IN THIS ISSUE

Giving the gift of health year-round
Access to the right foods limits effects of chronic illness

Easing the burden
Food pantry helps mother feed her children despite medical bills
Back to basics in 2017

The New Year is in full swing and all of us here at Northern Illinois Food Bank are excited to make a difference in our community and in the lives of our hungry neighbors in 2017. We continue to help families make healthier choices by providing more nutritious food, including fresh produce, than ever before. With March being National Nutrition Month, there’s no better time to talk about the positive impact of a nutritious diet for someone like Joshua, who relies on our network to access the right food to effectively manage his health.

Learn more about his story on page 3.

With a service area of more than 7,000 square miles, we have a lot of ground to cover as we work toward solving hunger across our 13 counties of Northern Illinois, but we’re on the right path. Last year we increased our year-over-year meal distribution by more than five million to 62.5 million meals – a big step toward meeting our 2020 goal of 75 million meals.

How will we get to 75 million meals? Simply by doing what we have always done: working together with you, your family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. What you do matters to us and to those who need our help. Whether you Volunteer, Donate, or Get Involved, you help neighbors like Sandra – a single mother who has faced tough choices over the past year due to her mounting medical bills. Read her story on page 4.

So whether it’s a couple of hours of time, a donation, or just sharing the news of the good work that we’re accomplishing together, you can make a difference.

We achieved great things together in 2016; here’s to 2017!

Warmly and With Gratitude,

President & CEO

Joshua’s Story

When you meet Joshua, you would never guess that he battles health issues. But if you take a closer look, you’ll notice the braces on his legs and the limp in his step.

Six years ago, Joshua was diagnosed with ALS – a progressive neurodegenerative disease. Just 15 years old at the time, he was one of the youngest people to receive this diagnosis.

Today, Joshua is a skilled mechanic – partly self-taught and partly trained. He recently completed a college automotive mechanic class, but due to his illness, he’s not able to work. He survives on a fixed disability income and a small amount of SNAP (food stamp) benefits that aren’t enough to get him through the month.

Joshua’s family provides him with a tremendous amount of love and any support that he can – but they struggle to make ends meet themselves. So for the food and nutrition he needs to stay healthy, Joshua turns to his local food pantry – Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry – for help.

He regularly accompanies his mother to the pantry to pick up soft foods like oatmeal, soft breads and enriched noodles that he can eat easily and that help make him and his body stronger.

“The food pantry has been absolutely critical to helping me stay as healthy as I can,” Joshua says. “I don’t have enough money to purchase the food I need and neither does my family, so without the pantry, I don’t know how else I’d be.”

Yet, despite his health challenges and medical bills, Joshua maintains an incredibly positive and encouraging outlook on life. Not only does he encourage and motivate his siblings to be the best they can be, his mother says, but he is also extremely grateful for everything he does have. He’s grateful for his family, and to members of the community whose donations have enabled him to purchase critical medical supplies, and to Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry for helping ensure he has enough to eat.

“To everyone who makes the Food Pantry possible, thank you so much,” he says. “I can’t express how much it really helps me and my family out. And I mean that sincerely from the bottom of my heart.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SIGN UP FOR A VOLUNTEER SHIFT, VISIT www.SolveHungerToday.org/Volunteer OR CALL US AT (630) 443-6910 AND ASK TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE ON THE VOLUNTEER TEAM.
Foodie 5Ks: Better than ever in 2017!

Whether one of your resolutions for the New Year was to get back in shape, spend more time outdoors or to give back to your community, the Food Bank can help you stay on track. Our Foodie 5K races series, presented by Meijer to benefit Northern Illinois Food Bank, is back and better than ever in 2017, with races in Wheaton, Libertyville and an all-new race in Romeoville.

The Foodie 5Ks appeal to everyone from food fanatics looking for a fun walk in the park, seasoned competitors to those embarking on their first-ever 5K adventure in 2017. Now in its fourth year, the Foodie 5K attracted more than 2,880 participants and raised more than $216,000 last year to support Northern Illinois Food Bank’s efforts of solving hunger in our community.

“We’re excited to bring the Foodie 5K back to Wheaton and Libertyville after the great support we received from those communities last year, and we’re looking forward to our third race at Lewis University in Romeovilla this Fall,” said Monica Marr, Development and Special Events Officer at Northern Illinois Food Bank. “These events offer a fun and easy way for everyone to engage with our mission of solving hunger in Northern Illinois.”

All proceeds from the Foodie 5K benefit Northern Illinois Food Bank where every $1 donated provides $8 worth of food. Participants are encouraged to fundraise to help the Food Bank serve even more hungry neighbors.

All three Foodie 5Ks are chip-timed fun runs/walks open to all ages. Advanced registrants will receive a shirt, a $5 food truck voucher to be used at the post-race festival and more. Participants who register for all three races will receive a special commemorative gift.

Registration per race is $35 for adults, $15 for children ages 6-12. Children ages 0-5 are free. Volunteer and sponsorship opportunities are available for all three races.

