

word of mouth

SPRING 2024

**FOOD
BANK**
OF WESTERN
MASSACHUSETTS

Nourishing Bodies, Hearts, and Minds — p.2

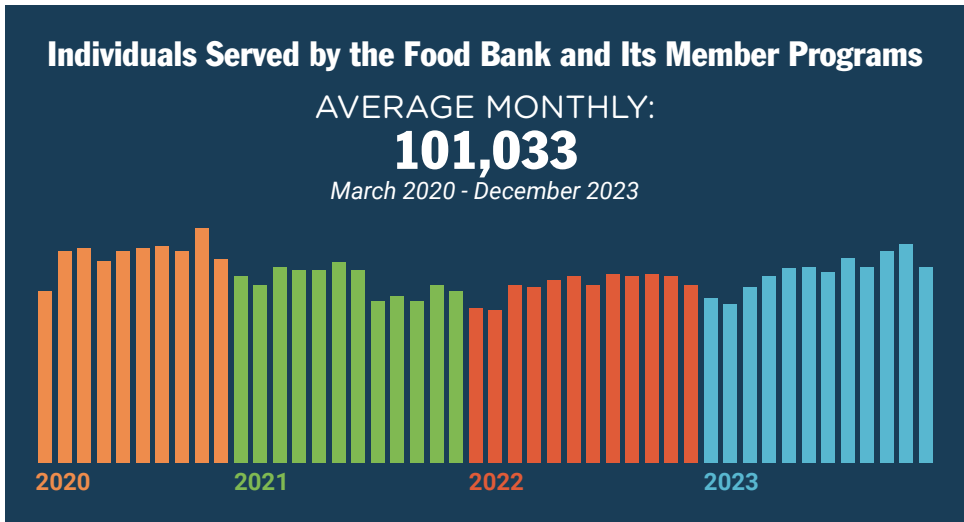
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A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Every month, I look at this chart below that shows the average number of monthly individuals who have received food assistance from the Food Bank and our region's food assistance network of 184-member food pantries, meal sites and emergency shelters. It confirms what so many people facing food insecurity and hunger have endured and continue to overcome.



Reflecting on what this has meant for the Food Bank during the last four years, I think of the two frenetic years we provided record amounts of food to all-time high numbers of people during the pandemic. In response, we also accelerated planning, fundraising,

and construction of our new home, sold our former warehouse, and moved to Chicopee.

For the first time since 2020, we can devote our attention to longer-term planning at the Food Bank. As we approach the end of our current strategic plan, we are reflecting on our mission, vision, and values, the language we use, the underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger, and how we can have the greatest impact and raise the most awareness. During this process, we will be eliciting feedback from our stakeholders: donors of food and funds such as yourselves, staff and volunteers, member food pantries and meal sites, other community partners, and the people who receive our services. We will soon be emailing donors like you a brief questionnaire to learn more about what inspires you to support our mission.

In addition, thanks to a two-year grant from Feeding America – the national network of food banks – we recently hired a community engagement organizer who is tasked first with meeting our members and community partners who are working on the frontlines to end hunger. Our goal is to invite people who live with food insecurity to share their stories and help us all understand how they overcome incredible odds to survive and pursue economic stability. We intend to listen to their perspectives to inform and guide the mission of the Food Bank, raise public awareness, and improve public policy to foster greater food equity. We look forward to sharing more about this important work in the coming months.

Thank you for all your support. I invite you to explore how you can get even more involved in the Food Bank's mission.

Sincerely,



Andrew Morehouse
Executive Director, Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

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Millers Falls LIBRARY

Nourishing Bodies, Hearts, and Minds



Branch Library Assistant Jacob Goldman and Montague Libraries Director Caitlin Kelley in front of the library on Bridge Street.

On a dreary, drizzly Thursday afternoon, the Millers Falls branch of the Montague Libraries opens its doors for the day. Inside, welcoming smiles and warm wood paneling lead the way to something unexpected – a food pantry nestled in a quiet corner of the library.

Hosting a food pantry in a library is an incredibly innovative model, the only one of its kind in our region's network. Caitlin Kelley, Director of the Montague Libraries, explains that it is a necessity in a small community with no other social service agencies or free, indoor public space. "We peddle in materials that feed patrons' hearts and minds," said Kelley, "but these things cannot be enjoyed properly if our patrons' bellies are empty."

The idea was sparked by a now-retired Branch Library Assistant, Melinda Georgeson, who struck up a conversation with a patron who told her he did not have enough to eat. She gave him the lunch she had packed for the day, and the next day she set aside a drawer with food for all the library visitors who might need it.

