

## WHEN FIGHTING HUNGER COMES FULL CIRCLE

Life is a cycle of beginnings and endings, and sometimes, things come full circle when you least expect it. Once the dust settles and the path becomes clear, it seems as if there's always been a plan for you. For KiEtha Gage, her circle has been completed through service to others - and it's unknowingly been part of her life all along.

Growing up in Hawthorne, Nevada, KiEtha Gage understood the importance of feeding the hungry in the community. In a small, rural town where the need for food was great, KiEtha's parents took it upon themselves to make a difference to those in need. After receiving a grant, her mother and father purchased a food truck and would drive through nearby counties distributing food to those who needed it most. Not long after, they opened a food pantry.

KiEtha eventually moved to Baton Rouge, where she began working for the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. Unfortunately, she lost her job and was out of work for almost a month. She found herself needing help and did not know where to turn so, she called a friend, who happened to work at the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

"All of the years I had been living in Baton Rouge, I never really needed food assistance or had even heard of the Food Bank until that time," she recalls.

After meeting with the Agency Relations Manager at the Food Bank, KiEtha was hired as the SNAP Outreach Coordinator where she would help those applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance



Program with their applications. She has been working at the Food Bank for nearly five years and in that time, a lot has changed.

"Since I first started here, so much has changed. We moved buildings, we flooded in 2016 and I am now the Programs Coordinator," she said. Although her duties at the Food Bank have shifted, the gratification from her work is unaltered.

"I'm still able to meet with clients and actually see the work we do," she said. "Getting to see the clients and the look on their faces when they get help, that's what matters."

As the new Programs Coordinator, KiEtha is responsible for all six Outreach Programs that the Food Bank offers. The newest program, called Farm Fresh Healthy Food Initiative, is one that she helped develop. This program is designed to provide fresh produce to agencies that may not have the capacity to store refrigerated produce consistently.

"People are getting fresh produce that they have never even seen before. Then, someone in the group learns how to cook it and shares recipes with other clients and it gets them talking to one another. It's fun to see," she said referring to the Farm Fresh Program.

To KiEtha, working at the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is more than just a job to pay the bills. It's fulfilling her life purpose. "The peace that I have from doing what I know I'm supposed to be doing, you can't buy that kind of peace," she said.

KiEtha's benevolence and passion of service motivates her to help those in need throughout our community, but it also keeps her humble. "We have to believe in what we're doing here because no matter how bad you think you have it, someone always has it worse."

"All of the years I had been living in Baton Rouge, I never really needed food assistance or had even heard of the Food Bank until that time."

# KIETHA

# TOP FOOD ITEMS TO DONATE TO YOUR FOOD BANK



At the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, we rely on donations to help make food available to those who face hunger across our 11-parish service area. But have you ever wondered what to donate? While we accept many food items, some nonperishable foods are better than others. Dr. Elizabeth Gollub, Assistant Professor at the LSU School of Nutrition and Food Sciences, has some suggestions and things to consider.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND NUTRITION

First, Dr. Gollub has some general access items to keep in mind, “Think in terms of cans with pop-top lids. This eliminates the need for a can opener and it could be [physically] more manageable for older adults or those with arthritis/functional disabilities. In general, think about how a food is packaged and if it can be opened relatively easy and without kitchen tools – for example scissors, nut crackers, skewers.”

In addition, when selecting food items to donate to the Food Bank, consider donating healthy foods that you would want your own family members and friends to have access to. Canned vegetables, soups, meats and beans often come in “low-sodium,” “reduced-sodium” or “no-salt-added” options. “Too much sodium is associated with high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases,” said Gollub. “Most people get sufficient amounts of sodium from other food/food products.”

## CANNED VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

“Include a variety of vegetables – not just peas and corn – because different

vegetables contain different and varying amounts of essential vitamins and minerals, and because variety keeps things interesting,” said Gollub. “So, include peas, carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, white potatoes, corn, tomatoes, green beans, mushrooms, asparagus, beets, etc.”

For fruits “Look for canned fruit that is packaged in juice and/or with no added sugars. This will provide the great fruit flavor without the [usually] unneeded sugar calories,” she suggests. Fruits are a great item, because most everyone enjoys them.

## CANNED SOUPS

“Soups are a great item to donate to the Food Bank, as they can be the basis of a nutritious meal – especially if you add additional vegetables and grains or pasta,” says Gollub. “In addition, read labels and look for soups that contain at least twice as much protein as fat.”

