

New Community Partnerships: Showing Up for Our Guests,

WHERE THEY ARE

While the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and its network are serving nutritious food to more than 100,000 people every month, there are more neighbors who don't have a reliable and regular source of food.

To realize our vision that everyone has enough to eat, the Food Bank aims to show up in new ways and in new places. "Innovation" may not be the first word that comes to mind when you think of food banking but, here, we share examples of creative thinking and collaboration happening in our community.

"Food banking is changing," notes Chief Executive Officer Michael McKee.

We are meeting guests where they are—in schools, in health care clinics, and in community centers, as well as in traditional pantries.



AT SCHOOLS

When he learned of the success of Good Food School Markets (GFSM) operating in two Harrisonburg area high schools, teacher Chris Kaznosky knew that the program could thrive at Central High School (CHS) in Woodstock, too.

Chris coordinates CHS's clothes and toiletries closet, which was already helping more than 100 students. Members of the senior class expressed the desire to expand the closet to feature a food pantry.

Nine weeks after contacting the Food Bank, the first food distribution event took place in May. Students chose the food, selected recipes to share, and staffed the tables to serve 107 households that day—including 189 children and teens!

Afterward, Chris said, "I heard many good things today from students and staff, as well as from a few parents who went through the line. **Together, what we did was truly meaningful.**"

When school re-opens in late summer, CHS and the Food Bank will continue operating a Good Food School Market so that all students can access food when they need it.

What YOU can do

FIND HELP: If you or someone you know needs food assistance, visit www.brafb.org/find-help.

LEARN MORE: Read more about Food Pharmacy at www.brafb.org/blog-chew-on-this/. Learn more about our network at www.brafb.org/partners/.

OFFER HELP: If you would like to donate, visit www.brafb.org/give-now. Or, flip to page 10 for other ways to get involved.



IN HEALTH CARE CLINICS

Because access to nutritious food is one social determinant of health, partnerships with health care organizations are a natural fit for the Food Bank.

Through the Food Pharmacy program, launched in 2020, the Food Bank now works with health care partners in 22 locations, from Harrisonburg to Fishersville and Orange to Lynchburg. Patients are screened and those who identify as food insecure receive 10-15 pounds of medically tailored food at each visit.

“When they come in for an appointment and are able to get a bag of fresh vegetables, it provides not just food, but also recipe cards, and access to diabetes educators and nutritionists who can guide them in this often complicated process,” said Nelly Maybee, MD, a physician with the Augusta Health Diabetes and Endocrinology Clinic in Fishersville. **“I tell a lot of my diabetic patients to treat food as medicine, because it is as important in managing their disease process as prescription medications.** (The) food pantry is an essential part of this process, especially for patients in lower socioeconomic brackets, who are more vulnerable and more affected by chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes.”



DR. MAYBEE

What began with one dialysis clinic has expanded to other medical care settings. The rapid expansion with Augusta Health—from its first site to 17 participating clinics in just one year—and the addition of partnerships at UVA Health and the Harrisonburg Free Clinic suggest this model of collaboration is working.



IN COMMUNITY CENTERS

“Gardens ... are the first sign of commitment to a community. When people plant (food) they are saying, let's stay here. And by their connection to the land, they are connected to one another.”

— Embrace Waynesboro

Embrace is a new food pantry partner in the Food Bank network, one that reaches deep into an underserved community where language barriers and low income are challenges to overcome.

But the gardens came first.

Managed by Kay Shaner of the Virginia Cooperative Extension office and a team of volunteers, the gardens surround the Embrace Waynesboro Community Center, which is located across the street from the city's preschool. Services to the community include new clothing, school supplies, and haircuts for kids; a teen tutoring center; laundry facilities; public meeting space; community meals; support groups; and much more. Sin Barreras is on site as well, offering social services and legal support for the Latino community.

Seeing the need to do more, Kay and Embrace's director, Jenell Watson, reached out to the Food Bank to set up a food pantry with shelf-stable food, culturally familiar food, and fresh or frozen proteins. To further support this vision, grants from the Food Bank's Agency Capacity Fund provided the pantry with a new refrigerator and the gardens with a new greenhouse.