



RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK

40 YEARS | ENSURING NO ONE
GOES HUNGRY

IMPACT REPORT

FORGING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

September 2022

Listening & Learning from Our Community

The Food Bank conducts a needs assessment to strengthen the emergency food network

The pandemic put a spotlight on existing disparities in accessing emergency food for certain groups, including recent immigrants, resettled refugees, Cape Verdean and Latino communities, Narragansett Tribe members, Southeast Asians and veterans, among others. The Food Bank is committed to learning from them how we can further strengthen the emergency food network and ensure it is more responsive to their unique needs and cultural preferences.



A guest at the Community Action Partnership of Providence County, picks out soy sauce and sofrito to round out her food bag. Providing culturally relevant foods enables guests to create meals their families will enjoy, which makes the pantry experience more pleasant and dignified.

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Early Findings:

As part of our 2022-2024 Strategic Plan, we are conducting a Community Needs Assessment, designed to build trust and understanding within underserved communities in order to better serve the people that live there. With the support of already embedded community-based organizations, we are engaging in collaborative conversations and a detailed survey process to gather information about community connections, strengths, challenges and opportunities to improve food access.

- While there continues to be a stigma to asking for help, there is more openness to accept it when the individuals providing the assistance are members of the same community. People tend to rely on family, religious organizations, and culture-based organizations that serve their specific population for support.
- Food is an integral part of every community and can be a source of joy and celebration as well as stress when their cultural and dietary food preferences cannot be met.
- There is a strong preference among all for fresh foods, particularly fresh produce.

The Food Bank has already begun sourcing more culturally appropriate items for distribution and building new partnerships based on feedback from this assessment process. The full report, available this winter, will inform how we continue to innovate to better serve our neighbors in need.

Food Distribution Facts



15 MILLION
POUNDS
of food distributed
July 2021 – June 2022



2.7 MILLION
POUNDS
of fresh produce
distributed



1.5 MILLION
POUNDS
of culturally relevant
food distributed

New Partnership Better Serves Southeast Asian Community

The Food Bank and the Center for Southeast Asians build bridges through food

One of the key partnerships that the Food Bank has formed to better serve our community is with the Center for Southeast Asians in Providence. Under the leadership of executive director, Channavy Chhay, the CSEA provides family, social and educational services to promote the prosperity, heritage and leadership of Southeast Asians in Rhode Island.

The Food Bank has worked closely with Chhay to understand the needs of her constituents and how the Food Bank could best support them. Earlier in the year, CSEA hosted several large-scale food distributions, supported by the Food Bank, in partnership with the Papitto Opportunity Connection. Attendees at a distribution in March walked away with large bags of rice, sardines, fish sauce, soy sauce and Asian noodles. A previous distribution during the holiday season included whole turkeys and fish. CSEA is in the process of coming on as a Food Bank member agency so that we can continue to meet the food needs of this diverse group.



Top to bottom: At a CSEA food distribution event in March, supported by the Food Bank, volunteers and members of the National Guard assist in putting food in the hands of over 3,000 people; CSEA executive director Channavy Chhay and her team prepare a traditional Southeast Asian meal alongside the Food Bank's culinary team.

“We’re so grateful for the Food Bank’s continuous partnership,” said Channavy Chhay, executive director at CSEA. “I am looking forward to continuing to share input, ideas and feedback to meet the needs of our communities.”

Chhay also brought her dedicated team to the Food Bank to share their culture and culinary traditions with a cooking demonstration and a beautiful lunch of traditional Southeast Asian dishes, shared with Food Bank staff. Building bridges with food and forging strong partnerships like the one with the CSEA is how we meet our communities where they are in order to better serve them.



Yvette Kenner, administrator at McAuley House, hands off a To-Go Bag to a guest. The bags are easy to carry and include nutrient-dense, easy to open foods that don’t require refrigeration or cooking.

Meeting the Unique Needs of Unhoused Guests

To-Go Bags feature easy to carry and eat staples

In response to feedback from our member agencies, the Food Bank recently began offering a more convenient option for unhoused guests. Packed in draw-string backpacks, these To-Go Bags contain food that is easy to open, doesn’t require refrigeration or cooking, and is nutrient-dense. The bags contain things like canned pastas, shelf stable milk, sunflower seeds, cereal bars, and tuna kits with crackers.

So far, the Food Bank has distributed over 3,000 of the bags to our member agencies, including McAuley House, which frequently sees unhoused guests as part of their meal-site and food pantry programs.

“There is so much that we might not know about the people who come through our doors,” shared Yvette Kenner, administrator of McAuley House. “They might be homeless but they’re also dealing with hunger, medical issues – they’re dealing with so much. We try to make sure we have everything they might need. We want them to feel confident that we are here for them.”