## DRIED OR CANNED BEANS

“Beans are a good source of low-fat protein, fiber, and several vitamins and minerals. Beans generally have a positive effect on health, for example they are associated with improved management of blood sugar, cholesterol and body weight,” Gollub explains. “Dried beans have the same nutritional properties and they are naturally low in sodium.” Variety is also good to consider when donating beans and lentils – as there are so many options, such as black beans, red beans, kidney beans, etc.

## CANNED PROTEIN

Canned meats are considered high protein foods – but they are also good sources of vitamins and minerals, says Gollub. “Good choices include tuna and salmon (packed in water) – they provide omega-3 fatty acids – heart healthy fats; chicken or turkey; peanut butter – this is a higher fat product, but peanuts contain “healthy” fats.” Donations of nuts and seeds are great as well. They add “protein,

fiber, antioxidants, healthy fats” to an overall diet.

## RICE

As a Louisiana staple, rice is a great food item to donate to those in need. “Rice is a low-sodium, low-fat source of energy that mixes well with vegetables, soups, salads, and complements, or strengthens the quality of the proteins in beans.” There are many different types of rice, but Gollub suggests, for a healthier option, consider donating brown rice as it has more nutrients and fiber.

## PASTA

Pastas are a great nonperishable food item and like rice, there are many different types of pasta – spaghetti, elbows, penne, farfalle, rotini and shells to name a few. “In general, these pastas are a low-fat, low-sodium source of protein and energy. Enriched pasta contains more vitamins and minerals,” Gollub says. “Whole wheat pastas contain more protein, fiber and higher levels of some vitamins and minerals; tri-color pastas provide an added dimension to a meal.”

## BREAKFAST CEREAL AND BARS

With such a large variety of breakfast cereals and breakfast snacks and bars on the market, in general, “look for whole grain cereals with less than 5 grams of sugar (more is ok if the cereal has fruit in it), and at least 5 grams of fiber per serving, and choose cereals that are fortified with vitamins and minerals.”

Another great item to donate is rolled oats. Gollub says, “Rolled oats are a great choice for a warm breakfast cereal. Oats make a filling meal and provide oat fiber that helps to lower cholesterol.”

When the Food Bank is armed with an assortment of foods like these, we are able to provide wholesome, nutritious foods to those who are in need, and they are able to cook and create healthy meals for themselves and for their families. ■



## HOW YOUR FOOD DONATIONS GET TO THOSE IN NEED

Have you ever wondered what happens to food once it has been donated to the Food Bank? Read on for an insider's view of the food sorting process and how it is distributed to those in need.



**Nonperishable foods** are a staple to the Food Bank's work. Many local grocery stores have Food Bank donation bins to collect food from patrons who visit their store. Once the bins are full, one of our Food Bank trucks or one of our "Barrel Buddy" volunteers come to pick up the food and bring it back to our warehouse.



**Food bins** are weighed and combined with a variety of other cans and nonperishable foods that have been donated to us through food drives, or by members of the community who drop food off at the warehouse. After a large amount of food has been combined, it is placed in our "sorting room."



**Volunteers**, upon whom we rely heavily, sort the food into one of 20 different categories. These categories range from canned proteins to breakfast foods to pastas and rice. Once the food has been sorted into the various categories, then the re-boxing process will begin. Volunteers help weigh and pack each of the sorted food categories into boxes. Weighing and boxing

the food helps the warehouse staff keep track of what food items we have in our warehouse and is helpful for inventory. The boxed, categorized food is placed on a pallet and stored on our shelves. It is then put into the inventory system for distribution.



**Our Agency Relations** team submits an "order" to the warehouse for each of our agencies based on their needs. For example, if one of our agencies needs canned vegetables, then Agency Relations may request extra vegetables specifically for them. Once the agency's order is gathered by warehouse staff, the agencies then come to the Food Bank to pick up their order – free of charge.

