

We Are There for Our Neighbors:

ONE YEAR OF NOURISHING NEW JERSEY
IN A PANDEMIC



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A Message From Carlos



Dear FoodBank Friends,

During this hectic and unusual year, I've often been asked if I ever imagined that the FoodBank would have to respond to a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. It's true that CFBNJ has been there for those in need in times of financial trouble, natural disasters, and emergencies on a national scale. But after years of steadily declining food insecurity rates in our state, never did I expect that all of that progress would disappear in the blink of an eye, putting New Jersey in an even worse position than it was in after the Great Recession.

Today, more of our neighbors than ever before have lost their livelihoods, depleted their savings, and run out of options, forcing them to turn to CFBNJ and their local pantries for help. Many came to us for the first time in their lives.

Since last March, CFBNJ has taken a diverse approach to fighting hunger in New Jersey during COVID-19. Beyond providing a record amount of food, we have also reimagined distribution in line with health and safety concerns, championed policies that we know to be effective against food insecurity, helped our neighbors navigate a changing benefits system, and engaged our communities in the process.

It has been the greatest honor and challenge of my career to lead the state's largest anti-hunger, anti-poverty organization during this time when food banks are needed more than ever. In this special extended edition of *The Feed*, you will get an insider's look at how CFBNJ has spent the past year responding to the pandemic, and even hear from a few of our neighbors and community partners who have been impacted by our work. In them, I see hope for the future.

Together with partners from all sectors of society, we are there for our hungry New Jersey neighbors when they need us most. And that starts with YOU. Over the past year, we have asked the public for support in the form of monetary gifts, food donations, and volunteerism. You have answered our call, displaying a level of generosity I have never seen in my decades of work in food banking.

Thank you for your supporting CFBNJ and our neighbors in need, during this challenging year and in the better days ahead.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Rodriguez
President & CEO

Follow Carlos on Twitter! @FoodBankCarlos





New Jersey has been hit hard by COVID-19.

In early 2020, we began seeing reports of a deadly new virus raging across Asia. On March 4, New Jersey announced its first presumptive positive case of COVID-19 – a Bergen County man who had been hospitalized with severe symptoms. Within a matter of weeks, schools and businesses were shuttered.

A decade of progress in the fight against hunger was wiped out overnight.

CFBNJ had to pivot in response to an unprecedented crisis that sickened thousands and left countless residents facing the stress of layoffs, reduced work hours, and missed paychecks. As a primary responder in the State of New Jersey's disaster relief plan and a dependable safety net for neighbors in need, we were charged with formulating an action plan that not only provided continued service to those already struggling, but also accounted for the new surge in need.

"The adults in my household have been laid off, and I'm worried about how to feed my three children, since the daycare where I worked has closed. Luckily, I'm a saver, so I've had the money to pay our rent so far. But once that runs out, I don't know what's next. We're just living day by day. Getting this food from the FoodBank really helps. It's comforting to know that we'll at least be able to eat for the next couple of days."

– Marissa, Pantry Recipient Newark, Essex County

Together with our dedicated community partners, we adapted.

Having served as a lifeline for those affected by 9/11, the Great Recession, and Superstorm Sandy, CFBNJ is no stranger to emergencies. **Together with our network of more than 1,000 partner feeding programs, we did what we have always done during difficult times.** We adjusted and ramped up our operations to give out as much food as possible, advising our community partners on alternate distribution methods and PPE use, while adapting temporarily to a 24-hour, three-shift system in our own warehouse.

We are there for our communities – before, during, and after a crisis.

But COVID-19 quickly proved to be one of a larger scale than we'd ever seen before, and the challenges mounted. Over the course of the pandemic, about 20 percent of our active community partners have experienced intermittent or indefinite closures, while increasing competition in food supply chains has driven prices up and resulted in a 50 percent decrease in donated food.

Despite these struggles, we worked alongside our network to distribute enough nutritious food for 83 million meals, a record amount in our 45-year history.

We also prepared more than 182,500 low-sodium, heart-healthy meals,



"We've stayed open throughout the pandemic because we've got to feed the people. Most of us are volunteers. Now, we're serving more than twice as many families as we were before. We're so grateful for our partnership with the Community FoodBank of New Jersey that helps make it all possible."

– Donald, Director, Office of Concern Food Pantry at St. Cecilia, Englewood, Bergen County

frozen in kits of five meals each, for organizations serving seniors. While some of our community partners were sadly forced to close their doors, others rallied to engineer innovative solutions to increase their food output in safe and contactless ways by hosting drive-through distributions, extending their operating hours, making home deliveries, and more.



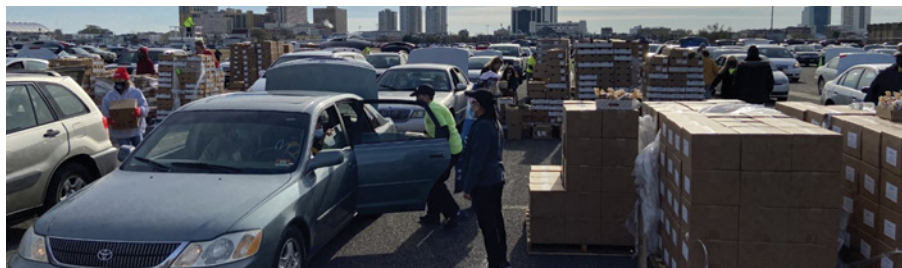
The Pandemic Has Affected Us Personally

We are deeply saddened by the passing of several of our community partners from COVID-19, including Janice Preschel, founder of Helping Hands Food Pantry, and Reverend Samuel Austin and his wife First Lady Reverend Dorothy Austin of First Corinthians Missionary Baptist Church. Our community has lost these remarkable leaders in the fight against hunger, but we will remember them for their incredible legacies of service.

