

PLENTY

Fall 2024

food gatherers®
fighting hunger where we live

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Food Gatherers keeps pace with hunger surge in Washtenaw County



Food Gatherers has kept up with the demand for healthy food at 140 partner and program sites across Washtenaw County, reaching more people than ever before.

The COVID-19 pandemic may be over, but costs are still up. Many Americans are struggling with paying for things like housing, utilities, transportation, medical care and, of course, food. This is especially true in Washtenaw County. As a result, Food Gatherers has distributed more food to more people over the past 12 months than we ever have before. According to a September 2024 USDA report, the food insecurity rate in the nation has risen again, to 13.5%. In our community, **1 in 8 neighbors faces the reality that they might not have enough nutritious food to feed their families.**

Food Gatherers has kept pace with the post-pandemic resurgence of food insecurity in our area. In fiscal year 2024, which ended on June 30,

Food Gatherers distributed 9.9 million pounds of food through our network of 140 partners and program sites across Washtenaw County. This record level of food distribution reached 60,000 people (non-duplicated), an increase of about 8.5% over the previous year. **Counting each person in a household every time they received food assistance, we served one million people-- enough to fill Michigan Stadium more than nine times over**

Many people visit a food pantry just once or a few times to help balance expenses during a temporary emergency situation. However, about 20% of the people receiving food assistance in our community last year visited a pantry 13 or more times, suggesting many of our neighbors face persistent food shortages.

While inflation is slowing, food prices and other costs remain high and the needs in our service area are projected to remain elevated or continue to rise over the next year.

“We’ve not seen any indication that this hunger surge will slow anytime soon,” said Eileen Spring, Food Gatherers President and CEO. “Food Gatherers has been able to distribute so much more food in large part due to pandemic-era funding, which ends in December 2024. We are counting on our local community to ensure the food safety net will continue to be there for people when they need it.”

To learn more or to get involved, visit foodgatherers.org.



The 60,000 unique visitors served during FY 2024 would fill Michigan Stadium more than half way.

Help fight hunger where we live: Donate now at FoodGatherers.org/Fall24



Monse Bolanos distributed healthy food at the Ypsilanti Superior Library through the Summer Food Service Program.

New Summer Food Service Program model reaches more families

Food Gatherers' Summer Food Service Program provided more than 70,000 meals to Washtenaw County children during the summer of 2024, more than five times as many as the previous summer. This increase in service was due in part to Food Gatherers' participation in a new option for the federal child nutrition program that provided Grab and Go meals for families to take home in rural areas.

Children enjoyed meals and activities at our five Eat and Play sites, which served more than 6,500 meals this summer. At four weekly Grab and Go locations, families picked up boxes containing breakfast and lunch for seven days for their children. In total, we distributed 65,000 Grab and Go meals. To help families who couldn't get to the Grab and Go or Eat and Play sites, Food Gatherers distributed boxed groceries at seven locations. Sites included area schools, libraries and residential communities.

Across all of the summer meal sites, about 1,000 children participated in the program and were able to access nutritious meals while school was out, a 37% increase from 2023.

"This program is such an important way for us to serve families," said LeRonica Roberts, manager of Community Food Programs for Food Gatherers. "We want to make sure the kids don't go hungry over the summer."

Roberts supervised the program with the help of three summer interns, who were a critical part of getting summer food out into the community.

"It was really cool to work with an organization like Food Gatherers and help get these meals to kids," said intern Stewart Nowinski. "Even though, day to day, it feels like you're doing some small act, by the end of the summer, you've served 70,000 meals, which is amazing."

Summer Food Totals

There's no reason for children to go hungry in the summer when they 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 young people and their families in Washtenaw County.

**Food Gatherers
Summer Food
Service Program
2024:**

Hosted
9
sites

Served
71,000
meals

Nourished
998
children



Grab and Go meal boxes contained a week's worth of breakfast and lunch meals for children like Jude.

Thank You

The 2024 Summer Food Service Program was generously sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education, Toyota Research & Development, the Lake Trust Credit Union, the Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor, Kroger and the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor.

