

PLENTY

Fall 2021

MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

food gatherers
fighting hunger where we live



Image drawn by Ebony Reddock

Rethinking How We Measure Success

Every organization needs to ask, “Is our work making a difference?”. To ensure we are meeting our mission, Food Gatherers invests in regular evaluation of our programs and practices, including having a full-time evaluator on staff. In 2020, Food Gatherers launched a multi-year project to integrate equity in our evaluation work. Funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, this project will provide valuable insights into the design of our evaluations, including who is collecting the data, reviewing the results, and determining what success looks like.

Our goal is to center those experiencing food insecurity in how we design our services and measure our impact. Food Gatherers has engaged Ebony Reddock, Ph.D., MPH, a local expert on equitable evaluation

practices from Bumblebee Design & Evaluation. Originally a health educator, Ebony’s interest in designing and refining effective programs led her to evaluation as a profession.

“I’m motivated in this work because I know the power of services that are culturally responsive and sound. The power of programs that are really challenging inequity,” says Ebony.

Together with Ebony, Food Gatherers formed an evaluation advisory group to launch the study. Ebony is currently conducting a series of community interviews and surveys with pantry guests, partner agencies, Food Gatherers staff, and even people who don’t use food pantries, to hear what types and amounts of food are most



Ebony Reddock, Ph.D., MPH,
Bumblebee Design & Evaluation

appreciated, as well as whether people feel welcome and respected when they visit a pantry.

When the interviews are concluded, the next steps will be for Bumblebee Design & Evaluation to identify common themes and to make recommendations to Food Gatherers for community-driven outreach, program improvement, and further research.

We can’t wait to tell you more!

Donate now to fight hunger: www.foodgatherers.org/FNL22

Working Together to Fight Hunger

Keeping Summer Hunger Off the Table

Summer is one of our busiest seasons of the year and it's hard to believe that it is over! This year, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provided 56,324 meals for 931 children at 22 community sites! Children enjoyed sit-down meals at daycares and summer camps, and 7-day meal packs were distributed at convenient locations throughout the community. Additionally, 459 produce boxes were distributed to families and 2,021 nutrition activity packs were shared with children. The SFSP is an important source of food for families when children are out of school and lose access to free- and reduced-price school meals.

The SFSP is offered in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education and with significant support from Toyota Research & Development, Ashley and Jon Oberheide, and Milk Means More. Other supporters include Blue Cross Complete, Kiwanis Club of Ann Arbor Foundation, Rotary Club of Ann Arbor, and TCF Bank.



Kids visit summer meal sites in their neighborhood

“COVID has wreaked havoc on our family. We have five high-risk people in each house and don't qualify for food stamps. This has been a weekly lifesaver.”
– SFSP family



SFSP staff, Robert, and Food Gatherers' mobile meals van



Families at a summer meal distribution

Thank You, Farmer Bill

Every holiday, Food Gatherers receives a call from Bill Schmid, affectionately known as “Farmer Bill”, wishing all the staff well! We love these calls, but we especially love the homegrown produce that he has donated to Food Gatherers since 1998. “It all started with one bushel of tomatoes. It just felt good and it has evolved from there,” says Farmer Bill. And, evolve it has, from one bushel of tomatoes to thousands of pounds of produce and monetary donations from farm stand sales over the last 23 years.



Farmer Bill Schmid holds a homegrown potato



Left to right: Claudette Snow-Schell, Farmer Bill Schmid, Nancy Biehn, and Lisa Olsen

Since 2011, the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor's Mindful Eating Team has partnered with Farmer Bill in managing the half-acre garden. Each year, congregation volunteers participate in all aspects of the growing season from March through October, including soil prep, planting, mulching, weeding (!!!), watering, harvesting, and end-of-year clean-up.

The garden crops include vegetables, flowers for pollinators and bouquets, and apples. “I grow what I like,” says Farmer

Bill. Freshly harvested produce is donated directly to Food Gatherers and sold at a roadside stand with half the proceeds also donated to Food Gatherers.

After 23 years, Farmer Bill has decided 2021 will be the last summer for the garden. Food Gatherers is truly grateful to both Farmer Bill and the Unitarians for this partnership which has provided more than 150,000 meals in our community. **Thank you!**

Food Gatherers Seeks Agency Input

As we update the design, implementation, and evaluation of our support to agencies and services to the community (see page 1), Food Gatherers has formed an Agency Advisory Group. This group will provide a diverse cohort of program partners the opportunity to share insights and contribute ideas during the process. The group had its first meeting on September 10th to discuss the key projects that will be completed over their term. To start, the group will focus on developing an outreach ambassador partnership model to create a process for community groups to work with Food Gatherers and connect people to services.

“I joined the advisory group because I would like to know more about how Food Gatherers supports the community and how my agency can aid in this support.”
– LJ Sarten, Ozone House Crisis Line Manager

Agency Advisory Group members:
Colette DeRaud, *Community Action Network*
Tanisha Hood, *Berea Cares*
Kelly O'Mara, *U-M Maize & Blue Cupboard*
LJ Sarten, *Ozone House*
Sarah Shugart, *Faith in Action*
Robert Walker, *St. Louis Center*
Sandy Williams, *Foundations Preschool*

ADVOCACY CORNER: YOUR VOICE MATTERS



Congressman Tim Walberg visited the Aid In Milan SFSP distribution. Left to right: Marie LeMarr, Congressman Walberg, Judi Burgio, Markell Miller, LeRonica Roberts, and Anna Almanza

In an economic crisis — like the pandemic — food is the first expense that a household with limited resources will cut. In our community, there are many people who are employed, but struggle to afford nutritious food due to unexpected expenses like medical bills or child care. In Washtenaw County, 40% of people experiencing food insecurity are not eligible for SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps) because their income level is too high according to the enrollment guidelines; statewide that number is 35%.

This is why, in addition to providing access to healthy, nutritious food for those in need, Food Gatherers is actively advocating at local, state, and federal levels to address and eliminate the root causes of hunger in our community. Our policy priorities are currently focused on federal programs that will provide a broader safety net. In August, we were pleased to host Congressman Tim Walberg at a Summer Food Service Program site in Milan and share the benefits of the program for local families in his district.

To learn more about Food Gatherers' policy priorities, advocacy efforts, and to add your voice, please visit www.foodgatherers.org/advocate.