Our large-scale distributions fed thousands in just hours.



Shortly after the state shutdown, we began hosting large-scale drive-through and walk-up distributions in response to the growing need. Working with county officials across the state, including leaders in Union, Essex, Atlantic, Bergen, Middlesex, and Hudson, CFBNJ provided emergency meal kits and supplemental fresh produce to thousands of households at a time. The first of these events was hosted at Essex County Branch Brook Park, together with the County of Essex. In Union County, these distributions were held biweekly for struggling residents, thanks to our incredible partnership with the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and Kean University. And in Middlesex County, we worked with the New Jersey Reentry Corporation and local representatives to distribute food safely.



In Atlantic City, one of the hardest hit cities in the nation, we joined forces with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA), with additional funding and volunteer manpower from local labor unions and casinos, to host biweekly food distributions for casino workers and Atlantic City residents. With an economy dominated by the hospitality and service industries, Atlantic City and the surrounding area already faced higher rates of unemployment and food insecurity before the pandemic.

Together with our partners, CFBNJ served miles-long lines at more than 40 large-scale events in 12 counties, distributing nearly 238,000 emergency meal kits. Each kit contained enough nonperishable food to sustain a household for several days – nutritious and versatile items like peanut butter, canned vegetables, rice, canned protein, pasta, shelf-stable milk, and more.

Even while responding to a pandemic, we also managed to continue our annual tradition of supporting holiday meals in November. Through large-scale distributions to our community partners and neighbors in need, CFBNJ provided more than 51,000 Thanksgiving turkeys and roasters, plus 15,000 holiday meal kits – representing significant increases over 2019 holiday totals.



We provided nutritious food and access to critical resources for kids and their families.

When schools closed on March 16, we knew that hunger would be exacerbated for thousands of children statewide. Child food insecurity in New Jersey was expected to leap 75 percent, up to about 1 in 5 children. Without free school breakfasts and lunches to keep them healthy, kids who relied on those meals, as well as those whose families were newly struggling due to the pandemic, needed our help more than ever before.

We stepped up with our child nutrition programs, including grab-and-go meals, summer food, and Family Packs, which together have provided 450,000 meals to food insecure children and their families. We helped families apply for P-EBT, benefits that are available to children who qualify for free and reduced school meals but don't have access to them during the pandemic.

We also expanded our efforts to connect eligible residents to key resources to bolster their household budgets and help them afford the food that they need. Inquiries for SNAP application assistance have increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic. **We've helped more than 2,700 of our neighbors apply for benefits and have added more bilingual staff to our Resource Access team.**

Both the health and economic effects of COVID-19 have hit low-income and communities of color the hardest. **According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Black and Latinx families are more than twice as likely as white families to face hunger during this crisis.** CFBNJ remains committed to supporting our neighbors in need with food and resource access during the pandemic and beyond, with a particular focus on these communities.

"I spent an hour on the phone assisting a widow in navigating an online SNAP application that she had started on her own. It was her first time applying for SNAP benefits, but I know that it is important to make a client feel empowered to take control of their outcome. She received her confirmation number and was delighted that I had spent the afternoon assisting her."

– Maria, CFBNJ Resource Access Coordinator

There's still more work to do.

We often say that CFBNJ couldn't do its important work without the help of our dedicated volunteers, and never has this been truer than during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, we made the difficult decision to temporarily curtail outside volunteers to limit exposure in our warehouse, engaging specialized groups of volunteers vetted by New Jersey Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (NJVOAD), like Team Rubicon and the Civil Air Patrol, to fill these gaps. For months, they visited our warehouse almost daily, creating emergency meal kits like a well-oiled machine.

In September, we began welcoming individual volunteers and small groups back to our Hillside warehouse, with comprehensive safety precautions in place. Volunteers have also helped at off-site distributions, loading the trunks of waiting vehicles with nutritious food. **Overall, more than 10,000 specialized and individual volunteers at both our Hillside and Egg Harbor Township locations donated close to 30,000 hours of their time in service of their neighbors in need.**

While CFBNJ has accomplished so much through our emergency-relief efforts, even



more work remains to be done during the recovery phase of the pandemic. There's a long road ahead for our neighbors whose savings have been wiped out, who are struggling to recover financially after being out of work for months, or who may not have gotten back to their livelihoods yet. This year, CFBNJ anticipates a total of \$12 million in additional new costs in order to maintain current service levels, plus \$2.5 million in necessary capital expenditures for equipment to support increased distribution. **This includes our plan to expand our fleet of trucks, trailers, mobile pantries, and vans from 24 vehicles to 32 as we move towards a partner direct model with a goal of delivering all food to our community partners, rather than having many of them pick up at our facilities.**

One year into the pandemic that has upended the lives of so many, our New Jersey neighbors remain strong and resilient. With our community partners, CFBNJ is innovating and addressing this crisis every day. Together, we are there for those who need us most.



CFBNJ's COVID-19 Response at a Glance

We've provided enough nutritious food for **83 million meals** since the start of the pandemic.

25% of the food supplied was fresh produce



238,000 emergency meal kits distributed



450,000

meals provided to kids and their families



182,500

frozen meals prepared and packed for homebound seniors



2,700

neighbors provided with SNAP application assistance



40 large-scale distributions hosted in 12 counties



17 million

pounds of fresh food boxes sourced and distributed



30,000

hours volunteered



**Data is actual through January 2021 with February 2021 estimates.*