Michigan Medicine Million Meal Mission clears major milestone

When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, the team at Michigan Medicine set a lofty goal: to provide one million meals to the residents of Washtenaw County. The Michigan Medicine Million Meal Mission was born.

About four years later, the Mission is still going strong. More than 560,000 meals have been distributed through the campaign.

“It is gratifying and humbling to see the community come together and support each other this way,” said Tony Denton, Senior Vice President and Chief Environmental, Social and Governance Officer for Michigan Medicine. “It speaks to the generous and kind nature of the people who live and work here.”

Denton was counting on that kind and generous nature when he launched the Mission in

partnership with Food Gatherers in 2020. He also serves on the board of directors at Food Gatherers, the primary food bank and food rescue organization serving Washtenaw’s 370,000 residents.

Although inflation has slowed recently, the cost of groceries and other household essentials, like gasoline, utilities and more, has remained high. Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap reported recently that the food insecurity rate in Washtenaw County has increased to 12.5%, a number that will most likely remain the same or increase in the future. That means about 1 in 8 households faces the difficult choice between paying bills and providing healthy meals.

“I believe we can ultimately end hunger where we live, but we have to work together to do it,”



Denton said. “Reducing food insecurity is so important. Not only is it a key determinant of health, but it can inspire hope and fuel the future of an individual, family, and the community.”

For more, visit:
www.foodgatherers.org/michiganmedicine

Making a Difference

In addition to the Million Meal Mission, Michigan Medicine fights hunger with time and talent.

In the past six months alone, staff from 10 different departments at Michigan Medicine have volunteered at Food Gatherers. Together, those teams have provided 85 volunteers who completed 177 hours of labor sorting and packaging a total of 8,371 pounds of food for distribution in Washtenaw County.

Michigan Medicine teams, including the Transplant Center (right), the Office of Patient Experience, and Physical Therapy, have donated their time to help move food out into the community to reach the neighbors who need it.



Volunteers from the Michigan Medicine Transplant Center prepare food for distribution.

Thank you to our friends at Michigan Medicine for all the ways you work to build a healthier community!

Plans for largest Food Gatherers fundraiser are already 'Rockin'

The weather is just starting to turn crisp, but we at Food Gatherers are already looking forward to the chilly days when we, along with volunteers, local celebrities and more will be "freezin' for a reason."

Plans for the annual Rockin' for the Hungry fundraiser are under way.

The event, our largest fundraiser that helps us provide food throughout Washtenaw County, returns to the airwaves from Dec. 3-7 this year. With our partners at 107one FM and Kroger, we will broadcast live on 107.1 from the Kroger at 400 S. Maple Rd from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day. The broadcast will feature interviews with our staff, volunteers, supporters, local celebrities and sponsored 'Power Hours.'

The goal? To raise the funds that will provide one million meals to residents of Washtenaw County. The event generates about \$500,000 every year; each dollar raised can help provide two meals.



There are plenty of ways to get involved, too. Volunteers are needed to accept donations and greet shoppers throughout the event. Shifts are typically 2-4 hours long. Anyone interested can sign up through the Food Gatherers volunteer page, www.foodgatherers.org/volunteer.

Power Hours are a unique opportunity for businesses: sponsors will be mentioned several times during their hour and be featured in a live on-air interview.

To sponsor a Power Hour, email Emma Cochran at emma.cochran@foodgatherers.org or call (734) 761-2796.

Upcoming Events

Scouting for Food

November 9

Several Washtenaw County scout troops will be out in their respective neighborhoods dropping off orange bags on Nov. 2. If you receive one, you're asked to fill it with canned or boxed foods to donate and set them out on November 9. **Scouts will pick them up by 9 a.m. that day.** For more info, reach out to scoutingforfood@michiganscouting.org.

Busch's Season of Sharing

November 15-28

Busch's annual food and fund drive supports Food Gatherers and the Saline Area Social Service (SASS). Donations will be accepted at all Busch's locations throughout southeast Michigan. There will be several ways to get involved, including donating at the checkout, purchasing gift cards and donating bottle return slips.



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