As time progressed and use of the drawer grew, it became clear to library staff that more was needed in both the amount and quality of food available. With support from the Trustees and the Friends of the

Library, the Millers Falls branch became a member of the Food Bank, expanded its shelf-stable and dry goods selection from one drawer to an entire bookshelf, and added a refrigerator and freezer to make fresh and frozen foods available.

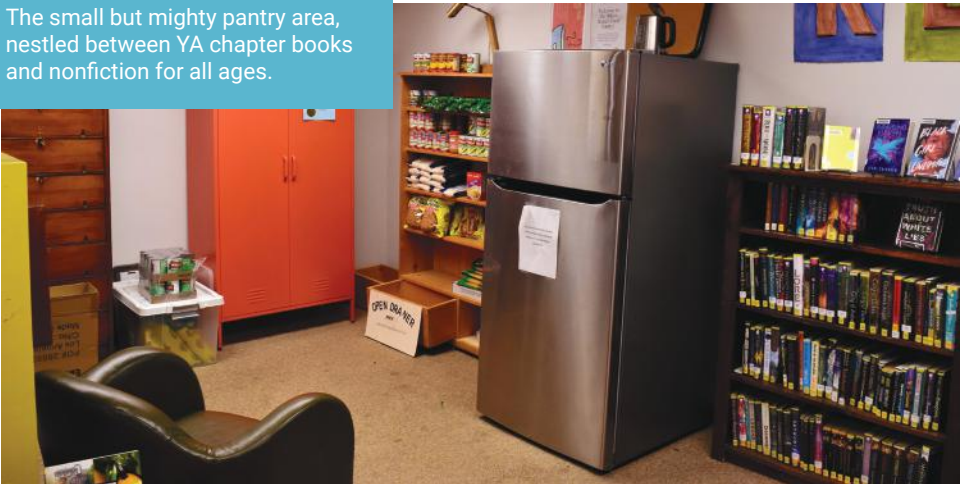


The original “Open Drawer” where Georgeson began the Millers Falls Library Pantry.

Today, the pantry has its own section among the book stacks and is available to patrons any time the library is open. Kelley noted that since becoming a member of the Food Bank, visitation at the library has gone up 35%. A few patrons visit only occasionally, and many utilize the pantry multiple times a week. Some, according to current Branch Library Assistant Jacob Goldman, choose a movie from the collection to go with their food.

Between the pantry, the book collection, free access to computers and Wi-Fi, and a growing ‘Library of Things’, the Millers Falls Library is a treasure of resources for the town of just over 1,000 people. In Kelley’s eyes, this is exactly what the library is for. “There are a lot of community needs the Montague Libraries cannot fill, but it’s my priority and that of the Libraries’ Board of Trustees to do the best we can to support the community, even if the services we provide fall outside the traditional scope of what libraries offer.”

The small but mighty pantry area, nestled between YA chapter books and nonfiction for all ages.



➔ To get connected to the latest happenings at the Montague Public Libraries, visit their website at montaguepubliclibraries.org

This spring, the Food Bank hosted its first in-person regional Food Assistance Network Conference since the pandemic for member food pantries, meal sites, and emergency shelters.

Member Conference

Members gathered to connect with Food Bank staff and each other, and participate in workshops on Volunteer Recruiting, Development, and more!



Food Bank

Hunger Free Campus

The Food Bank joined student advocates from the Hunger Free Campus Initiative at the State House to meet with legislators to discuss support for this initiative.



Feeding America



In early March in Washington, D.C., the Food Bank participated in a Feeding America fly-in to advocate for national nutrition programs included in the Farm Bill.



Public Policy Manager Laura Sylvester met with Rep. McGovern and the aides of Rep. Neal, Senator Markey, and Senator Warren to discuss the Food Bank's national anti-hunger policy priorities.

Happenings



The Cliff Effect

The Economic Pathways Coalition, which is co-led by the Food Bank and Springfield Works, held a briefing with legislators urging them to continue funding the next year of the Cliff Effect Pilot Program. economicpathwaysma.org



Putting MA in MAKing Hunger History

MAke Hunger History is a groundbreaking and recently-formed statewide coalition of nonprofits, legislators, businesses, and community advocates to end hunger in the Commonwealth. The coalition's goal is not just to provide short-term relief but to fundamentally transform the landscape, eradicating hunger through policy change, community engagement, and collective action.

Led by a dedicated steering committee, which includes Food Bank Executive Director Andrew Morehouse, the coalition outlined its ambitious mission in a letter released this past April: "Our vision extends far beyond treating and addressing the needs of today; it's about building the movement that will lay the foundation for lasting change. We envision a Massachusetts where the status quo is challenged, the cycle of hunger is permanently broken, and every person has dignified access to nourishing food."