As a single, working mother of children ages two to 18, Sandra is no stranger to hard work. But like many families across Northern Illinois, she found herself in unexpected and uncharted territory when she began experiencing serious medical issues.

With years of work experience, both in construction and in a hospital as a certified nursing assistant, Sandra had successfully purchased her own home and owned vehicles, and was able to provide for her family. Just over a year ago however, all of that changed.

During one of her usual 12-hour shifts at work, Sandra noticed she was having difficulty seeing her computer screen. She went to the eye doctor, but when nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary, she returned to work. It wasn’t until later when she suffered a seizure at the dinner table that she found herself in the hospital undergoing numerous tests — tests which revealed she was suffering from aneurisms and tumors in her brain.

Today, Sandra is a survivor. While she underwent a grueling surgery to remove the tumors, she now suffers from side effects including chronic memory loss, vertigo and sciatia, all of which make keeping up with her children and housework difficult. A severe migraine had landed her in the hospital just the night before she visited the local pantry where we met her, Avon Community Food Pantry in Round Lake Park.

Although she receives a small amount of SNAP benefits, Sandra says she is still struggling to make ends meet. She shares that her oldest son, who is 18, just started working and has been helping pay the bills, including their mortgage. She hopes that her recent social security benefits application will come through before she loses her home.

“She’s stepped up so much,” she says. “I just hope I don’t have to lose my home because I worked so hard to buy it.”

Sandra is also thankful for the help she receives at Avon Community Food Pantry, which she visits once a month.

“The pantry is such a huge help,” she says. “Without this place, I could only afford beans and rice.”

She shares that although she knows how to cook quite a few meals only using staples like rice, beans, tomatoes and onions due to her Mexican heritage, she always looks forward to the variety of food offered at the pantry.

“I always ask if they have venison meat,” she says excitedly. “We got some of it here once, and the kids really loved it. So now I make a bunch with it whenever they have it — burgers, tacos, everything!”

Sandra gets teary-eyed thinking about everything she and her family have overcome in the last year, but is hopeful for the future, and is thankful for the support she receives at the pantry.

“I appreciate all your help, and I hope God blesses the Food Bank with a lot more.”
We were excited to be part of Curtis Granderson’s Grand Giving campaign in November which raised $200,000 for hungry neighbors across Chicagoland.

We also welcome individuals, families and social groups of all ages and sizes! Children age 8 and older can volunteer with an adult chaperone.

Know a teen ages 16-18 looking to get involved in the community? Encourage them to apply for our VolunTeen program! Visit SolveHungerToday.org for more.

A volunteer shift is the perfect team-building activity—we take groups up to 200!

Volunteer shifts are available at 8:45 AM at our Centers—Geneva, Rockford and Park City. Sign up by visiting www.SolveHungerToday.org/Volunteer.

Food Bank staff celebrated Giving Tuesday by holding a food drive at the Geneva Metra station, collecting 468 pounds of food in just three hours. Thanks to all who donated food for our hungry neighbors!

Canadian Pacific’s annual holiday train rolled through Chicagoland again this year, providing a festive start to the holiday season and raising food and funds for the Food Bank.

The holiday season is a busy time for us, but the outpouring of generosity and support from our communities is such an inspiration. Thank you for helping us make the season bright once again this year for our hungry neighbors!

Thank you, volunteers!

As we get ready to celebrate Volunteer Appreciation Month in April, we’d like to thank everyone who has joined us in the past year in our fight against hunger—our hungry neighbors are grateful for your helping hands, as are we! We could not achieve what we do without the tremendous support and smiling faces of our volunteer force.

More than 300 volunteers from Jewel-Osco, Tyson Foods, Alpha Baking Company, CA Fortune, Jel-Sert and Kellogg’s packed over 9,000 meal boxes to kick off the holidays at the Food Bank. In total, we provided more than 29,000 holiday meal boxes to families across Northern Illinois this holiday season!
Upcoming Activities

See our complete calendar of events at www.SolveHungerToday.org

A TASTE THAT MATTERS

presented by Jewel Osco

APRIL
Foodie 5K Wheaton
Saturday, April 1 – 9 a.m.
Cantigny Park, Wheaton
See article on page 5. To register or learn more, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Foodie5K.

MAY
Foodie 5K Lake County
Saturday, May 13 – 9 a.m.
Independence Grove, Libertyville
See article on page 5. To register or learn more, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Foodie5K.

AUGUST
19th Annual Hunger Scramble
Tuesday, August 22 – 8:30 a.m.
Cantigny Golf, Wheaton
Join us for a day on the green at our 19th annual Hunger Scramble golf outing. Enjoy scenic views as well as on-course tastings and giveaways, a 19th-hole awards reception, and silent auction and raffle prizes.

For sponsorship information, to volunteer, join an event planning committee or register for any of our 2017 events, please contact Tiffany King at tking@northernilfoodbank.org, or at (630) 443-6910 ext. 136.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to find out the latest happenings at the Food Bank
Send comments/questions about articles in this issue to communications@northernilfoodbank.org