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Family Kitchen turns five-star hotel leftovers into meals for the poor

by Erin Flemming | Aug 08, 2012 | 21:24 Updated: Aug 08, 2012 | 23:56 

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Family Kitchen volunteers empty donated food into storage containers (Photo by Erin Flemming)

AMMAN — This Ramadan, volunteers with the Family Kitchen organisation are once again working to turn uneaten food from hotels and restaurants, which would usually go to waste, into iftar meals for Jordan's neediest families.

Bandar Al Sharif, one of Family Kitchen's founders and directors, said the organisation, founded in 2009, is important to him because many people in the Kingdom are in need of nutritious meals that can easily be provided by hotels and restaurants.

"It's grown a lot this year — every year it's growing more than the year before," the 28-year-old bank employee added. "We want to be professional enough to be able to serve even more people with healthy and nutritious meals in the future."

Every night, Family Kitchen splits volunteers into three groups, all responsible for picking up leftovers from five-star hotels, as well as selected bakeries and restaurants. In total, Family Kitchen receives donations from 14 establishments.

After packing up the food, volunteers drive it to a cold storage area in east Amman that was donated to the organisation.

The food is frozen overnight and then distributed in time for iftar the next day. This is a change from years past, where volunteers would deliver hot meals a few hours after sundown.

Last Ramadan, Family Kitchen distributed approximately 19,000 hot meals. This year, with more volunteers, donations and cold storage space, the organisation distributed more than 14,500 iftar meals in the first two weeks of Ramadan.

Jacki Scott, another founder and director of Family Kitchen, said more restaurants and hotels are willing to donate food, but the organisation has "hit capacity" in terms of how much food can be distributed at this time. A major goal for Scott is to acquire donations of storage space and a cold cargo van so the project can expand.

The amount of leftover food from events and dinners can be "astounding", Scott emphasised. She said after a recent iftar event, there were more than six whole lambs left over that Family Kitchen was able to give to the needy. She noted that paying for a lamb is often difficult, even for a middle-class family.

"Part of our goals is food equality — giving the poor the same food the rich eat," Scott told The Jordan Times. "People actually get to choose what kinds of foods they want, which is great."

Basma Khalifeh, a writer for Living Well magazine and a volunteer with Family Kitchen, said she decided to get involved with the organisation after seeing their Facebook page.

Khalifeh noted that the organisation appealed to her because she is able to give her time and effort rather than just a cash donation to help feed the needy.

“The idea of getting leftovers from hotels is wonderful... there’s so much waste that they would throw away and you feel like you’re being helpful and productive,” she said. “I go all day fasting and I know I’ll get food at the end of the day, but some people don’t have that certainty.”

Last year, organisers said they were planning to open a food bank in order to provide food aid to the poor year-round.

This January, Scott and Sharif launched the Food Security Food Bank, which is now the umbrella organisation under which the Family Kitchen project operates.

Volunteers with the food bank distribute boxes of dry foods to several poor communities in the Kingdom.

This year, Scott said, they also hope to launch a microfinance initiative through the food bank.

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edita says:

August 9, 2012 at 5:02 am

wow i am so happy of what an idea you have i was working before in jordan for 7 years at diplomat as a chef cook and i really can saw that because sometimes i got a part time jobs in five stars ... very good idea im sure so many poor and needy be happy.. IM not a Jordanian but i love your country and your people .. i miss Amman.. Jordan.. Thank you ma'dam Basma Khalifeh, ALLAH!! WILL BLESS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!!! MABRRUK!!

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