

## **Food Stamp Outreach Study Released**

In June, the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger released the results of its food stamp enrollment campaign "Making Food Stamps Work". The report was prepared by Dr. Mary Summers of the University of Pennsylvania. Partnering with the PA Department of Welfare, Penn's Fox Leadership Program of the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development, and Pathmark Stores, the Coalition ran the campaign for 18 months from 2003 to 2006.

Volunteers screened a total of 7,500 clients for the Food Stamp Program (FSP). Of the 6,000 who were found potentially eligible, 2,600 (43 percent) applied for the program and 2,100 (35 percent) were successfully enrolled. In addition, the campaign brought an estimated \$3.2 million to low-income Philadelphia households and \$5.9 million in increased business to the City.

According to the report, estimated benefit levels did not appear to influence a household's decision to apply. This finding suggests there are other barriers which keep eligible households from applying. When application assistance was provided along with screening, the application rate increased to 53 percent and the enrollment rate to 40 percent.

The Report offered several suggestions for increasing the participation rate in the FSP. First, the application itself is still too difficult for many clients. Second, many applicants are discouraged by the quantity of supporting documentation they must supply. Third, many clients complained of extended waiting times at the County Assistance Office (3 hours was not unusual), especially when they, in turn, were asked to return with more documentation. The Report identifies pilot projects in other states that have shown that "minimizing application requirements or providing systematic application assistance to new clients can significantly increase food stamp participation rates." They also recommend looking to the private sector for best practices in utilizing new technologies.

The Coalition continues their Campaign with new sources of funding and as of June has screened over 12,000 households.