Growing online food banking

Celebrating a year of reaching new neighbors every day

Providing food and hope in uncertain times

Food Bank increases operations to meet increased need due to COVID-19
Providing hope in an uncertain season

Dear Friends,

As the weather outside signals the change in seasons, I’m reminded that many families and individuals across Northern Illinois would normally be looking forward to relaxing vacations and countless outdoor activities heading into the summer months. This year, things are so very different.

As you know all too well, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are widespread and evolving daily. Every single one of us has been affected in one way or another. More than 36 million Americans have filed for unemployment, sending the national unemployment rate to its highest level since the Great Recession. Those who are still working may be furloughed, or face a reduction in hours. When schools across Northern Illinois were closed in March, thousands of local children lost easy access to school meal programs, leaving parents, many of whom were already struggling to make ends meet, with even more difficult budget choices.

Fortunately, generous supporters have stepped up during this uncertain time to help the Food Bank meet the urgent and rapidly increasing demand for food assistance. During the month of April, our distribution surpassed 7 million meals in response to the increasing need. We are grateful to our member agencies that have remained open and to our Food Bank program staff, who are providing more nutritious groceries to our neighbors than ever before.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading about your support in action for kids like Damien (page 3). His father Patrick is incredibly grateful for the help he’s found through the Food Bank’s online food pantry, My Pantry Express – one of the several programs we’ve expanded during this time in order to serve more neighbors.

Please know how grateful we are to YOU for helping us solve hunger for so many children, families and seniors across Northern Illinois during this challenging time. Our work has always depended on your generosity, through every season. Now, more than ever, it is clear that we’re all in this together.

With gratitude,

Julie Yurko
President & CEO

Northern Illinois Food Bank is working toward solving hunger in Northern Illinois for our neighbors in need. Look for the following icons throughout this issue of The Full Plate accompanying stories that highlight the five pillars of our strategic plan:

- Provide More Meals
- Ignite the Community
- Build Healthy Communities
- Strengthen Leadership
- Be Trusted Financial Stewards

Beauchamp Story

"We eat healthier," Patrick says. "Getting the nutrients he needs, I'm able to live and feel like a normal human being."

Making ends meet with My Pantry Express

Of ten, we don’t think about the unexpected – sometimes things happen without rhyme or reason. And sometimes, these things alter our lives in ways we never would’ve imagined. No one knows this better than Patrick, who we met last year.

Patrick’s son, Damien, is three years old and full of contagious energy, and meets everyone with a dimpled smile. When Damien came into his life, Patrick was working steadily and was excited to become a dad – it was something he’d always wanted.

Shortly thereafter, Patrick got sick. He underwent surgery, and afterwards simply couldn’t work anymore due to experiencing several health complications. Yet, he still had someone else to be responsible for – Damien.

“My son is my biggest worry,” Patrick shares. “My mother taught me two things growing up: as long as they’ve got a roof over their head and food in their belly, they’ll never know you’re broke. They’ll never know the stresses you’re going through.”

To make ends meet and ensure Damien has what he needs, Patrick uses every resource he can find, including local food pantries like the N.I.C.E. Center in Lee. That’s where he first learned of My Pantry Express (MPX) – a Food Bank program offering private, online food shopping and local pick-up at convenient locations and times for anyone in need.

He remembers his first experience with MPX well: “It went so smooth. It got delivered to my car, [and I] didn’t have to worry about walking or standing in lines which can be a challenge for me, finding a babysitter, or any of the other millions of reasons to [not visit] a pantry.”

Being able to choose which items to order also makes a big difference in the quality of food Patrick and Damien are eating. Some of their favorite grocery items to get through MPX include eggs, oatmeal, chicken, bottled water, and granola.

“We eat healthier,” Patrick says. “Getting the quality of food [from MPX], with the fiber and protein that we need, allows me to use my Link card for fresh fruits and vegetables.”

He shares that the program has allowed him the opportunity to normalize interactions with friends and family.

