

MontCo Anti-Hunger Network convenes for 5th annual conference

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Keynote Speaker, Marlysa Gamblin, domestic policy advisor for racial and gender divides at Bread for the World Institute addresses attendees on the topic of racial equity at MontCo Anti-Hunger Network's 5th Annual Conference held at The Hill School in Pottstown on Jan. 31. Submitted photo

POTTSTOWN — MontCo Anti-Hunger Network convened 101 service providers, consumers, funders and government officials at The Hill School for its 5th Annual Conference.

Featured topics included the examination of food justice through a racial equity lens, nontraditional ways to help low income seniors stay fed, and a panel discussion on enhancing Pennsylvania food security which included Montgomery County Commissioner Valerie Arkoosh, PA Secretary of Human Services Teresa Miller, and ACLAMO Executive Director and CEO Nelly Jiménez.

“There are two approaches to addressing hunger — getting food to people who need it and resolving the issues that cause it,” said MontCo Anti-Hunger Network Administrator, Paula Schafer. “MAHN is developing innovative methods that connect people to food assistance who are unable to access brick and mortar food pantry locations. We also acknowledge that racism is a root cause of hunger for people of color and the racial inequities that have caused and perpetuated hunger need to end. The goal of this conference is to inspire new thinking and action around these critical elements of our county’s coordinated response to hunger.”

MontCo Anti-Hunger Network is a nonprofit organization providing resources to 39 food pantries that help feed more than 15,000 households across the county each year. It operates a Retail Food Rescue Program that has distributed more than 152 tons of food to county pantries since April of 2018, and provide network members with education in food pantry best practices.

The keynote speaker was Marlysa Gamblin, domestic policy advisor for racial and gender divides at Bread for the World Institute. Gamblin’s expertise is providing research and analysis to end hunger and poverty among communities of color and women, with the intention of narrowing the racial, gender, hunger and income divides.

She said, “When we think about ending hunger, we often equate it solely with feeding people. But ending hunger requires that we end vulnerability to becoming food insecure — we must stop the cycle. Doing this requires a shift from a charity-oriented model to a justice-oriented one.”

Gamblin conducted a Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation with meeting attendees that looked at thirteen laws intended to keep people of color from building wealth in the U.S.