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Making sure every hungry neighbor has every meal, every day is at the center of our strategic plan here at Northern Illinois Food Bank. Thanks to your support, we’re steadily moving toward our goal of closing the meal gap in our service area by the year 2020. While we’re encouraged by our progress, we realize there is still much work to be done, particularly when it comes to reaching vulnerable populations like children and seniors who often don’t have the means to access nutritious food on their own. Nearly half of everyone we serve is either a child under age 18 or an older adult over age 60. In this issue of the Full Plate, we take a look at some of the programs we have in place to get healthy food to our youngest and oldest neighbors in need. With summer around the corner, thousands of children in northern Illinois will soon lose a daily source of nutrition they receive through free and reduced price meals provided during the school day. This can add extra stress for parents already struggling to make ends meet as they try to provide up to 10 extra meals every week for each child. Our Summer Meals Program strives to fill this gap by providing breakfast, lunch and snacks so kids can focus on enjoying their summer rather than worrying about where their next meal will come from. As you’ll see on pages seven and eight, we work with a wide range of community stakeholders to make sure these meals are easily accessible for kids in need.

At the other end of the spectrum, our Senior Mobile Pantry program is designed to deliver nutritious food directly to the housing facilities where seniors living on limited fixed incomes reside. As page five illustrates, this can make a huge difference for older adults who may not be able to easily access their local food pantry or grocery store. Your support makes these and other programs here at Northern Illinois Food Bank possible. I’m always impressed by the generosity our community shows in caring for our neighbors in need. On behalf of everyone we serve — from children to seniors — thank you for your kindness and support.

Warmly,

Julie Yurko, president and CEO

Northern Illinois Food Bank is working toward its strategic goal of providing 75 million meals to our neighbors in need by the year 2020. Look for the following icons throughout this issue of The Full Plate accompanying stories that highlight the five pillars of our strategic plan:

- Building Bridges
- Igniting the Community
- Providing More Meals
- Strengthening Leadership
- Maintaining Frugality and Trust

Northern Illinois Food Bank recently expanded its communications outlets to include a blog. Aptly named The Full Plate Blog, this is your newest source of great stories and information about the Food Bank, our network, our hungry neighbors and the issue of hunger in your neighborhood. If you’re left wanting more after each issue of this newsletter, The Full Plate Blog is the destination for you.

For instance, read about the best apps to help save money while grocery shopping, or check out profiles of some of the food trucks participating in our Foodie 5K. The blog is also full of stories of people who are eating nutritious meals with their families because of your support.

Check out The Full Plate Blog at www.SolveHungerToday.org/FullPlate

Summer 2016

Finding a new method for produce

T he perfect metaphor for life is a garden. A garden provides a small area in which nature and humans come together and grow items essential for sustaining life. Dig the ground, plant a seed, let the rain fall, and within months, the garden gives back.

Northern Illinois Food Bank provides food for over 71,000 people each week thanks to your support. We understand the crucial role a garden plays in making sure enough fresh food is provided to neighbors in need. This is why the focus on expanding community gardens within our service area is being explored through our AmeriCorps VISTA program.

Northern Illinois Food Bank’s mission of solving hunger is getting a significant boost from 11 young professionals who are currently serving the community as AmeriCorps VISTA members. As part of their one-year term of service, the VISTA members are aiding the Food Bank by focusing in the areas of capacity building, communications, community engagement, community gardens, senior hunger programs and volunteer development. Shelbi Ball is leading the charge as the Community Garden Coordinator.

For her part, Shelbi researched methods currently being used at different food banks and member agencies known for their community gardens. She is also speaking with neighbors in need about what method would be most effective to them and what they would like to see grown.

The model Shelbi is focusing on encourages food pantry recipients to participate in growing their own food within a community garden setting where they will receive education from University of Illinois Master Gardeners and dietician guidance from local health department staff. Her model displays creativity and sustainability while focusing on the health of our hungry neighbors.

There is more to community gardens than just gardening,” Shelbi said. “Gardening is something that can really improve your health both physically and mentally. Shelbi recently received the Governor’s Volunteer Service Award in the AmeriCorps category. This award recognizes individual volunteers to highlight the importance of volunteerism and community service in the state of Illinois.

Shelbi’s career goal is to work for a non-profit that improves health outcomes in low-income communities. The experience she gains from being part of the Food Bank is a real stepping stone to her future as she is learning how a nonprofit runs, but also is working with the population she wants to help. Plus, there are some other perks to her role.