“You guys are giving me the opportunity to be able to live and feel like a normal human when people come over because I’m not scavenging for food,” he says. “I can have company and be able to afford to cook a hamburger for a friend. It’s made a big improvement in feeling comfortable around my family, being able to actually invite people over to have a meal.”

By combining the Link card with the groceries he gets from MPX, Patrick explains, he can stretch his SNAP benefits further throughout the month.

“Since I started this program, I haven’t run out of food – and I used to run out of food constantly,” Patrick says. “I promised myself I will never go through that again, now that I know programs like this are available. My son deserves to not have to go through that.”

MPX was created not only to reach new neighbors and remove the stigma from receiving food assistance, but to help neighbors like Patrick, for whom visiting a food pantry can be difficult. As we look to the future of the program, one thing is certain – we’ll continue working to ensure every neighbor has access to the foods they need and deserves.

For more about how you can support My Pantry Express, visit SolveHungerToday.org/MPX.
Northern Illinois Food Bank is dedicated to meeting neighbors in need where they are – and we know innovating and expanding our programs is necessary in order to accomplish that goal. That’s how we came up with My Pantry Express (MPX), an online food pantry that’s the first of its kind in the Feeding America network. MPX offers private, online food shopping and local pick-up at convenient locations and times to reach food-insecure individuals not currently accessing the charitable food network.

Originally conceived as a pilot program, the very first MPX distribution took place in February 2019. Since then, we’ve grown the program to nine distributions per week with pickup sites in three counties (DeKalb, Lake and Winnebago). In total, My Pantry Express fulfilled 10,755 orders, totaling more than 533,000 meals in its first year.

My Pantry Express is already turning heads nationally for innovation. The program won the People’s Choice award at the 18th annual Chicago Innovation Awards in October 2019. These prestigious awards celebrate the most innovative new products and services in the Chicago region across all organization sizes, sectors and industries. Additionally, the Food Bank received a $750,000 grant to support MPX through 2022 from the Walmart Foundation. The Food Bank was chosen as one of 11 grantees due to the program’s innovative approach to removing barriers and improving/creating access to healthy foods.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found this program was a great way to serve our neighbors during the pandemic. Although we changed the model to pre-packed boxes to accommodate the increased need, we more than doubled the number of families served each week. We look forward to returning to the original program model and continuing to innovate in the year ahead.

“I’m truly grateful for My Pantry Express – it helps make ends meet for my family.” – Crystal, Lake County

“No one should go hungry, and we’re happy to help meet their need.” – DeKalb County MPX volunteer

WHAT OUR NEIGHBORS HAVE TO SAY

“God bless you for meeting my family’s needs.” – Omotola, DeKalb County

“This is an amazing program, and I’m grateful for this help.” – Vicki, DeKalb County

Dorothy, Laurie and Gretchen are sisters who volunteer each week with the Food Bank’s My Pantry Express (MPX) program, which offers private, online food shopping and local pick-up options to help reach food-insecure neighbors not currently accessing the charitable food network. The sisters were three of our very first MPX volunteers, and have since attended multiple distributions each week to help run the on-site operations. Check out what they have to say!

1. How did you hear about MPX?
Through the Food Bank! Someone told Gretchen about the regular [food sorting and packing] shifts, and one day Dorothy went too. Then we were invited to a volunteer information session about MPX, and so we went. It was great!

2. What do you like most about this program?
We just love helping people. It’s so amazing, [and the people we serve] really appreciate it.

3. What do you want people to know about MPX?
The gratification is incredible. The people who come are so thankful for what everyone does: the volunteers who pack the groceries [at the Food Bank], the driver who delivers them, and us volunteers who put [the orders] in their cars. They always say thank you, and some even have tears in their eyes. And every time we’ve been there [at the pick-up site], we’ve had someone come up and ask about what we’re doing.

Each and every day, the work we do at the Food Bank is made possible by thousands of volunteers like Dorothy, Gretchen and Laurie – friends, families, coworkers and more – who donate their time and efforts toward solving hunger in Northern Illinois. We’re so grateful for you! Thank you for making sure every neighbor in need has access to nutritious food.

