

# Small actions resonate in big poverty project



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Community Services Agency Associate Director Maureen Wadiak highlights fresh and selective food donations as one strategic area where local groups can make a big difference.

undertake.

The plan highlights five key aspects of family poverty – food, housing, health care, education and income – and estimates that a quarter of Santa Clara County residents live in poverty.

The agencies use a different measure of poverty from the federal figure due to the particular cost-of-living constraints in this county. A local family with two adults, a preschooler and a school-age child must earn \$68,430 a year to be economically self-sufficient based on the coalition's calculation – more than three times the federal poverty threshold, which is \$21,200 for the same family.

Citing the shrinking resources of tax revenues and state funds, the plan

A coalition of 90 local agencies and non-profits, collectively dubbed "Step Up Silicon Valley," launched a campaign to cut poverty last week with an action plan aiming to reduce regional poverty rates 50 percent by 2020.

Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County convened the group in 2007 to find social solutions that connect business, non-profit and governmental efforts. Los Altos and Mountain View's Community Services Agency (CSA) participated in the project, which CSA Associate Director Maureen Wadiak said could help bring systemic problems to the public's attention and offer specific responses anyone – even individuals – could

calls for corporate, individual and philanthropic involvement in the campaign. By identifying which problems contribute to poverty – and who the poor are in this area – groups can develop specific responses. For instance, in addition to broadly raising public awareness of community hunger, organizations can advocate for specific changes to food-stamp policies or to how local residents donate to local food banks.

“It almost seems overwhelming when you read through all of the objectives,” Wadiak said, but highlighted CSA’s nutrition program – for which demand has increased 18 percent over the past year – as one concrete place informed volunteers and local groups can make a big difference.

“Go out and really try to solicit donations, form partnerships that bring in healthy food to the food pantry. Vegetables, fruit, protein, meat – those are the things we don’t get donated,” she said.

Food drives can target a special need, such as ingredients for specific ethnic cuisines or for diabetic seniors, or seasonal fresh fruit in the summer.

“I may not be able to change the world single-handedly, but what can I do, where I work, to meet the needs of the people I serve?” Wadiak asked. “It may not be sweeping, it may not be a broad philosophical statement, but that’s the reality.”

For more information and a copy of the action plan, visit [www.stepupsv.org](http://www.stepupsv.org).

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