Though the initiative is still in its early stages, the coalition draws upon the collective expertise of its members, who have long been engaged in advancing food equity. Alongside the Food Bank of Western

Massachusetts are

organizations such as Project Bread, the Greater Boston Food Bank, The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, La Colaborativa, and more! Together, MAke Hunger History is a unified voice advocating for statewide, structural and legislative action to create a truly food secure Commonwealth.

MAke Hunger history has already earned support from Governor Maura Healey, who emphasized "Too many families and children are suffering from food insecurity, and it's going to take all of us working together to close those gaps." The coalition is actively seeking new members, including advocates, policymakers, businesses, service providers, individual community members, and people who have experienced food insecurity.



Want to learn more and get involved?
Visit makehungerhistoryma.org

THANK YOU!

The following businesses, organizations, & foundations made a gift of \$1,000 or more between Jan. 1, 2024 and March 31, 2024.

Arbella Insurance Group	Meyers Brothers Kalicka, P.C.
Barings	Miller Family Donor Fund
Bedrock Financial	Mohawk 4x4 Adventures Inc
Berkshire Brewing Company Inc	New England Mechanical Contractors Association
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts	PV Squared Solar
Caroline Blanton Thayer Charitable Trust	Port Family Foundation
Church World Service, Inc	Prentiss Smith & Co
Community Health Charities	Talcott Resolution
Edward L Bernays Foundation, Inc.	TD Charitable Foundation
Fair Share Foundation	The Iqbal and Shelby Mamdani Foundation
First Church of Christ in Longmeadow	Town Fair Tire Foundation
Liquors 44	UMass Memorial Health Care, Inc.
MacLean Charitable Fund	Wal-Mart
Marcel Investment Trust	Weed Man Lawn Care
Merriam-Webster, Inc.	Women's Benevolent Group
	Feeding America

The following businesses are the top ten donors of food between Jan. 1, 2024 and March 31, 2024.



Stop & Shop & Retail Recovery

The Food Bank's Will Bike 4 Food event registration is officially open and we're excited to welcome Stop & Shop back for their 9th consecutive year as the presenting sponsor. Through this partnership, Will Bike 4 Food brings cyclists from across the region to Hatfield on Sunday, September 22nd to pedal toward a hunger-free Western Massachusetts.

Behind the scenes, Stop & Shop's dedication to end hunger is robust and innovative. While Stop & Shop prioritizes serving its customers, the reality of any retail market is the risk of perfectly good surplus food going to waste. According to Feeding America, the equivalent of 145 billion meals goes into landfills each year – with much of that food still safe to eat. Often, the only reason for its disposal is cosmetic defects or an approaching sell-by date.

Stop & Shop has created an innovative way to reduce waste through its retail recovery program. High-quality food at risk of going to waste is donated to the Food Bank and our region's food assistance network. Over the years, Stop and Shop has donated dairy products, frozen meats, produce, bread and baked goods and more – the equivalent of 770,000 meals last year! Beyond their direct partnership with the Food Bank, Stop & Shop's School Food Pantry Program also directly supports over 230 colleges in the New England region with food for student-centric pantries.

Stephanie Cunha, Manager of External Communications at Stop & Shop, says that the company is proud to be involved in the work of expanding food access, explaining, "Feeding people is part of our DNA, and it's what drives our commitment to addressing hunger in the communities we serve."

For food that has passed an edible date, Stop & Shop has invested in a green energy 'digester' to divert food waste from landfills. The digester converts the inedible food into energy that powers a portion of Stop & Shop's Freetown distribution facility. What is left is picked up by local farms for compost, reinvesting in the local food system and returning vital nutrients to the soil.

The Food Bank remains grateful to Stop & Shop for continuing to re-invest in the community and the environment.



Learn More about Stop & Shop's School Pantry Program
at stopandshop.com/pages/school-food-pantry-program

THE 14TH ANNUAL

WILLBIKE 4 FOOD

Presented by  **STOP&SHOP**



EVERY MILE CREATES CHANGE

**EARLY-BIRD
REGISTRATION IS OPEN!**

Support our mission to end hunger in Western Massachusetts and enjoy a scenic bike ride. Take advantage of discounted registration fees now at willbike4food.org

SUNDAY, SEPT 22, 2024



VOICES in FOOD EQUITY

Nourishing Tomorrow's Leaders



Join us as we delve into the pressing issue of food insecurity from childhood through college years across Western Massachusetts. Both events are open to all at no cost. Hors d'oeuvres will be served. Visit foodbankwma.org/VIFE for information on how to register.

JUNE 12, 2024

SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE 5:00-7:30pm

AUGUST 21, 2024

BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE 5:00-7:30pm

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