



## WORKING POOR STUDY FACT SHEET

### Purpose

■ In 2007, the Greater Chicago Food Depository and University of Chicago Survey Lab partnered to conduct a study on the usage of food assistance programs among the working poor residents of Chicago and Cook County. The National Hunger Study, conducted in 2005 by America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network, found that 39 percent of the households that receive food from the Greater Chicago Food Depository include one employed adult.

### Methodology

■ The Survey Lab interviewed 301 working poor residents of Cook County using a telephone survey questionnaire. The sample surveyed was drawn from areas throughout Cook County where at least 15 percent of the population was living below 175 percent of the poverty line. The study defined "the working poor" as individuals who worked at least 20 hours per week for at least 27 weeks in the last year but whose incomes fall below 175 percent of the federal poverty level. This means a family of four with one person working part-time and making \$36,137 or less would be considered to be a working poor family. Data collection was completed in November 2007.

### Findings

- 61 percent of respondents experienced some level of food insecurity in the last year and 49 percent reported three or more food insecure conditions in their household. That is, they lacked money for food, lacked money to maintain a balanced diet, cut meal sizes or skipped meals to stretch the food they had, or went hungry.
- Among food insecure households, 30 percent did not access any food assistance programs but only 22 percent used a food pantry. Other findings among food insecure households that did not use a food pantry in the last year:
  - 45 percent had at least one child enrolled in the free or reduced-price school lunch program.
  - 43 percent had at least one household member participating in the Food Stamp Program (Link card)
  - 16 percent had at least one household member participating in the federal WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program.
  - Less than 1 percent used a soup kitchen, Meals-on-Wheels delivery, or a city emergency food box.
- Among all working poor respondents in Cook County:
  - 22 percent had used a pantry within the past year.
  - 59 percent had never used a pantry.
  - 5 percent had never used any type of food assistance program.
  - 70 percent have children under age 18 in the household.
  - Individuals reported they were more likely to turn to family than a food pantry when in need of food assistance.
- A key concern is the pantry usage rate among food insecure households.
  - Among the working poor who are currently in need of food assistance, but are not using a pantry, 40 percent believe that "people will look down on you if they know you use a food pantry."
  - Among the working poor who have never used a pantry, 35 percent stated "lack of information about the program or location" as a reason for not using a pantry.
  - While most respondents are likely to visit a pantry during the morning hours, on weekdays or weekends, the preferred times for pantry use vary greatly.