“Since starting this job, I have had the best cucumber ever grown from a community garden,” she said.

Northern Illinois Food Bank is currently recruiting 11 AmeriCorps VISTA members for fiscal year 2017. For information, visit www.nationalservice.gov and search under the programs tab or contact Gloria Sanders at 630-443-6910 ext. 147 or gsanders@northernillfoodbank.org.
Tony’s Story

is helping Northern Illinois Food Bank to address.

Aging indicates one-third of senior households has no money left each month or is in debt after meeting essential expenses. When we met Tony at HCS Family Services in Hinsdale, fresh produce, meat and a gallon of milk were among the nutritious food items that filled his shopping cart. As he browsed the pantry’s shelves, he paid particularly close attention to make sure he selected food that fit Mary’s dietary needs since she is diabetic. “When the pantry has strawberries and other fresh fruit, that’s a God send,” Tony said.

Seniors rely on community support.

With your support, hungry neighbors like Tony don’t have to decide between paying bills and purchasing groceries. More than 50,000 adults age 60 and older rely on Northern Illinois Food Bank’s network of community food pantries and feeding programs each year, and that number is expected to rise as more and more Baby Boomers reach retirement age.

“That sense of comfort was shattered in 2012, though, when Tony lost his company in the midst of the economic downturn. He and Mary also lost their house, and as their savings dried up, they moved into a retirement community in Oak Brook.”

“When the pantry has strawberries and other fresh fruit, that’s a God send,” Tony said. “Financially, this food helps us save maybe $200 per month or more at the grocery store,” Tony said. “Emotionally, it’s keeping my wife and I together.”

Like many seniors, Tony and his wife Mary rely on a fixed income, and much of that income is taken up by rent, utilities, transportation and medical costs. In fact, a recent study from the National Council on Aging indicates one third of senior households has no money left each month or is in debt after meeting essential expenses.

For seniors struggling to make ends meet, nutritional needs often get put aside, a problem your support is helping Northern Illinois Food Bank to address.

Help is there for unexpected need.

Not long ago, Tony was the CEO of a company that manufactured and repaired gasoline pumps and nozzles for local gas stations. With two grown children well into adulthood, Tony and Mary, his wife of 49 years, were enjoying a comfortable life in DuPage County.

When you are 84 years old and you can’t drive anymore, a day like this can make all the difference,” said Guiette, a senior who benefits from the senior mobile pantry program. “When asked how the senior mobile helps seniors, Dyer says, “Seniors didn’t have the means to make it to our pantry,” said Bill Bich, director of Crystal Lake Food Pantry. “Now we are able to go out and bring it directly to them so they have a good selection of food directed toward their needs.”

The Food Bank’s senior mobile pantry initiative in Crystal Lake is made possible thanks to funding from McHenry County Senior Services Grant Commission. Senior mobiles have also expanded to North Chicago and Aurora thanks to funding from North Chicago COG’s and Aurora Quality of Life Grant, respectively, and expansion into other counties is being discussed.

Meeting seniors when and where they need help.

Eight volunteers from Crystal Lake Food Pantry surround the tables at their designated stations, and a half dozen more wait with shopping carts to assist the seniors through the line and accompany them back to their apartments to help with stocking the food on their shelves.

“Seniors didn’t have the means to make it to our pantry,” said Bill Bich, director of Crystal Lake Food Pantry. “Now we are able to go out and bring it directly to them so they have a good selection of food directed toward their needs.”

Focused on needs of seniors.

In Crystal Lake, tables are filled with dozens of options of bread, bags of fresh salad, meat, and a few sweet treat surprises. This is stop one of two for Northern Illinois Food Bank’s senior mobile pantry program in the area today.

Focuses on needs of seniors. Based on feedback from seniors who rely on the Food Bank’s network, senior mobiles are stocked with low-sodium items, smaller cuts of meat, and non-food products such as toilet paper and cleaning products.

Unlike traditional mobile pantries that distribute food directly from a truck outside, the senior mobiles typically follow a model where items are brought inside to a common room where the seniors already reside. “When you are 84 years old and you can’t drive anymore, a day like this can make all the difference,” said Guiette, a senior who benefits from the senior mobile pantry program. “When asked how the senior mobile helps seniors, Dyer says, “Seniors didn’t have the means to make it to our pantry,” said Bill Bich, director of Crystal Lake Food Pantry. “Now we are able to go out and bring it directly to them so they have a good selection of food directed toward their needs.”

