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HELP BEYOND HUNGER HUNGER COALITION IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST FOOD BY JENNIFER TUOHY

A local woman was facing a food shortage and an inability to make ends meet. Unsure of what was going to happen to her and her family, she attended computer classes and educational workshops at the Hunger Coalition.

These eventually led her to a scholarship fund at College of Southern Idaho created for clients of the Hunger Coalition and The Advocates, and she is now able to apply for better jobs.

"People don't realize the depth of the shame that accompanies not being able to provide for yourself and your family," said Sharon Dohse, client resource manager for the Hunger Coalition. "It's often something that people won't share openly with those closest to them, and this leads to isolation. Through computer mentoring, people have a chance to learn computer skills at their own pace. It's a positive, supportive environment where people can learn a new skill and feel good about themselves."

While it distributed 194,000 pounds of fresh and nonperishable food last year, the Hunger Coalition is about more than just food for local families struggling to make ends meet. Clients can participate in nutrition workshops, cooking classes and computer training sessions through its mentoring and education programs.

Last month, a child nutrition workshop offered healthy recipe ideas and basic nutritional information to parents while encouraging children to explore better nutrition with activities and recipe tastings. Last year, thanks to a partnership with Nurture, a nonprofit dedicated to family health and nutrition, the coalition received hundreds of slow cookers to distribute to its clients. This prompted Hallie Reikowsky, the coalition's garden and education manager, to run a class teaching simple and time-saving cooking techniques using the slow cooker, which is an easy way to produce a variety of healthy, simple meals with just a few inexpensive ingredients.

Providing 210 people with basic nutrition every week through its mobile food bank is just part of the coalition's work. The creation of these programs goes a step further in helping people back on their feet. Meagan Ryan Stasz, the Hunger Coalition's communications and development director, said that by offering support and access to community resources, the organization hopes to help clients move beyond hunger and back to a place of self-sufficiency.

Are you in need? If you, or someone you know, is experiencing malnutrition or facing daily decisions about buying groceries or paying the heating bill, call The Hunger Coalition at 788-0121 or visit www.thehungercoalition.org.