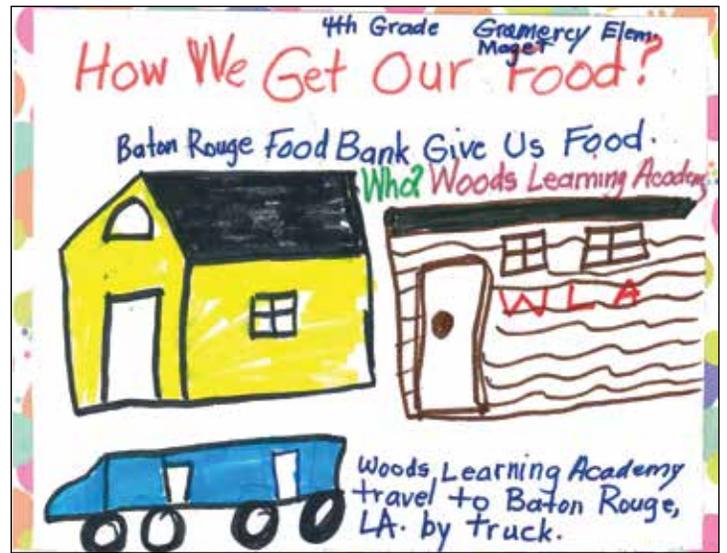
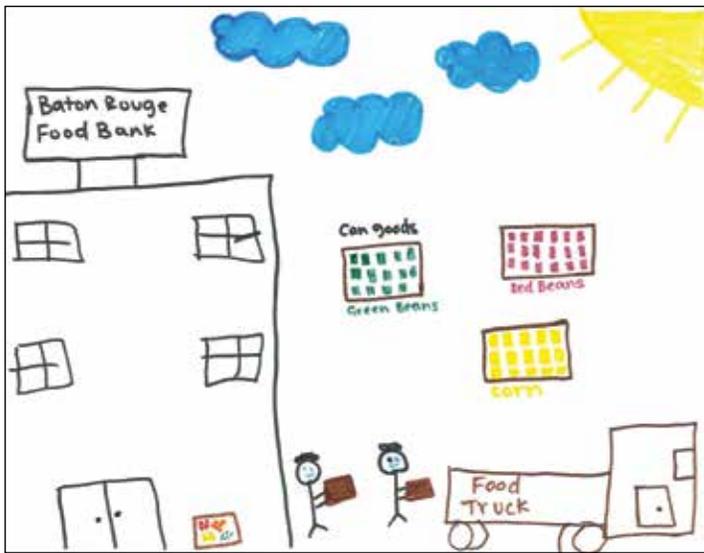


**Our agencies** are made up of food pantries, meal sites, group homes, shelters and soup kitchens, which all serve people in need. The food is taken to the agency where it is distributed to their clients.



**Bottom line** - we can't do this work without your support. Each nonperishable food item that is donated to the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is so important. Every can of tuna, box of oatmeal or jar of peanut butter all make up orders that will go to agencies and will then make it into the hands of those who need it most.

# AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: WOODS LEARNING ACADEMY



Through generous donations, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is able to serve a variety of agencies. While most of these agencies are pantries and kitchens, some of the other agencies we serve include churches, shelters, group homes, schools and more. One of our agencies, Woods Learning Academy, is a school and childcare program, that receives food from the Food Bank.

Children attending the school and childcare program receive meals that are either provided for or supplemented by the Food Bank. Ms. Barbara, the school's director, said, "Without the help from the Food Bank, I wouldn't be able to do it."

As a result of our service to Woods Learning Academy, the children are able to eat three times a day. In the mornings, the children get to choose between a hot or cold breakfast and at lunch they receive a full meal, followed by a small dessert. At the end of each day, the children are allowed to choose one item of the various snacks provided by the Food Bank.

"Proper nutrition is so important in stimulating the mind and body, especially at an early age," said Beverly Collier, a teacher at Woods Learning Academy. "Thanks for being there to help feed the children."

Cindy Lodrigue, a teacher and parent of a child who attends the school, said, "Thanks to you, my son, as well as my students, have truly enjoyed being able to taste new and interesting foods they have never eaten before." She continued, "You have truly made their world a better place."

People facing food insecurity struggle in many areas of life. Children do not do as well in school and are not as healthy as they should be, and senior citizens must decide between buying medicine or groceries every month. We know that without the support of our donors and volunteers, we wouldn't be able to provide so many children, families and seniors with the food that they so desperately need.

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BEVERLY

# OPENING DOORS TO SERVE STUDENTS IN NEED



Carol Massarra, a graduate student at Louisiana State University, is studying to receive a doctorate degree in engineering science, focusing on contract management. After immigrating to the United States from Syria in 2010, Carol began her graduate program in 2012, became a citizen in 2015, and is on track to graduate this summer. Carol is also a client of the LSU Food Pantry.

