



Food For Thought



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MEETING THE NEED WHILE BUILDING RESILIENCE

The last year tested us all; our will, our resolve, and our ability to adapt quickly to difficult circumstances. When the pandemic hit, life as we knew it changed overnight and for thousands of our neighbors, that sudden change meant a job loss, empty cabinets and a first time need for food assistance. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank quickly realized we needed to ramp up our efforts and think differently about food distribution as in-person, “client choice” pantries were no longer an option. Our staff worked with partners across our 27 counties to ensure a continuation of emergency charitable food assistance, an essential service.

As signs of recovery emerge, we must ask ourselves – “What do we understand better now than before the pandemic?” and “Where do we go from here?”

Hunger can affect anyone. More than 40% of those served by the Food Bank and its partners were seeking food assistance for the first time. Many families are just one missed paycheck or medical emergency away from financial hardship; the pandemic brought that into sharp focus.

Lesson Learned: While emergency food assistance is core to our mission, we must also work to help people find financial stability and end hunger before it begins.

We can't take the food supply chain for granted. Throughout the pandemic, nearly

70 percent of the food we shared was fresh and healthy fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein. We were fortunate as many foods were available at no cost from the USDA or covered by funds from the PA Agricultural Surplus System program, but most of the food distributed, we had to purchase. Disruptions in the food supply chain made many items hard to obtain and others more expensive.

Lesson Learned: We are ramping up our innovative approaches to sourcing food. This year we are launching an initiative to connect small local farms with agency partners. The new Farm to Agency Resource Market (FARM) Grants will support both partners and food producers to capture even more healthy food to share with neighbors in need right in their own community.

Central Pennsylvanians are generous. When the Food Bank asked for help, you answered the call. Generous financial donations helped us keep up with demand, keep our team safe, and support the entire network of agency partners who didn't waiver in helping their neighbors when they needed it most.

Lesson Learned: We are ... better together! To sustain the mission at the local level and build resiliency throughout the network, we share our resources generously to support our partner agencies. From 2020-21, we've shared several rounds of crisis response,



Berta was just one of thousands who lost a job during the pandemic and needed to reach out to the Food Bank for help feeding her family.

(Continued on page 3)

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JAVA WITH JOE

Dear Friends of the Food Bank,

It is hard to believe the Holiday Season is once again upon us, but you can rest assured the Food Bank Team has been preparing for months to make sure everyone has a seat at the table. With the help of wonderful supporters like you, and our amazing volunteers, we have been building “holiday boxes” of wonderful shelf-stable food that will accompany turkeys, hams, and other proteins, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables, sweet potatoes, eggs, milk, cheese, and more. And this year, we are also stocking food items that are preferred in diverse cultures. We hope this wholesome and healthy bounty will be shared at tables of loved ones and friends, with ample helpings of laughter and kindness.

Of course, even as we plan for the holidays and cheer on the continuing economic recovery, the toll of 20 months of the pandemic has left many families and individuals in difficult financial circumstances, or worse. I will admit I can't bear to write another statistic about the loss of life and health due to COVID, but we all know it has been horrendous. It has also created divisions in all areas of our society and our lives, and much healing remains to be done.

Several years ago, we embarked upon our “Better Food, Better Health, Better Together” mission construct to ensure everyone in Central Pennsylvania has access to enough healthy food every day. Never has the Better Together part of this approach been more vital than right now, and we are so proud to be together with you to help our many neighbors in need through another hopeful but challenging Holiday Season.

From our Family to you and your loved ones, thank you for your love, caring, and sharing together.

YOU ARE OUR HUNGER HERO

Every year in September, we join with more than 200 Feeding America Food Banks across the U.S. to celebrate Hunger Action Month (HAM). This year was no exception. As part of our HAM activities, we held a Virtual Town Hall event where we shared updates on our mission and the lessons we have learned over the past year and a half. We also spoke about our commitment to building resilience throughout our network by working with our partners to end hunger at the local level.

