

PLENTY

Fall 2023

MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

food gatherers
fighting hunger where we live



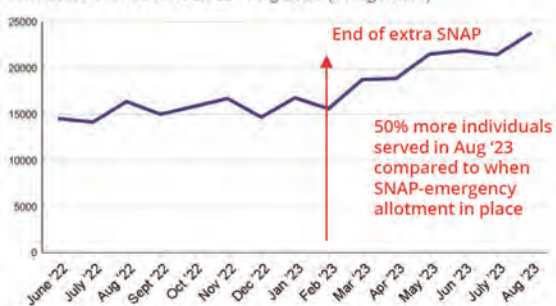
Toyota & Subaru of Ann Arbor volunteers pack produce boxes at Food Gatherers' warehouse.

New Surge in Hunger Worse Than During the Pandemic

When the pandemic struck in 2020, visits to pantries soared, retail food donations plummeted, and we lost our labor force of more than 7,000 volunteers. Food Gatherers wasted no time launching an emergency response. Fighting hunger became a national priority as Congress took action, launching a suite of federal programs to address poverty and support food banks.

End of "extra" SNAP

Individuals Served June 2022 - Aug 2023 (43 agencies)



Data showing the increase in individuals served since the expiration of the SNAP emergency allotments.

Three and a half years later, the programs that helped hold the line against hunger and poverty have expired.

Neighbors who received relief from eviction prevention programs, child tax credits, and additional SNAP allotments saw their cushion disappear at the same time prices at the grocery stores increased dramatically.

Our community is turning to Food Gatherers' network of food pantries and meal programs to feed their families.

In July 2023, high-capacity pantries served a total of 5,374 households, a 93% increase from the 2,778 households served in July 2021, when federal programs targeted to address food insecurity and poverty were still active.

"Federal food resources to food banks have declined since the height of the pandemic, so we are now purchasing much more food to meet

the need," says Eileen Spring, Food Gatherers President and CEO. "We purchased 40% more pounds of food in FY2023 compared to the prior year but spent 65% more on it due to inflation."

The amount of food distributed has also increased. Three of our last four months' distribution totals have been more than 700,000 pounds, a level not seen since the pandemic.

"This emergency response is necessary, but it is not sustainable," says Eileen.

"Today, we need policy and philanthropy to align to meet his crisis."

Food Gatherers needs your help:

- Spread the word about free food distributions. If you need food, call Food Gatherers at 734-761-2796 or visit FoodGatherers.org/FindFood.
- Donate. Funds provide the most flexibility to respond to new challenges. Make a donation at FoodGatherers.org/Fall23 or call 734-761-2796.
- Use your voice to advocate for policies that promote food security. Learn more and sign up for action alerts at FoodGatherers.org/Advocate.

Help build a food-secure future for Washtenaw County
Donate at FoodGatherers.org/Fall23

Fighting Summer Hunger

When school is out for the summer, kids lose access to the meals their schools provide. To support families during the summer break, Food Gatherers partners with local programs, volunteers, and sponsors to bring free summer meals to kids and teens in Washtenaw County.

Food Gatherers 2023 Summer Food Service Program



15
sites



13,133
meals



729
children



Families enjoy a cookout and end-of-summer celebration in Superior Charter Township.

Thank You
The 2023 Summer Food Service Program was generously sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education, Toyota Research & Development, the Lake Trust Credit Union Foundation, and the Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor Foundation.



Faith in Action social worker Craig Rafail plays his guitar at Food Gatherers Summer Food Service Program.

They dance when they come in: Building community through food

At Hilltop View apartments in Dexter, social worker Craig Rafail is about to make his musical debut. Kids are gathered for an end-of-summer celebration – board games, bubbles, and a yummy lunch served by volunteers from the Food Gatherers Summer Food Service Program, which hosts sites serving free meals to kids and teens when school is out.

After a quick tune-up on his guitar, Craig launches into a song. Soon the kids are singing along, following him in an impromptu parade around the play structure. This celebration isn't just an opportunity to have fun; it is also a chance for Hilltop View residents and the apartment complex's staff and volunteers to get to know each other.

Opened in June 2022, the Avalon Housing apartments provide permanently affordable, supportive housing to families, individuals, and veterans. The onsite food pantry run by Faith in Action has already seen significant growth, serving twice as many people compared to last year. In fiscal year 2023, Food Gatherers provided more than 32,000 pounds of food to the program.

