



## ANSWERING THE CALL TO BE A CAREGIVER FOR OTHERS



NEIGHBOR

Spotlight

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**STACY**

**N**ot everyone chooses the life of being a caregiver. Sometimes it chooses you. For Stacy Sholes, his life experiences have been largely shaped by taking care of others. From age 11, he had the keys to the house and was considered the primary care giver for his family.

“I was the baby of the family at 11 years old, but my brothers were disabled, and my mother had developed severe anxiety to the point she wasn’t able to go outside much,” said Sholes. “It was just in my nature to be a caregiver. I didn’t realize at that age what I was doing was caregiving - I just did it to help my family. You got to have a lot of patience, and I learned that it was a calling for me - not a burden.”

Sholes and his family have relied on the food pantry at Hope Ministries to help them get by when times are tight financially.

“I started working young, so I’ve always had jobs,” said Sholes. “Having to raise siblings and family, I was the primary male in their life, and so while I worked, I still had to care for them. With inflation as high as it is, the pantry makes it a lot easier for people who are on a fixed income.”

Stacy has worked several jobs during his lifetime including youth counseling, security services, education, inventory, and janitorial services. He is most fond of his time working with kids in public housing.

“I grew up in public housing so that’s where I did most of the mentoring of kids there trying to get them to understand this doesn’t have to be your future,” said Sholes. “I found myself sharing the skills I had learned and trying to help them see that with hard work and dedication you can change your environment.”

Sholes is very grateful for the food his family receives from Hope Ministries, and he has a message for donors of the Food Bank who help the pantries provide food to those in need.

“They will probably never know first-hand the lives they touch by donating to the Food Bank,” Sholes said. “For me, it’s like being a good neighbor or part of your family. I can always count on the pantry. A lot of people that come here have small kids, or they are elderly and taking care of grandkids. You never know when you are going to need help, and it’s nice to know they are here when you really need them.”



# What to Expect in 2025

**A**s we kick off the new year, it is common for all of us to reflect on where we are now and consider how we can make the most of the year ahead. When we think about the state of hunger specifically, we realize there are many families still dealing with food insecurity today but who are also looking forward to a brighter future.

A recent Gallup study found that 26% of Americans surveyed said they did not have enough money to buy the food they needed over the last 12 months. Here at home, hunger statistics on the meal gap from Feeding America reveal Louisiana unfortunately remains number 1 in food insecurity among both children and seniors. In fact, 1 in 7 children in our 11-parish service area are considered food insecure.

While 2024 economic data shows that food prices increased less in 2024 than in recent years, the increase of 2.2% still impacted families struggling to make ends meet. As we enter 2025, the hope is that the economy will start to rebound, leading to lower prices on groceries and a more affordable cost of living overall.

2025 will also be a special year for your Food Bank as we will be celebrating 40 years of feeding friends and neighbors in our community. Our team now collects and distributes more food than ever before, and with the addition of a second bulk packing machine last year, we are prepared to continue to serve more families who need our help. We hope that you will join us this year in celebrating four decades of service to others.

This year will also be special for me personally as I will be retiring in December - after 20 years serving as the President and CEO of your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. This is such a special place. Feeding individuals and families who do not have access to meals has always been the sole focus of our mission regardless of the challenges we have faced along the way, and that spirit of service to others will continue for years to come.

I have always been amazed at what we can accomplish as a community when we come together, and that includes the thousands of volunteers and businesses who continue to help us feed those in need. I am truly grateful to have been able to lead such an amazing organization and team who are all passionate about service to others. I wish you and your families all the best in 2025 and look forward to the year ahead. *Together, We're Fighting Hunger.*

Michael G. Manning

President & CEO, Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank

# 2024 IMPACT REPORT



OVER  
**12.8 Million**  
Meals Distributed



OVER  
**16.6 Million**  
Pounds Distributed



**58,005**  
Volunteer Hours



**14,987**  
Volunteer Visits



“One day my mom couldn’t go to the pantry, so she asked if I could go in her place to pick up the food. I got there early and was amazed at the line. While I was sitting in my car, one of the older volunteers noticed that I was young and asked if I could help them prepare and distribute boxes. I said ‘yes’. I’ve been volunteering ever since and have recruited others to join me.”

► **Christian Jacobs,**  
Second Baptist Church Food Pantry



“I remember a time when my husband and I shared a candy bar for supper one night because that was all we could afford. My two-year-old son had to eat dry cereal on top of that many times. We did not know of any food banks or places to go for help back then. Volunteering means a lot to me. Even more now since my son passed away. I try to do things in his memory.”

► **Monica Gill,**  
Food Bank Volunteer



“In this area, a lot of people walk to the food pantry, and they really need it here. In the summer, we see more single moms coming in with kids, and it breaks your heart. You can tell they really need the food because they are here at 7 o’clock in the morning waiting for us to start at 11 o’clock.”

► **Lynn Mearidy,**  
Ever-Present God Ministries Food Pantry

## MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to feed the hungry in Baton Rouge and the surrounding parishes by providing food and educational outreach through faith-based and other community partners.

## THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM BEHIND THE BRAND



**Megan Rojas**, Communications and Public Relations Coordinator, brings her love for storytelling and connection to her work. After earning her undergraduate degree, Megan reflected on her passions and found her calling in communications—a field blending writing, creativity, and the human element.

Megan's role is multifaceted and dynamic. She manages internal projects, oversees their progress, and creates content for social media, including photography and audience interaction. Beyond social media, she writes articles for the organization's website and occasionally prepares press releases. "It's a dynamic role that challenges me to balance strategic thinking with creativity, which I truly enjoy," Megan shares.

Her journey highlights the importance of following one's passions. Megan's role allows her to connect with others and tell meaningful stories while expressing her creativity.

**Kristen Bellatti** has combined her lifelong passion for art with a career dedicated to serving others. She began her journey with the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in April 2021 as an administrative assistant, supporting development and accounting. By October of the same year, she transitioned into the role of Communications and Donor Relations Coordinator.

Since joining the Food Bank, Kristen's responsibilities have grown significantly. She advanced to Senior Communications Coordinator and currently serves as Creative Communications Manager. In this role, she oversees the Food Bank's website and mobile app, assists with media buying, works with vendors, and liaises with media outlets. Her artistic expertise is evident in her graphic design, video production, and photography.

For Kristen, the most fulfilling part of her work is knowing that her creativity directly supports those in need. "I love knowing that my skillsets are being used to help people and support the mission of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank," she shares.

Kristen's artistic foundation has been key to her success in communications. "I've always had a passion for art, which led me to where I am today," she explains. Whether managing digital platforms or creating visual content, Kristen's creativity ensures the Food Bank's message resonates and reaches its audience.

**Both Kristen and Megan** are active members of professional organizations, including the Public Relations Society of America, the Public Relations Association of Louisiana (Baton Rouge Chapter), and the Southern Public Relations Federation. Kristen also serves on the Board of Directors for the Public Relations Association of Louisiana's Baton Rouge Chapter.

Together, Kristen and Megan exemplify how passion and creativity can drive impactful work, helping the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank fulfill its mission to serve those in need.

# RETAIL RESCUE PROGRAM EXPANDS MEALS

## Working Together to Fight Hunger.



With generous grant funding from the Walmart Foundation and Feeding America, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has been working with partner agencies across our 11-parish service area to enhance our retail rescue program.

This funding has enabled us to equip partner agencies with the necessary resources to collect retail donations directly from stores. By adopting a “hub and spoke” distribution model, agencies act as central hubs, gathering donations from retailers while smaller nearby agencies collect food from the hub. This approach ensures food reaches those in need faster, reducing waste and improving access to fresh, nutritious items.

One of our partner agencies, Catholic Charities, was able to purchase a 10,000-square-foot warehouse to support retail pickups and expand food distribution at no additional cost to their organization.

“I can’t think of a better way to help our community than by reclaiming food that would have otherwise been thrown away,” said Stephanie Sterling, Executive Director of Catholic Charities. “I’m so proud we can play a part in this effort and collaborate with community partners to ensure the food reaches those who need it most.”

This warehouse will enable Catholic Charities to continue serving the 650 families they support, as well as smaller agencies in the surrounding area.

“We want this process to be humanizing and filled with compassion, so people feel truly supported,” added Bishop Duca. “Our goal is to make food assistance more accessible and empower individuals who walk through our doors.”

Another partner agency, The Life House, has been participating in the retail rescue program and this funding has allowed them to take on more food. This transitional housing facility now collects approximately 2,000 pounds of food daily, serving as a hub for other nearby organizations. The Life House uses these donations to feed its 126 on-site residents and families in the surrounding community.

Thanks to the grant funding, the Food Bank has also provided agencies with essential tools such as warehouse space, trucks, laptops, and insulated containers. These resources enable agencies to manage larger volumes of food effectively, ensuring smaller organizations that previously lacked the capacity can now benefit from the retail rescue program.

# Holiday Food Drives Provide Critical Meals

Through a series of annual partnerships, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank collected donations to ensure families across its 11-parish service area could enjoy nourishing meals.



## Zoo Lights Food Drive

For the seventh consecutive year, the Food Bank collaborated with BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo to participate in Zoo Lights. This tradition transformed the Zoo with illuminated displays and a festive atmosphere that drew in visitors.

As part of the partnership, guests were encouraged to bring non-perishable food items for a 50% discount on admission.

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the community, Zoo Lights collected over 5,097 pounds of food this year. That's the equivalent of 4,248 meals, to feed local families in need.



## Red Bags Holiday Food Drive

The Red Bags Holiday Food Drive is another annual campaign of the Food Bank's holiday efforts. In partnership with Associated Grocers and Baton Rouge Coca-Cola, this program ran from mid-November to December 25, 2024. The participating grocery stores offered shoppers the opportunity to purchase pre-packed red bags filled with essential non-perishable food items for \$10 each.

Through this year's campaign, the Food Bank raised over \$55,000, which can provide up to 165,000 meals for individuals and families facing food insecurity.

Thank you to the organizations that partnered with us this holiday season as well as those in our community that supported these efforts.

**DON'T FORGET TO SHARE THE FUN!**  
**TAG US IN YOUR PHOTOS**

Use hashtags #BRfamily #BRfoodbank



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