bus pass for someone that needs to get to the shelter for the night or to their medical appointment. Pretty much everything we do here is rewarding.

10. What would you describe as some of the most rewarding moments of the job?

. I think that if people can help only during the holidays that is still fantastic! It is a busy time of year and there is always something to do to help.

11. What would you say to someone who is thinking about joining to help out at their local soup kitchen (if that's where you work) or food bank.

. They should absolutely go for it! Volunteering is such a rewarding experience. You become a positive part of the community in which you live and can help make the difference in a person or a family's quality of life. You meet other volunteers of all ages and grow friendships with each other. Helping people feels really good!

It was a little hard for other food pantries and soup kitchens to get back to me due to the amount of work they have during these times but I'm sure they would give similar answers to *Ms.Schwilk*, I would like to thank **Community Bridges** for taking the time to get back to me and other people who work in a similar

business to them for doing the harder jobs that may be overseen. Happy Holidays everyone be safe and grateful for what you have cause some people have nothing.

Until next time, Niah (They/She)