

APRIL IS SENIOR HUNGER AWARENESS MONTH

LOUISIANA IS #3 IN
SENIOR HUNGER



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MARY

If you were faced with the choice of paying your utility bill to keep the lights on, buying medicine for your chronic illness or buying food to feed your live-in grandchildren, what would you choose? April is Senior Hunger Awareness Month – a time to raise awareness about the unique challenges of senior food insecurity and the ways individuals and communities can help older adults access the food they need to live a healthy life.

“My mother had never thought she would have to go from giving to the community to having to depend upon something like this program,” stated Mary Medci, regarding her 78-year-old mother – a participant in the Food Bank’s Senior Grocery Program. Mary has been assigned her mother’s pick-up representative from our monthly food distribution. “We both have a limited budget, but we have to try and find the fruits and vegetables she needs for her special diet,” stated Mary.

Many low-income seniors face spending tradeoffs that can lead to or worsen food insecurity such as utilities, transportation, housing and/or health related costs like medicine. In Feeding America’s most recent study citing 2018 data, ‘The State of Senior Hunger,’ Louisiana is within the top three states with the highest rate of senior hunger. Now, in conjunction with the harsh economy and

current pandemic, some seniors are finding themselves in need of assistance for the first time in their lives.

Our Senior Grocery Program is meant to improve the life of seniors with limited incomes by allowing them to stretch their budget. The program provides basic, shelf-stable food once a month to qualified at-risk seniors. The food box is made up of donated items including breakfast foods, assorted canned and dry goods and fresh produce when available. The Food Bank services two locations for our Senior Grocery Program with over 400 households receiving these supplemental packages to allow them to stretch their limited budget for other necessities of life.

In addition, we must remember older adults (ages 50-59) also face unique challenges as they may begin to experience economic and health complications that can be associated with aging, while being too young to benefit from support services available to seniors.

You can help seniors and older adults have access to the food they need by donating online at brfoodbank.org or calling 225.359.9940 to donate over the phone. Remember, just \$1 could provide the food equivalent to three meals for food insecure seniors in our community.

SPECIAL DISTRIBUTIONS UNDERWAY TO AID WORKING FAMILIES



“We are here to help people through the hardest times, we always show up when there’s a problem and we have clients who truly depend on that.”

KIETHA

At the start of the pandemic, many of our member agencies closed down, challenging us to find new and safe ways to distribute food to those in need. The Food Bank’s “drive-thru” distribution allowed minimal contact between staff, volunteers and clients to further reduce the potential risk of infection. Working with local churches and community centers, we found locations with large enough parking lots to host distributions at the magnitude that we were facing.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farmers to Families program, previously known as the COVID Food Assistance program (CFAP), has allowed us to supplement during an increase in food insecure individuals from the pandemic. The Food Bank has always provided a box of shelf stable items. However, with these additional food boxes, we are able to provide cold items like frozen meat, milk and fresh produce.

Under normal operations, the USDA provides food to Food Banks to utilize for any client that has pre-registered. As the pandemic progressed, this program was developed and restrictions were loosened. Items that originally were only able to be given to pre-registered clients became available for use in aiding the need.

In total the Food Bank distributed over 4 million meals at our pandemic specific distributions. With the effects of the pandemic still being felt in our service area, the Food Bank is continuing to find ways to get food to those that need it in our community. Many families have to choose between food and bills as they get back on their feet. With limited staff and resources, we have downsized our weekly mobile distributions but continue to hold special Saturday distributions with the help of the Louisiana National Guard.

“We are here to help people through the hardest times,” stated KiEtha Gage, Programs Manager for the Food Bank. “We always show up when there’s a problem and we have clients who truly depend on that.”

While the Baton Rouge area’s unemployment rate slowly decreases, per the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, many families do not have the ability to visit a member agency during the week or attend one of our weekly mobile pantries. Our special Saturday distributions were created to overcome this challenge at no cost to our clients.

To learn more about our Saturday distributions visit brfoodbank.org or call 225.359.9940.

YOU ARE THE HEART OF OUR OPERATION



Volunteers provide an essential service to feed the food insecure in our 11-parish service area. Without volunteers, we would not be able to work toward our mission. In 2020, we had 8,579 volunteers, equating to a total of 36,557 hours of volunteer work. For comparison, in 2019 we had 9,718 volunteers totaling 36,625 volunteer hours. This means we nearly matched the time donated by our community in the prior year, despite the pandemic.

To sustain our regular operations as well as the increased demand for food services, we must ensure the safety of our volunteers. We have increased cleaning and sanitizing of our facility and take all of the precautions we can to get the work done safely. Volunteers are required to wear a mask and gloves while participating in volunteer activities. Additionally, we are following all safety regulations provided by the CDC, local and state health agencies.

With the number of mobile distributions underway since the beginning of the pandemic, sorting of food and packing of food boxes for client distributions remains a top priority and our volunteers are the ones who really make it happen. We have a group of regular volunteers who are excellent at welcoming in new volunteers and making them feel part of the team right away.

We also have multiple outdoor volunteer activities throughout the week for anyone who prefers to volunteer in an outdoor capacity. Volunteers can work outside at Capitol City Produce to maintain our Vince Ferachi Community Garden, or they can also attend a drive through mobile distribution outdoors and off site. Volunteers with the Mobile Pantry program assist with off-loading the truck with food product and also help bring boxes of food to clients' vehicles.

