

Network News

Winter 2024



Ellie McDowell (right), food cupboard manager, and Austin Borowitz, AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, display some of the free food available at North Hennepin Community College.

Filling the nutrition gap on campuses

“We are committed to being a place of care, joy, and abundance. We work to undo the food scarcity mindset, to eliminate barriers, and to be as welcoming as possible” – Emma Kiley, Saint Paul College

Education opens doors to career opportunities and financial independence. But enrolling in school costs money and requires sacrifice. College students are a less-visible segment of community members experiencing hunger.

Emma Kiley and Ellie McDowell manage emergency food cupboards at Saint Paul College and North Hennepin Community College (NHCC), respectively. They point out that students give up wages to make the commitment to their education, even when they continue to work part-time, and are often supporting other family members. Housing, transportation, and health care costs stretch their limited budgets to the point where they need assistance filling the nutrition gap, according to both Ellie and Emma.

Since opening in November 2022, the Saint Paul College Food Cupboard has had more than 5,000 visits. In the last school year, NHCC hosted 9,515 visits, and is on track for even more this year.

The Food Group is the primary partner and source for the food at both schools. Emma highlights the value of culturally connected foods, fresh produce, frozen fish and meat, and more. “We go through our entire delivery from The Food Group every two weeks!” she says.

Ellie’s philosophy echoes those values as she works to support academic achievement through nutrition. “We are thrilled to partner with The Food Group and proud to offer quality, nutritious foods to our students,” she says.

“When I started school here, I was hungry all the time,” says Catrina, a nursing program student at NHCC. “I stumbled upon the food cupboard and asked, ‘Is this real? Is this free?’ Now I come regularly and have made some good friends here.”

Thank you for supporting this vital part of local hunger relief!





New Hunger Relief Programs & Advocacy Branch of The Food Group:

We are excited to share with you that The Food Group will be joining forces with Hunger Solutions Minnesota officially in March 2024.

Formally combining efforts as one organization has been under discussion for some time, and we want to share with you the official announcement. Hunger Solutions has been a trusted long-time partner organization of The Food Group with closely aligned values, vision, and approach.

The Food Group is excited to add new program areas and advocacy focus to our work. As hunger and food needs in our community continue to climb to unsustainable levels, these new programs and advocacy focus strengthen our commitment to solutions that will create lasting impact and change into the future.

Specifically, our hunger relief programs will be enhanced through the addition of the Minnesota Food Help Line, Market Bucks program, SNAP Rx, and Minnesota Food Shelf Grant Program. Joining forces will also establish Hunger Solutions advocacy efforts as a new branch of The Food Group's work to fight hunger and support local farmers.

The addition of Hunger Solutions as a branch of The Food Group and incorporating their programs will differentiate our work, broaden our focus to statewide impact, and allow us to work more deeply on systems change through advocacy related to food, hunger, and local farmers. This change will allow us to stay focused on our existing core work while expanding our impact.

Long-time Executive Director of Hunger Solutions and champion for fighting local hunger, Colleen Moriarty is retiring, making the timing perfect to join forces. Sophia Lenarz-Coy will continue as Executive Director of the expanded organization. We are excited to share the innovative ways that blending our efforts as one organization will lead to in the days ahead to provide food for today and change for tomorrow.

"Hunger Solutions is a deeply respected leader in anti-hunger public policy. The Food Group is honored and excited to add their important and critical work to our programs and focus as an organization. The impact will be even greater as we join forces to fight hunger and nourish our community."

-Sophia Lenarz-Coy, Executive Director, The Food Group

A new year, a refreshed vision for engagement



With 2023 behind us, I am eager and hopeful for the year ahead. The Food Group spent time in 2022 and 2023 engaging with our community to understand how we can best deepen our work moving forward.

With thoughtful input from many food shelf participants, Twin Cities Mobile Market customers, farmers, and Fare For All users, our staff and board have developed strategic goals to guide our work for the next three years.

1. The Food Group will actively engage in policy and advocacy to influence food systems change.
2. The Food Group will deepen and diversify partnerships to collectively advance food justice.
3. Community voice and user input will inform all levels of The Food Group.