According to Craig, the food and housing have already made a difference. "This week we have somebody moving out because they were able to save money. They're moving north of here to a bigger house. This program made a difference."

This summer was the first time Food Gatherers hosted free summer meals at the new location and it has opened the door for staff, volunteers, and parents to build the relationships and trust necessary to have a strong community. "We have common goals," says Craig. "They want to feed their children. We want to feed their children. The adults come in for the pantry and the kids come in for the Food Gatherers lunches. We get to see them weekly and touch base with them".

The addition of free summer meals helps address food security in Dexter, where the lack of public transportation is a barrier to reliably accessing the grocery store. The free summer meals at Hilltop View take the stress off parents who know their kids can enjoy a nutritious meal a few steps from home.

And most importantly, the kids love it, too.

"They dance when they come in," says Craig. "I'm getting choked up about it but they come in that door and they are just dancing. It is a very special time. It brings the kids together. It brings the parents together. The food is the glue."

Voices for Change

In July, we were honored to attend the Elevating Voices: Power Summit in Washington D.C. co-organized by Feeding America. The summit created a space for community members to amplify their voices as individuals who have felt the impacts of hunger and to connect with federal decision-makers.

Food Gatherers team member, Andrew Paniagua, accompanied two Washtenaw County residents nominated to attend. Vivian Lehman has been a food pantry volunteer at Avalon Housing for six years and serves on their board and advocacy group. Alisha Spencer is a Trusted Parent Advisor at WISD, helping connect families to resources. Both generously shared their insights from the conference. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

This was Feeding America's first summit for and by people with lived experience of food insecurity. What was the conference like?

Alisha: It was exciting to be around people from different states. Washtenaw County is not the only one that's going through it, and when everybody else is going through the same exact thing, then you know it's a problem.

I have experienced not being able to get SNAP benefits but not having enough, needing to not pay a bill to be able to put food on the table, and going to food pantries. If you don't voice what you have lived, then change won't happen.

Vivian: It was a great opportunity and there are so many things that we can do to try to update our system, how the process works, and to be heard. I participated in everything they had.

We did one of our breakout sessions and I was telling [U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Undersecretary Stacy Dean] how I thought the Senators need to actually come to a food pantry, and she made me feel so



Vivian Lehman, Andrew Paniagua, and Alisha Spencer, in D.C.

heard. She gave me her information and if I ever need to reach out, I can.

Andrew: It was so great to see so many people from all corners of the U.S. and from diverse backgrounds connect for a common cause. There was a noticeable energy and desire among the neighbors present to help make a difference and take further action.

Voices (cont.)

Representatives from the White House, USDA, and others were also present. Why was it important to invite decision-makers?

Vivian: Because I feel we can work together. It was very important for them to hear from people who actually are living this life every day and to hear the good stuff as well as the things that we need to work on. It's not all bad things, but there are a lot of areas that we need to try to improve on and we have to have their help.

You know, prices are going up. Food stamps are going down. Right now in this crisis — because I do consider this a crisis — we are in such great need of pantries because there are more people needing food. I utilize my food pantry as well and it has helped me and my family out tremendously. So I think it's good for them to hear people's life stories.

What did you learn about the power of your own voice to make change?

Alisha: Having an opportunity to go to D.C. made me really feel that my voice does really matter and I am doing awesome, amazing things. I had an opportunity to go to D.C. and represent Washtenaw County, to network with other people, and to learn how we can use our voice better.

Vivian: You know what, I surprised myself in even doing this trip. I hadn't been out of Michigan in over a decade.

It was very educational and I'm really happy I went. I felt heard and that my opinion mattered. I was on cloud nine for a while after I came back.

What's next on your advocacy journey?

Vivian: It was a great opportunity and there are so many things that we can do to try to update our system, how the process works, and to be heard. The experience makes me want to be more involved. The only way we are going to really get help is if people get educated.

Alisha: I want to give parents a voice to speak up about the different things going on in the community. They are doing good things — just because they're on food stamps doesn't mean they're not doing the right thing. Letting them know that you are appreciated. We see you. You can use your voice too, just like me.



Upcoming Events

Busch's Season of Sharing

November 13-26

Busch's annual food and fund drive to support Food Gatherers. Please visit any store to participate.

Rockin' for the Hungry

November 28-December 2

Stay tuned for details as we join forces with Ann Arbor's 107one and Kroger to fight hunger where we live!



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