

# OC Rescue Mission needs food donations

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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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**TUSTIN** At a time when toy and gift donations are flowing into nonprofits to be given to low-income families, food donations aren't meeting the need, officials say.

The [Orange County Rescue Mission](#) provides housing, food and services to help Orange County's homeless people become self-sufficient. This year, the nonprofit is providing 71,091 meals a month, double the amount of meals it did last year. But food donations have not doubled.



Kenneth Arriola, left, and Ben Watnick, of the Orange County Rescue Mission at The Village of Hope in Tustin gather donated food to box. The Orange County Rescue Mission is experiencing a shortage of food donations, although the need has doubled. Donations usually peak around the holidays but drop off dramatically afterwards.

LEONARD ORTIZ, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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## By the numbers

In 2009 at the Orange County Rescue Mission, including the Village of Hope:

3,251 toys, school supplies and children's items provided

9,451 vocational and job training sessions

"We're just worried about food because there are so many more people hungry this year than last year. We're hoping people think about donating food to us at the same time as they're donating Christmas items," said Jim Palmer, president of the Orange County Rescue Mission.

People donate and spend a lot of money during the holidays and don't notice the need again until February, Palmer said. And the need for food has increased as the nation's economic woes have grown, he said.

"I know it's human nature during the holidays, everybody starts thinking of others," said Bill Riemer, vice president of operations for the Orange County Rescue Mission. "That's when we get the majority of our donations.

"But the sad reality is, come Jan. 1, donations are going to drop like a rock and that's when we really scamper for a few weeks or a month and we need to really get people motivated to donate food," he said.

The nonprofit will accept donations large and small, from an extra can of beans to bulk items. Monetary donations are used to purchase food in bulk for a discounted rate, Palmer said. Residents also can hold a food drive.

Donated food is used to provide hot meals to residents and also is sorted into food boxes and distributed to families around the county.

10,760 medical exams and procedures  
13,905 prescription medication assistance  
10,265 life skills and general education sessions  
28,290 hygiene kits provided  
122,118 hot showers provided  
125,762 nights of shelter provided  
853,096 meals provided  
Source: Village of Hope



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Last year, the Rescue Mission provided 853,096 hot meals, double the previous year, Palmer said.

At the [Village of Hope](#), 1,000 hot meals are cooked each day. Four hundred of those meals are given to shelters in Fullerton and Santa Ana.

In addition to food, the facility needs diapers, one of the most expensive things families must buy, personal hygiene items and canned meat. A list of urgent needs is frequently updated on the Web site, [rescuemission.org](http://rescuemission.org).

People can show up and drop off food at the warehouse. Those are the donations that are down right now, Riemer said. The nonprofit is getting food from the Irvine-based [Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County](#) and from Feed the Children.

The Orange County Rescue Mission also needs volunteers. The number of volunteer hours has doubled at the Rescue Mission, which reduced six positions over the last year, according to Palmer. The Orange County Rescue Mission has just 82 staff members, he said. The center's Web site, [rescuemission.org](http://rescuemission.org), lists open volunteer positions, job descriptions and an application.

The Village of Hope, at 1 Hope Drive on the former [Tustin Marine base](#), has 190 residents. The transitional housing program for homeless people has a capacity of 192, and has been busy since its opening in March 2008. On any given night, the Orange County Rescue Mission houses more than 400 people in five facilities.

"I think that everybody can make a difference," Palmer said. "Sometimes people see the numbers and think, 'There's no way I can make a difference.' My daughter, Nancy, years ago saw homeless on the street and thought, 'They need jackets.' She handed out a flyer in the

neighborhood and before we knew it, we had a couple trash bags full of jackets.

"It all adds up."