“The idea of a senior mobile pantry came to fruition after discussions between Crystal Lake Food Pantry and the Food Bank. The pantry had dedicated senior-only hours, but realized it wasn’t making the impact it could for seniors in the community.”

Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Senior Mobile Pantry initiative is funded entirely by private donations. Find out how you can help support seniors in your community by contacting Hester Bury at hbury@northernillinoisfoodbank.org or 630-443-6910 ext. 124.
Communities rally to solve summer hunger

O
ne in five children in northern Illinois is at risk of hunger, and making sure these kids have access to nutritious food throughout the year is truly a community effort.

When the school year ends, so do the free and reduced-price school lunches that provide sustenance to children in need each school day. For these boys and girls, summer isn’t much fun if they’re hungry and their parents are struggling to stretch their budgets to provide as many as 10 extra meals each week per child.

Your support helps Northern Illinois Food Bank fill this gap through the Summer Meals Program, which provides breakfast, lunch and snacks at more than 110 sites across northern Illinois. Last year, more than 288,000 meals were served through the program at parks, churches, schools, libraries and other sites throughout the community.

Here are the stories of two community institutions working to make sure kids in Addison and Mundelein have the nutritious food they need to grow and thrive during the summer.

Churches come together to provide summer meals

Serving the community can take different forms, and seven different churches in the Mundelein community knew just what they needed to do. Pastor Kris Hewitt of the Ivanhoe Congregational Church of Mundelein brought together representatives from seven local churches of various denominations.

“After speaking with our Township Supervisor who runs a food pantry, she discussed the high demand in the summer for children that normally receive a free or reduced price lunch,” Kris said. The group decided to participate in Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Summer Meals Program by hosting summer meals at a park in Mundelein. Not knowing what to expect, they quickly realized the need was prevalent when children starting showing up each day. In the first year (Summer 2016), the program served 2,500 meals. In its second year, the group added a second site and served more than 4,000 meals.

“It is kind of a glimpse of heaven for people to come together,” Kris said. “We have more in common than difference. We are all there to serve hungry kids and the mission is our priority.”

Local businesses and community members have also started to take notice of what these churches are doing. Over 100 volunteers are part of the program each summer, many who weren’t aware hunger was an issue in the community.

While meals are the focal point with volunteers, the “Library Lady,” as the children affectionately call her, shows up to the site with books in English and Spanish that are sorted by grade and reading level. These are books that are out of circulation, but provide the children a chance at honing their reading skills during the summer.

“All of us believe that it is the job of the church to serve people, and it’s our conviction of faith,” Kris said. “We want to do something as simple as feeding a child. It’s a no-brainer, really.”

Library responds to needs of hungry kids

Books are a pathway to immerse yourself into an unfamiliar culture or travel to fantasy lands searching for buried treasure. These adventures often start at your local library.

However, the adventure is difficult if your only thought is about when you will eat next.

The Addison Public Library is across the street from a local school. Each day more than 100 children and teens walk through the doors to utilize the services offered there.

“We were essentially running an unofficial after school program for these kids,” said Elizabeth Lynch, teen services coordinator at the library.

Elizabeth and other staff members noticed something about the children; many were hungry and asking for snacks. Staff members would keep granola bars or other snacks at their desks to satisfy any requests, but they knew something more could be done to combat the issue.

After having a discussion with a colleague who had done something similar with another food bank, Lynch contacted Northern Illinois Food Bank to find out about how Addison Public Library could be part of the Summer and After-School Meal Programs.

The library became a summer meals site in 2015, serving more than 100 children each day and more than 4,000 total meals. Addison Public Library is one of more than 14 public libraries that participate in Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Summer Meals Program.

“We have seen the difference that it makes in the behaviors of kids hanging out after school and during the summer,” Elizabeth said. “They act calmer, are more focused, and I believe there is also an element of appreciation that we make this individual connection each day and create a mutual respect overall.”

The other component of the program is the use of teen volunteers. While there is always a trained staff member on-site, the teens are embracing their duties to the fullest.

“I saw a transformation in the teens that were involved,” she said. “Many became leaders and allowed this to become a defining experience.”

Before the program began, those involved in starting it didn’t realize the kind of impact it would have on the community as a whole and how the perception of the Library has been changed.