SNAP Outreach Program Improves Food Security

Growing team helps those in need access this important benefit



SNAP outreach program manager Lihna Agostini assists a guest with SNAP enrollment

One of the goals set forth in our Strategic Plan was to enable food-insecure families to better meet their nutrition and health objectives. As part of this goal, the Food Bank deployed a trained team to educate and advocate for those who need assistance applying for SNAP benefits. The Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federally funded program administered through the RI Department of Human Services. SNAP improves food security by providing EBT cards with cash benefits that families can use to buy nutritious foods in supermarkets, farmers' markets and at some online retailers.

But applying for this critical benefit can be time consuming and complicated. The Food Bank's SNAP team helps guests fill out forms, answers questions, troubleshoots benefits issues, conducts eligibility pre-screening and makes referrals to legal and other relevant programs and services when needed.

"The Food Bank's SNAP outreach program has been crucial to helping our guests," shared Maggie Pinto, social services program manager at the Jonnycake Center of Westerly. "Throughout the pandemic, we saw a lot of food insecure clients come through our doors with unanswered questions regarding SNAP. Being able to facilitate clients getting help is a huge piece of our mission."

From July 2021 to August 2022, the SNAP team conducted 150 outreach visits at member agencies, impacting not only those the team sat down with, but their families as well. In the year since it was launched, this critical program supported over 1,600 Rhode Island families in need, with SNAP application support and service referrals.

USDA Food Boxes Support our Seniors

Caseload increase means help for more low-income adults in need

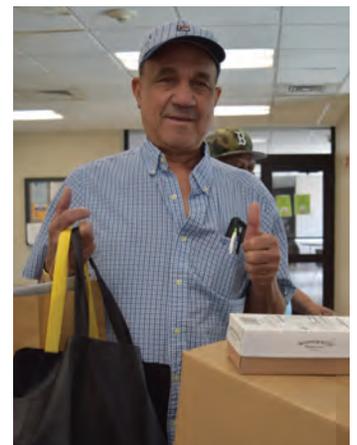
For many older Americans on fixed incomes, a little help goes a long way. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a US Department of Agriculture program designed to provide extra food assistance to seniors facing food insecurity. As administrator of the program for the State of Rhode Island, the Food Bank supplies participating seniors with a monthly box of healthy staples, through our member agencies and at low-income senior high rises.

Earlier this year, the USDA increased the number of boxes we're able to distribute from 1,700 to 2,240 per month, reflecting both the critical need for senior support in Rhode Island and the Food Bank's successful management of the program. The addition of over 500 slots to the program this year enables us to help even more seniors in need.

"Being able to distribute more CSFP boxes across the state is meeting a critical need," shared Lindsay Sgambato, the Food Bank's director of acquisition and distribution. "These seniors often have limited mobility and having this box delivered right to their building in most cases is a huge benefit to them. Having an increased caseload means we're able to share the program more widely and reach seniors who may not have been able to access this important resource."

Boxes contain items like shelf-stable milk; cans of fruits and vegetables; peanut butter; canned chicken and a block of fresh cheese, providing seniors with healthy, nutritious foods to supplement their monthly grocery budgets.

Ulysses, a senior housing resident, collects his supplemental food box, packed with nutritious staples he might otherwise not be able to afford.



"The box is very important to me because there is a lot of good food inside – healthy food," shared Ulysses, a senior resident at Parenti Villa in Providence. "I feel very grateful because these are things I would have to buy."

New Agency Partner: Women's Refugee Care

Expanding our support of underserved communities

The Food Bank recently welcomed Women's Refugee Care (WRC) as its newest member agency, offering pantry services at its location on Broad Street in Providence. WRC facilitates the transition for African refugee families to life in Rhode Island, by supporting their journey to become self-sufficient and productive members of society, while maintaining their cultural and ethnic identity.

Refugee families are expected to become self-sufficient within three months of arrival in the US, but face challenges such as language barriers, cultural orientation, employment, and adjustment difficulties. Women's Refugee Care provides case management, mental health programming, referrals and direct service, including the new food pantry.



Above: Clement Shabani and Aline Binyungu, cofounders of Women's Refugee Care. The couple, both social workers with human rights training, were forced to leave their home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006. In 2016, Aline and Clement saw the impact they could have on the refugee community here and founded Women's Refugee Care.



Left: Aline Binyungu, carrying corn maize from the WRC's new food pantry.

"We're thrilled to join the Food Bank's network of member agencies," said Aline Binyungu, executive director of Women's Refugee Care. "Our refugee community is expected to assimilate quickly, and that comes with so many challenges. I feel relieved that hunger doesn't have to be one of them."

Truck Stop Returns!

Our first Truck Stop event since 2019 was a success!

The Food Bank kicked off this summer with our first in-person event in more than two years. Truck Stop: A Festival of Street Eats returned in June, bringing over 500 guests to the Food Bank and raising \$200,000 to support our mission.

Thanks to sponsors Stop & Shop, IGT, Delta Dental, Marcum, Washington Trust, Webster Bank and many others for making this event possible.



Truck Stop attendees enjoyed delightful bites from Hometown Poke, Incred-a-Bowl and many more, served up by volunteers and friends of the Food Bank.



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