

Twin Cities hunger relief expert visits Rapid City

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The director of Field Services for one of the nation's largest food banks offered her insights into tackling food insecurity issues during a meeting this week at Rapid City Collective Impact.

Michelle Heerey works for Second Harvest Heartland, a food bank headquartered in the Twin Cities of Minnesota that distributed 90 million lbs. of food in 2015 and was named Feeding America's "Food Bank of the Year" in 2014.

Heerey met Wednesday with representatives of several agencies on the frontlines of hunger relief efforts in Rapid City, including individuals from Feeding South Dakota, Rapid City Area Schools, the Rapid City YMCA, Salvation Army and Youth & Family Services. Regional Health, Sioux San Hospital and United Way were also represented.

Heerey and Feeding South Dakota CEO Matt Gassen explained the basics of how the food bank industry works – from getting food to giving it – and some of the innovations that have helped the industry serve more people. For example, Heerey says Second Harvest encourages its partners (food distribution sites) to get outside their own four walls and create "pop-up" distribution sites in the community. In addition, the organization has expanded its distribution efforts in schools, at healthcare sites, and is piloting a program in which police officers can distribute food boxes where they see a need.

Such efforts take hard work and strategic planning. Food insecurity is one of Rapid City Collective Impact's top priorities for 2017, and community members can expect to see the groundwork laid to tackle the issue head-on in the coming weeks.

For more information on Rapid City Collective Impact, visit www.rccimpact.org or contact Communications Director Julie Oberlander at joberlander@rccimpact.org.

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