“We are still focused on literacy and civic engagement, but we came to recognize to do this successfully we needed to blend in programs like the Summer Food Service Program and partner with the Food Bank,” Elizabeth said.
For Eli Brottman, helping hungry neighbors proved to be the perfect way to spend the summer between his sophomore and junior year at St. Charles East High School. Along with eight other teenagers who took part in Northern Illinois Food Bank’s VolunTeen Youth Leadership Program last summer, Eli found himself immersed in day-to-day volunteer operations at the Food Bank’s West Suburban Center in Geneva. From helping in the warehouse to managing volunteer projects to eventually leading a volunteer orientation, the experience offered an up-close look at how the Food Bank provides food for 71,000 hungry neighbors each week.

“In addition to learning about the Food Bank, I’ve learned about the people it serves,” Eli said. “I never realized that the majority of people who rely on the Food Bank have a source of income but have to choose between paying for food and paying their bills. I saw how important this food is to them.”

The VolunTeen Program is open to high school students ages 16-18. During the nine-week program, VolunTeeners develop a wide range of skills, including customer service, leadership, public speaking, relationship building and problem solving. “Eli was excited to come to the Food Bank each day, and he not only wanted to be there on time, but he was pushing to get out of the house 20 minutes early,” said Francine Brottman, Eli’s mom. “It was a great growth experience. Eli learned a lot and he enjoyed it.”

The Food Bank launched its VolunTeen Program last summer and continued it throughout the school year with sessions in the fall and spring semesters. In total, more than 30 students have taken part.

The Food Bank is seeking participants in the VolunTeen Program for the upcoming summer session and 2016-17 school year. The program is available at each of the Food Bank’s centers in Geneva, Park City and Rockford. “We see our VolunTeeners as future leaders here at the Food Bank and beyond,” said Shawn Thompson, manager of volunteer programs at Northern Illinois Food Bank. “Their energy and eagerness to help are much appreciated, and we look forward to working with more dedicated teenagers as the program grows.”

VolunTeen Program

You matter to us

1. How did the name Team Terrific Tuesday come about? The same people kept showing up week after week, working hard and showing continued dedication so Tom Hong, Northern Illinois Food Bank retail relations liaison, gave the name to us.

2. What is the best project the team has been given? For us, the best thing we do each year is work on the annual Holiday Meal Box project.

3. Why is the continued support of Northern Illinois Food Bank important to the team? Otherwise Betty (longtime member of the group) wouldn’t have any friends. All joking aside, it’s actually because we are a team helping so many people in our area have a meal when they need it.

4. What are the top three memories the team has from volunteering? That’s easy. 1. Finding actual bananas in the banana boxes. 2. Bagging sweet potatoes. 3. Sorting and labeling version.
AROUND THE FOOD BANK

Thank you to the nearly 200 guests who attended A Cup of Hope: A Garden Tea to Solve Hunger in March at Hyatt Lodge-McDonald’s Campus in Oak Brook. This first-ever event hosted by the Executive Women’s Council of Northern Illinois Food Bank raised more than $35,500 to help the Food Bank provide nutritious food to our neighbors in need!

The Executive Women’s Council of Northern Illinois Food Bank hosted A Cup of Hope. For information about getting involved with the Women’s Council, contact Gina Gramarosso at 630-443-6910 ext. 130.

Join us!!
Don’t miss our upcoming Foodie 5Ks in Libertyville and Joliet.

More than 1,200 participants lined up to support the Foodie 5K at Cantigny Park.

Ten gourmet food trucks served up tasty options during the Foodie 5K post-race festival.

The first Foodie 5K of the season raised more than $110,000 to help hungry neighbors.

Participants at A Cup of Hope enjoyed sparkling wines, an extensive and descriptive selection of teas, scones, cakes, muffins, and assorted pastries while learning tips and the newest trends in gardening from guest speaker Katie D’Connor.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Foodie 5K presented by Meijer in April at Cantigny Park in Wheaton! Be sure to join us for our upcoming Foodie 5Ks in Libertyville and Joliet.

A CUP OF HOPE

Thank you to the nearly 200 guests who attended A Cup of Hope: A Garden Tea to Solve Hunger in March at Hyatt Lodge-McDonald’s Campus in Oak Brook. This first-ever event hosted by the Executive Women’s Council of Northern Illinois Food Bank raised more than $35,500 to help the Food Bank provide nutritious food to our neighbors in need!
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Send comments/questions about articles in this issue to bpettigrew@northernilfoodbank.org