You can watch the Virtual Town Hall on our YouTube page, www.youtube.com/c/CentralPAFoodBank.

As part of our Virtual Town Hall event, we named our 2021 Hunger Heroes and this year, our heroes were ... **all of you!** Our partners, donors, volunteers, and staff members have truly worked “better together” over the past year and half to bring food and hope to thousands of people who were, and continue to be, affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic. As the saying goes, “not all heroes wear capes,” and because of you, we:

- Shared more than 1.5 million pounds of good healthy food per week through our network of 1,200 local partners in 27 counties.



No matter how you supported the CPFH this past year, whether serving at the local level as a partner, volunteering your time, making a donation, or working as a member of our staff ... YOU were our 2021 Hunger Hero.

- Delivered more than 30 million pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein.
- Served hundreds of thousands of individuals, hardworking families and their children, seniors and veterans who needed help for the first time.
- Will be able to continue to provide a helping hand to the many who need it as they work to get back on their feet, including rural communities and people of color who have been hit the hardest during this pandemic.

Our network of local partners, our donors, our volunteers, our friends, and family ... **YOU** ... are the heroes that go around cape-less, working together to make the impossible, possible for our neighbors in need. We truly are all better together.

HUNGER ISN'T SELECTIVE: MEET ALECIA

When Alecia, a young mother, decided to attend Pennsylvania College of Technology in 2016 to pursue an associate degree in Early Childhood Education, she knew she was in for a challenge. Dedication to her family and her studies put full-time employment out of the question. When the college opened its first nonprofit food pantry later that year — lovingly nicknamed “The Cupboard” — Alecia decided to check things out. What followed would be a cart-full of nutritious food, compassion, and hope.

“I was in school and had just had my first baby, so I needed a little bit of extra help with food,” Alecia explains. “I didn’t use The Cupboard every week, but just knowing that it was an option if I ever needed it really meant a lot.”

Fast-forward to 2020. Having obtained her associate degree, Alecia was now in the process of earning a bachelor’s in Human Services and Restorative Justice. Then, COVID-19 hit. In-person classes stopped, and campus services ground to a halt. All, that is, except The Cupboard.

“When the pandemic started and everything closed, I was in need. So I reached out to the woman there and said, ‘I know things are closed right now, but I was just wondering if I would be able to gain access somehow to The Cupboard.’ She got back to me right away and brought a cart-full of food to my car. We wore masks, gloves, everything. It meant so much.”

Now that Penn College has returned to in-person learning, Alecia uses The Cupboard less frequently. However, she vows never to forget the kindness the pantry workers showed her when she needed it most.



Alecia and her family benefitted from a college food pantry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Continued from page 1)

crisis recovery, and Bold Goal grants for the purchase of refrigerators, freezers, shelving, and other materials that allowed our partners to improve their capacity, expand their food selection, and launch programs aimed at ending hunger.

How can you help?

We are truly grateful for the support central Pennsylvanians have shown us throughout the pandemic. Without the generosity of faithful and committed supporters like you, we could not do this critical work. You volunteer your time to pack boxes, you make financial donations, and your dedication to this mission is unrelenting. As we continue this recovery phase, we ask you to continue this journey with us. The impact is immense.

ADDRESSING COLLEGE HUNGER: FUELING THE FUTURE WITH ACCESS TO GOOD FOOD

A bachelor’s or associate degree can be an important factor in improving someone’s economic circumstances; yet food insecurity is a primary reason why many students drop out. In fact, 71 percent of college students today do not fit the model of a “typical” college student. They may be financially independent, work at least part time, enroll in, and stay in college at a later age, or have dependent children. These factors, when paired with other challenges students face like cost of tuition, lodging and/or transportation, books, and supplies, can create significant barriers to making ends meet.