MPX 1st Anniversary

Expanding online food banking to serve more neighbors

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We’d like to recognize the major donors ($10,000+) whose support has enabled MPX to make a huge difference for our neighbors:

- Anonymous (4)
- Bayer Fund
- Mary Kathryn Black
- Nathaniel Carlson and Beth Woods
- The Christopher Family Foundation
- Michael and Emily Foley
- Mark and Rebecca Graf
- The Grainger Foundation
- Ideal Industries Foundation
- Jewel-Osco Foundation
- Joan Kelley
- Lake County Community Foundation
- Barbara Ann Steel Foundation
- UPS Foundation
- Walmart Foundation

We’d like to recognize the major donors ($10,000+) whose support has enabled MPX to make a huge difference for our neighbors:
Because the Food Bank has been deemed an essential business during the COVID-19 pandemic, and due to the unprecedented need of neighbors, we still need volunteers to help us sort, pack and distribute food!

In March, the Food Bank lowered the maximum volunteer capacity of shifts at all of our Centers to ensure we are following CDC recommendations and practicing social distancing during our volunteer shifts. Since that time, we’ve also required all volunteers to complete a Health Statement upon arrival to our Centers or at offsite distributions, and are asking they bring and wear a mask when volunteering at a Center or at a distribution site. The Food Bank is providing cloth masks as needed.

If you are healthy and want to get involved, please visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Volunteer for more info, or to sign up! There has never been a more impactful time to volunteer at the Food Bank!

Direct Service (Grocery Distribution) Opportunities

My Pantry Express
Currently available in DeKalb, Lake and Winnebago Counties only
Volunteers help ensure a welcoming experience for our neighbors while they pick up their groceries from a partner location in the community.

Winnebago Community Market (WCM)
Volunteers at WCM ensure a welcoming, positive experience for our neighbors by keeping the Market’s shelves stocked and assisting shoppers with their groceries.

Mobile Pantries*
Locations vary
Volunteers help ensure a welcoming, positive experience for our neighbors, and assist in distributing meat, produce and non-perishable foods from our traveling food pantry truck.

*Groups of 25+ must register by contacting the Volunteer Team at volunteer@northernilfoodbank.org or at 630-443-6910.
Upcoming Activities

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

22nd Annual Hunger Scramble
Tuesday, August 25 – 8:30 a.m.
Cantigny Golf, Wheaton

A fun, scramble-style outing, including on-course tastings, giveaways, and scenic views. You can expect some changes this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including tee times and a different post-round experience, but rest assured the event will be an enjoyable way to provide food for our neighbors in need. Visit www.solvehungetoday.org/golf for the most up-to-date event information and to register or to donate a silent auction or raffle item. Contact Chris Fisher at 630-443-6910 ext. 221 for questions or information regarding sponsorship opportunities.

Hunger Action Month
September

Help us celebrate Hunger Action Month with your family, friends and coworkers and save the date for the Pack-A-Thon nearest you! Be sure to also check out SolveHungerToday.org/HAM to stay up-to-date and learn how to get involved with our other Hunger Action Month events. Contact Teresa Schryver at tschryver@northernilfoodbank.org with any questions.

Friday, Sept. 4 | Geneva
Friday, Sept. 11 | Park City
Friday, Sept. 18 | Joliet
Friday, Sept. 25 | Rockford

A Taste That Matters – NOW VIRTUAL!
September, Date TBD

The Food Bank’s premiere event returns for a 9th year, but for the first time ever, will be a fully VIRTUAL event! Join us remotely for a fun and unique evening to raise funds for neighbors in need across Northern Illinois. To stay up to date on event details or purchase tickets, stay tuned to www.SolveHungerToday.org/ATasteThatMatters, or contact Chris Fisher at cfisher@northernilfoodbank.org, or at (630) 443-6910 ext. 221.