This work is already underway and will expand and deepen through an exciting new chapter in our combined efforts with Hunger Solutions Minnesota (read more about how our organizations are joining forces inside).

None of what we do would be possible without your past, present and future support. Our dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and frontline partners empower The Food Group to nimbly respond to changing community needs and feedback. **With food shelf visits at an all-time high, this work is needed now more than ever. I am grateful to do this in partnership with you and am energized to keep moving forward together in 2024!**

Sophia Lenarz-Coy

Thanks to your incredible support in 2023, together we:

Shared

6,452,163
Meals

Distributed

139% more
Local food + 132% more
culturally connected foods in 2023

Partnered with

7 Tribal Partners
+ 2 Native producers

2,193
volunteers

gave **16,257 hours**
to build a better food system

Reclaimed

40,873 lbs
of local produce
from farms and farmers markets

221 Farmers
attended our Annual Emerging Farmers Conference

More about Hunger Solutions Minnesota & Their Programs

Hunger Solutions focuses on advancing sound public policy, building grassroots advocacy, and informing and educating the community on hunger in Minnesota.

Hunger Solutions has been a nonprofit organization, advocating for anti-hunger policies and initiatives for more than thirty years. Their programs include:

- **Advocacy:** Public policy intervention and systemic change. Hunger Solutions is the anti-hunger community's leading voice at the Minnesota legislature.
- **Minnesota Food HelpLine:** Provides support and solutions for food needs including referrals to program and food resources.
- **Market Bucks:** Matches SNAP-EBT spending dollar-for-dollar (up to \$10) at participating farmers markets across Minnesota, making healthy food more affordable.
- **SNAP Rx:** Strengthens the connection between health care and hunger relief organizations by providing health screenings and referrals to the Minnesota Food HelpLine.
- **MN Foodshelf Grant Program & Statewide Food Shelf Data Collection:** Issuing grants to food shelves statewide and collecting food shelf visit data.

Volunteer Spotlight

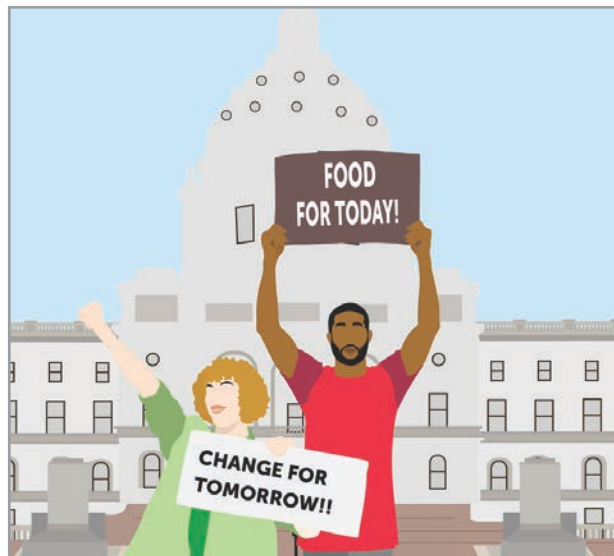
Volunteer gives time and energy to combat grocery flight

Annie Elefante has been volunteering for three years with The Food Group. "Volunteering is a great way to build community," explains Annie, and she likes the way The Food Group "looks at the food system as a whole."

In November, Annie organized a cash drive where she collected more than \$7,000 in donations with her coworkers at Boston Scientific to support The Food Group, including a company match.

"I read about grocery flight in North Minneapolis in The Food Group newsletter," explains Annie. "I shared the article with my coworkers, and they had no idea that this was happening." They decided they wanted to do something about it, and Annie began organizing the drive.

Photo: Volunteers Annie Elefante (left) and Natasha Rice repack black beans in the warehouse



Join us for **Hunger Day on the Hill, Wednesday, March 13, 2024.** Sign up at: bit.ly/HDOTH2024



Annie finds inspiration from a quote in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass* - "Wealth among traditional people is measured by having enough to give away." Annie's generosity and ability to inspire others to give reveals the rich abundance of resources and compassion we have here in our community.

Introducing: Monthly Nourishers Food of the Month

In 2023, we shared 70,317 lbs of carrots. That's 321,350 servings! We offer carrots to our food shelf and meal program partners, and our Fare For All and Twin Cities Mobile Market customers.