Nearly one-third (29%) of students pursuing higher education have missed a meal at least once a week since the beginning of the pandemic. More than half of all students (52%) sometimes use off-campus food banks – and 30% use them once a month or more. Of students who are also parents, 49% have experienced food insecurity. One third (34%) of students say they know someone who has dropped out of college due to difficulties affording food.

As Pennsylvania emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become very clear that skilled workers are in historically high demand. House Bill 1363, the Hunger-Free Campus Act, has been introduced in the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The proposal would establish a grant program for public institutions of higher learning that take certain actions to eliminate hunger on their campus, including providing a food pantry, assistance with SNAP, launching a student meal credit sharing program, establishing a hunger task force, etc. Pennsylvania has some of the most expensive schools in the nation, making a bill like this even more important in our state.

The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank has partnerships with many colleges, universities, community colleges, and technical schools throughout our 27-county region. While the legislature debates how to prepare the workforce of the future, to grow back Pennsylvania’s economy stronger and better than before the pandemic, we hope they will consider how access to good nutrition is critical to success.



Ashley Visco of Penn State Health, oversees the Student Food Pantry at Penn State Health in Hershey.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: HELPING SENIORS AT THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays are a joyful time to bring people together – especially around food! No one knows this better than **Deb Miles**, Community Manager, and **Karen Mello**, Social Services Coordinator, of the Williamsport Apartments, a low-income senior housing facility and long-time Food Bank partner. While the monthly program's main goal is to provide their seniors with nutrition to keep them strong and healthy, the women have also seen another heartwarming benefit: fellowship.

“[Our residents] get the chance to mingle while they’re waiting for food,” Karen explains. “It really brings them together as a community.”

“Food distribution is the monthly social event,” Deb adds. “They’re lined up with each other in the hallways, so it’s good camaraderie for them.”

With minimal SNAP benefits, mobility issues and the ever-rising cost of groceries, many of the seniors at the Williamsport Apartments depend on the Food Bank to put extra love on their tables. Deb and Karen know the residents especially appreciate the food during the winter months, as it allows them to share holiday meals with their families, as well as each other.

“We have one resident that loves to bake,” Karen says. “She makes apple crisp and this delicious blueberry cobbler. They use this food for the social potlucks too. Just a gathering of, ‘Let’s make something.’ This makes them feel they are still able to contribute, which is a great, independent feeling.”



Deb Miles and Karen Mello of the Williamsport Apartments in Lycoming County.

**NOVEMBER 19
EXTRAGIVE.ORG**

On November 19, donate online at ExtraGive.org and your generous gift will go even further thanks to the Stretch Pool and Prizes from the Community Foundation and our extraordinary sponsors.
Help us go the EXTRA mile together!

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JOIN US FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY GIVE

The Extraordinary Give is one of the largest community fundraisers we participate in every year. Gifts made through this event have helped us provide millions of meals to our communities over the past 10 years. Mark your calendars for November 19, and make a donation that will be stretched by extraordinary sponsors, and offer hope for people still facing impossible choices between buying groceries and paying for other essentials such as housing, medicine, and childcare. A gift of just \$10 will help us provide up to 60 nutritious meals.

Learn more at www.extragive.org.



The Harrisburg Area Local & Outdoor (HALO) activities group volunteers at the Harrisburg Central Packing Operations Facility.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: HALO

The Harrisburg Area Local & Outdoor (HALO) activities group has been volunteering at the Harrisburg Healthy Food Hub for four years. They have a lot of group participation during the volunteer shifts and it provides them opportunities to give back to the community.

“We love to volunteer at the Food Bank as it helps fight hunger,” said Prakash, a HALO member. “No one should be left without food due to their economic situation. We can always work toward a society where no one is left in hunger. Organizations like the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank help us work toward that goal.”

Volunteering is a great group activity! If your group would like to volunteer to pack boxes full of healthy, nutritious food for your neighbors, visit our website at www.centralpafoodbank.org to learn more.