

Dear [Name],

“Brother, can you spare five bucks for a grande skim sugar-free extra-hot caramel macchiato?”

Imagine seeing someone at a freeway exit holding that sign. You might hand over a buck to acknowledge the wry social commentary: Amid unprecedented affluence in Los Angeles, more and more people in our communities are slipping into poverty and struggling to support themselves and their families.

You don't need a litany of government statistics to know that the rising food and energy prices, rising unemployment and tightened credit are pushing up the rates of hunger and homelessness, particularly among those who have always been self-supporting. You just know there are severe economic consequences to working-poor families, elderly people on fixed incomes and new-to-Los Angeles immigrants when the prices of a gallon of gas and a triple venti soy white mocha are interchangeable.

I may joke about the latte as a comparative economic indicator, but I am deeply concerned that more Los Angelinos than ever before cannot afford nutritious meals and basic necessities.

I found a way to help thousands of them. Now I'm writing to ask you to help me support an organization that I truly believe is working hard and honestly to alleviate the hunger around us.

Yes, I'm going to ask you for money—and much more than the cost of a few grande triple skinny lattes. Much more.

SOVA, from the Hebrew word “savah” meaning “eat and be satisfied,” is a non-sectarian food program for low-income people run by Jewish Family Services of Los Angeles.

SOVA provides free groceries and supportive services to nearly 5,000 men, women and children through neighborhood food pantries in the Beverly-Fairfax and Pico-Robertson areas and Van Nuys. It has professional management, 16 full-time and part-time paid staff, and hundreds of volunteers, including students and Bar and Bat Mitzvah candidates fulfilling their community service obligations.

I am proud to bring this organization to your attention because I think you'll agree with me that it is a vital safety net for people in need and is worthy of your support. I'm writing to you now because my family has made the success of SOVA a personal project.

A lot about SOVA impresses me. Chief among the group's characteristics are its compassion and common sense.

SOVA respects the dignity of its clients. It brings control to people whose financial circumstances have made tatters of their self-confidence—low wage earners, the newly unemployed, people living with disabilities and chronic illnesses, the homeless, and people in jeopardy of losing their homes and apartments. Clients with stable homes receive groceries to last three to four days; homeless clients receive two-week supplies of food that does not require cooking. People can have Kosher and special-diet foods. Everyone can get personal hygiene products.

I like the fact that in addition to receiving food, clients can choose to take advantage of SOVA services aimed at helping them improve their situations—immediately and, with dedication, permanently.

Community Connections is a one-stop consulting center right at SOVA pantries. Specialists offer free legal counseling, job counseling, food stamp enrollment, and assistance with utility bills. While the grown-ups talk, kids can visit a Children's Corner to read and select books to take home for their own libraries.

Resource Centers, also inside the pantries, feature professional and paraprofessional volunteers who can guide clients to government and social service agencies for free medical and mental health care, nutrition counseling, child care, senior services, shelter and housing solutions, and other assistance, including employment referrals.

Clearly, SOVA is dedicated to allaying life's challenges. But SOVA has its own, including the perennial challenge of maintaining the flow of funding and food. SOVA gets free and discounted commodities from local food banks and generous vendors, and has been fortunate to receive steady donations from schools, businesses, congregations, and a lot of very nice people. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is a key provider, but that agency is not immune to downturns. Supplies of USDA commodities have dropped 50 percent in the last five years. SOVA has been working hard make up for that deficiency and shortfalls resulting from the current economic decline.

I invite you to join me in securing SOVA's success. My family hopes to raise \$50,000 between now and the end of the year. You can help us reach that goal in a number of ways:

You can make a one-time, tax-deductible donation. Write a check to "SOVA, Family Funding Project." Mail it to: XXX.

You can charge your donation to your credit card by calling: 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX

You can become a sustaining contributor by joining the our Family's own Food of the Month Club.

On behalf of my Family, I'd like to thank you in advance for your generosity. I have high regard for this organization and its good work to improve the health, lift the spirits and expand the opportunities of so many people far less fortunate than you and me. I personally appreciate your support. Through our contributions, we can assure SOVA clients that they will eat and be satisfied.

Warm regards,

PS: The number of people going hungry in Los Angeles is staggering. In 2007, over 471,000 households were living below the poverty level. Your support enables SOVA to sustain the health of 5,000 local residents, give them a chance at independence and raise their hopes for a better future. Please give generously—and enjoy your next cup of...coffee.