Become a Monthly Nourisher in February and share carrots with our community. Get started using the enclosed reply form.

Farmer Spotlight

Ore Taylor's passion for farming: from Sierra Leone to Minnesota

When Ore Taylor isn't pulling an all-nighter to prepare for an 8 a.m. meeting with her colleagues in Europe, you can find her tending to her peppers and potatoes at Big River Farms, a program of The Food Group focused on growing farmers and food.

Even though Ore's full-time job has been in engineering for the past twenty years, she always had her hands in dirt either in community gardens, her backyard or her mother's farm in West Africa. Ore felt inspired by her mother's farm in Sierra Leone and had always been curious about nutrient density in crops.

Her mother had the big vision, but Ore wanted to learn the day-to-day practicalities of farming. She realized, "If I'm ever going to take over (my mother's) farm, I need to know what I'm doing." So, she applied to Big River Farms' Grower Training program and launched Taylor Ventures. Ore is passionate about soil health and growing nutrient-dense food.

Donor Spotlight

Legacy donor is passionate about making positive change

Sanford "Sandy" Berman has been a supporter of The Food Group for more than thirty years, just celebrated his 90th birthday, is a humanitarian and social justice advocate, and an author and editor.

And to top it off, he has included The Food Group as a contingency beneficiary in his estate plan. A retired librarian, Sandy is still working to make the world "a little better" and raising the consciousness of the community around issues he is passionate about.

"Of all the issues in the world that need to be addressed, food relief is the most immediate," he says.

Sandy says, "I would like my legacy to be that no matter how awful things may seem at any moment, they may be surmountable, and we can't take the chance to



"We should be able to get (nutrients) in our food, and if it's not in the food, then the question is why? It's not in our food because it's not in the soil. I'm trying to grow crops that are nutrient-dense, that have the whole spectrum of minerals and vitamins they're supposed to."

Being a part of Big River Farms has grown Ore's admiration for farmers and her personal connections to her community. "It's a beautiful relationship to be able to support a farmer and know where your food is coming from."

Buy produce from Ore at Kingfield Farmers Market or contact her at oogilber2003@yahoo.com to volunteer on her farm.



not act. I admonish my neighbors to never give up, to always consider who needs what and to get those basic needs fulfilled."

Sandy knows that change takes time but is worth the effort. He worked for decades to eliminate library fines that were a barrier and deterrent to low-income patrons. He continues to campaign for change and inspire others to join him in creating a more just and equitable world. **Thank you, Sandy, for your lifelong dedication to community service and your legacy commitment to The Food Group!**

Photo: Berman received the Tom Oye Humanitarian Award from the City of Edina in 2019 Credit: City of Edina

Joining Forces: The Food Group & Hunger Solutions

"Hunger Solutions Minnesota is honored and excited to join forces with The Food Group, a partnership that will strengthen our mission to eliminate food insecurity statewide.

In our combined efforts, we will work to create an equitable and sustainable food system—one that promotes access to healthy and culturally connected food for all, advances impactful public policy, and aims to create lasting change in our state." -Colleen Moriarty, Executive Director, Hunger Solutions

Learn more about becoming a Monthly Nourisher inside



Calendar of Events

Upcoming Warehouse Tours

Come to New Hope for a behind-the-scenes tour to see your support in action.

- Thursday, February 22, 10-11 am
- Wednesday, March 13, 10-11 am

Donors & Friends Volunteer Night

Join us in our New Hope warehouse for a food-packing project, tour and refreshments. Tuesday, March 19, 5pm - 7pm.

2024 Hunger Day on the Hill

Use your voice to advocate for policies that address hunger in Minnesota, Wednesday, March 13, 10am - 4pm. Register online at bit.ly/HDOH2024



Get Involved and RSVP:
thefoodgroupmn.org/events

You met the matches and doubled the meals!

Thank you for your incredible generosity and support in November and December!

You doubled the number of meals shared in our community by leveraging matching funds from Manitou Fund, Luther Auto, Ameriprise, and Medica.

Thank you to our donors and sponsors for your support!