If you are interested in volunteering with us, visit brfoodbank.org to find a volunteer opportunity that works best for your schedule.



8,579
Volunteers

INCREASING OUR CAPACITY TO SERVE THROUGH EXPANSION



“Being able to increase our capacity for cold product means that we can serve more clients across our 11 parishes with healthy vegetables, proteins and dairy that may be hard for them to acquire on their own.”

MIKE

As we work toward our mission to feed the hungry in Baton Rouge and the surrounding parishes, it is important to note our continued growth. We must stay as productive and efficient as possible to ensure the best use of our donors' dollars. This includes expansions, like the new cooler that we recently added to our warehouse. Additionally, to keep our volunteers and staff safe, we installed multiple air purifying units to decrease risk of exposure to COVID-19.

During the pandemic, we have received an increased amount of produce from government programs. To guarantee proper storage space, our original cooler and freezer combination unit was transformed into a full freezer with a cooler built adjacent to the unit.

“We have more than doubled our cooler space with this new expansion project,” said Mike Manning, President and CEO of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. “Being able to increase our

capacity for cold product means that we can serve more clients across our 11 parishes with healthy vegetables, proteins and dairy that may be hard for them to acquire on their own.”

The ability to expand the cooler space was a direct result of having the foresight to lay pipes in a way that would allow for this kind of expansion when the original facility was transformed from the Fraenkel Furniture Warehouse into what is now your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank facility.

Now, our cooler area can hold up to 354 pallets with space for a sorting area to ensure fruits and vegetables are sorted before they spoil. This is in comparison to the previous cooler area, which contained enough space for only 150 pallets.

You can learn more about our efforts to embrace innovation by calling 225.359.9940 or visiting brfoodbank.org.

UNDERSTANDING THE PASSION TO SERVE OTHERS



“Everybody grows up knowing there is some type of need, but to actually see the need in person is eye opening.”

GABRIELLE

Gabrielle Albi started her journey with the Food Bank in May of 2020 as a part of the Covington unit of the Louisiana National Guard (LANG). As a Louisiana Guardsman, she worked with KiEtha Gage, Programs Manager, to collect data at our pandemic specific mobile distributions. In October of 2020, the Programs Coordinator position became available and Albi was strongly encouraged by Food Bank staff to apply. She started at the Food Bank as a paid employee in October of 2020 but still continues to work with LANG to complete her orders.

As Programs Coordinator, Albi is in charge of the Mobile Pantry program as well as the Senior Grocery Program. “Everybody grows up knowing there is some type of need,” stated Albi. “But to actually see the need in person is eye opening.”

Prior to the pandemic, our Mobile Pantry program was dependent on large donors working with our development department to set up a distribution in their community. A company or local organization would donate funds to purchase specific items, such as a holiday meal, to distribute in their specified location.

We were forced to put a hold on the donor requested mobile distributions once our pandemic response began. However, our program was transformed January 2021 as a monthly direct food distribution site. We currently have 23 monthly distributions confirmed for this program with the capacity to hold 32 distributions, Tuesday through Friday.

As a part of our Mobile Pantry program, Albi is tasked with finding high poverty areas in our 11-parish service area where food resources are hard to come by or in some cases areas defined as food deserts. A food desert, defined by Feeding America, is any location where access to fresh and healthy food is limited. Once a location for a Mobile Pantry distribution is established, flyers are distributed in that area to inform the community that we will be present and encourage clients to apply to receive food. After Albi completes her tasks in the morning, as part of the LANG, she comes back to the office where she is responsible for inputting applications and recording data.

The Mobile Pantry Program is similar to our pandemic response mobiles; however, these mobile distributions are a monthly visit with a master list of clients who have pre-registered to receive food by meeting the qualifications. These mobile distributions may not be pandemic related, but that doesn't mean our clients aren't still dealing with the challenges left behind from furloughs and unemployment.

“We still see a need,” stated Albi. “We see every single month at every location the continued need for services in each community.”

To learn more about these mobile distributions, please visit brfoodbank.org or call 225.359.9940.

NEW ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY



“Coming in and seeing the staff’s familiar faces was nice as well as being able to see how many people I can really help.”

AN

Are you hoping to gain real world professional experience while volunteering for a great cause? At times, our administrative staff may need assistance with office related duties, such as filing, sorting, large mailings, and other duties. We have created a new volunteer opportunity designated as Administrative Support.

This clerical type of volunteer opportunity involves very little physical activity and is accessible to anyone needing a slower paced option for volunteer hours. This opportunity is great for someone looking to accumulate volunteer hours while gaining experience in a professional environment.

An Vu, a Louisiana State University junior studying biology with a focus in pre-med, has been a repeat volunteer in this

position. As a past volunteer in high school, An was aware of the Food Bank and our mission. As a part of Alpha Delta Epsilon at LSU, An was tasked with gaining volunteer hours and wanted to pick a mission close to her heart.

“Coming in and seeing the staff’s familiar faces was nice as well as being able to see how many people I can really help,” stated An. “It’s a great way to make connections and meet new people.”

If you are interested in volunteering with us, visit brfoodbank.org or call 225.359.9940 to find a volunteer opportunity that works for you.

**DON'T FORGET TO SHARE THE FUN!
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