

For agencies, it's food safety first

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Cooking 470 nutritious meals each day, 365 days a year, is a challenge for chef Rob Newmeyer at The Healing Place of Wake County.

The Raleigh programs offer three meals a day to homeless people with alcohol or drug dependency. Newmeyer orders some food from national wholesalers, but does the bulk of his shopping at the Food Bank.

"I have a food budget of \$1.65 per day, per person," he says. "I plan my meals 10 days in advance, based on what the Food Bank has to offer that week."

What the Food Bank can provide has changed dramatically over the last several years, says Larry Morris, agency services manager for The Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

More fresh produce and frozen meat is available, along with prepared items such as potato salad and chicken salad. The increase in perishable goods means that member agencies must receive training to maintain food quality and safety.

Food safety is always important, but more so for many Food Bank clients. Morris points out that some recipients may have chronic illness or compromised immune systems.

Member agencies that receive donations from the Food Bank must have appropriate food storage areas that meet Food Bank regulations.

Agencies must attend a food safety training session organized by the Food

Bank. At least one member of each agency must attend a two-hour session every two years, unless they have received other certified food-safety training. At each session, Food Bank staff goes over basic food safety: making sure food is kept at the proper temperature, stressing the importance of hand washing and preventing cross-contamination by using separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.

"We talk about transporting the food to

keep temperatures constant. Using a freezer blanket, for instance, even if you're just driving across town. You never know when your car might break down," says Morris.

Food Bank outreach coordinators visit member agencies once every 18 months to check their food safety practices. Coordinators check the temperature of refrigerators and freezers and see that food is being stored off the floor.

The Food Bank also gets the word out if there is a food recall. Staff makes sure any recalled food is disposed of properly.

Christian Community in Action in Cary monitors food safety and quality, says Jill Wissing, crisis ministry coordinator. Volunteers check expiration dates and go through fresh produce to prevent spoilage.

Wissing says she or one of her staff members attends the food safety training session each time the Food Bank offers it.

Morris says food safety must always be a prime concern. "We need to make sure those folks are safe," he says.



Students from St. Michael's School, from left, Calli Patch, Michael Macdonald, Emma Zisek, Kristin Twomey and Kelly Majewski, sort sugar and flour into bags in the food pantry at Dorcas Thrift Shop in Cary.

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