Carol found the LSU Food Pantry by chance – and she is grateful she did. As she was studying in the Student Union Building at LSU, she saw a flier about the pantry, and decided to visit.

“The Pantry is really convenient. I’m there and I can pick up whatever I need and go home,” she said. “It’s there. If I’m in the Student Union studying, it’s within one or two minutes walking distance from me. It saves me time and it saves me money.”

“As a graduate student and teaching assistant, we don’t receive that much money. I can barely pay for my apartment and bills. Sometimes, I need

to borrow money from somebody, like my aunt if I have an extra expense,” she said. “So, I’ve found that the Pantry really helps me a lot.”

In need of a little extra help, Carol applied for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP (previously Food Stamps). In 2014 however she did not qualify. It wasn’t until she found the LSU Food Pantry two years later, that she got the help she needed. “When I saw the flier, I was glad to go there. Since then, I’ve told students from my office and my friends about the Pantry and now they also go there.”

“At the LSU Food Pantry, they are really generous with us. What I get there is enough for two people sometimes,” Carol explained, which is helpful because she lives with her 81-year-old mother. “They are very generous and kind people.”

The LSU Food Pantry makes the environment welcoming and almost ‘social’ she said. “I have been able to meet friends from the Food Pantry...

I talk with other people and they tell me the same thing. They say, ‘we don’t need to shop and get meals and meat and so on.’ We get enough from the Pantry. So as students we are saving money and saving time.”

“People who give to the Food Bank are helping people that they don’t know – and a lot of people, I’m just one example,” she said. “When I first came to the Food Pantry, there were maybe 10 people in line. Now, sometimes 40 people are waiting in the line. It’s expanding in terms of people they serve and the food that the Pantry is able to give.”

After she graduates, Carol’s goal is to teach and become a professor. “I will graduate in the summer and won’t have a need to go there anymore, but on behalf of other people who are still using the pantry – a lot of people need this,” she said. “Some people are living with their children, their husband, just a lot of people need this and the more who donate, the more the pantry is able to help.”

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CAROL



# Q&A

WITH BOARD CHAIR  
EDDIE HUGHES

In part of an ongoing series, we will be sharing thoughts and ideas on the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in a Q&A format so that you can get to know our board members better and also learn how we are working to better serve those in need. We recently sat down with Eddie Hughes, our board chairman, to get his thoughts on where we are and what lies ahead for your Food Bank.

**Q:** What are some of your hobbies?

**A:** Golf, traveling, spending time with my family - my wife, Ashley, and two children, Caroline and Bracey.

**Q:** Why did you decide to join the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank's Board?

**A:** My good friend, Russell Mosely, was on the board 5 years ago and told me about its inspiring mission. He made me want to be a part of the organization.

**Q:** Why do you think the work of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is important to the community?

**A:** Food availability and hunger impacts every facet of our lives. When people in our community don't know where their next meal is coming from, it disturbs the fabric of our society. Children don't do as well in school and they aren't as healthy as they should be. Some seniors must make a choice between buying medicine or buying healthy food. The working poor must devote a greater proportion of their income to food than those who are more fortunate. The Food Bank helps to ease some of those burdens by helping its agencies provide food

to those in need. Those who avail themselves of the food from the Food Bank and its agencies can devote their energies to other issues without worrying where their or their child's next meal is going to come from.

**Q:** What are you most proud of and what excites you most about the Food Bank?

**A:** I think we are one of the shining lights in our community. Our employees and board members believe in our mission to help feed the hungry. We always look for new and innovative ways to bring food to the people in our community who need it. It never ceases to amaze me when one of our staff comes up with a brand new idea that helps expand our reach in the community. I am fortunate that the Food Bank has incredibly professional executive staff and motivated and mission-driven employees who work hard every day to eliminate hunger in this community. I'm also excited about the future because this community has shown time and time again that it believes in the Food Bank's mission.

**Q:** What are your goals as Chairman of the Board?

**A:** I want to continue to add to the success achieved by my predecessors. This organization went through Katrina and Gustav and came back stronger. It went through the devastating flood of 2016 and came back stronger. It not only recovered each time, but thrived because of our dedicated staff and because our community supported our mission. If I can continue to help this organization thrive and distribute even more food to those in need in our community, I will have done my job.

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