

INNOVATION, RESILIENCE, & HEART ACROSS THE REGIONAL EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK

■ Michelle Geoffroy, Agency Relations Manager

I'm responsible for maintaining relationships with the 173 food pantries and meal programs that receive food from The Food Bank. They must become members, which means meeting requirements of food safety, data collection and regular inspections. Members can also access opportunities to network with each other, apply for capacity building grants, and attend workshops.

A big part of our job in the Agency Relations Team is getting to know the people who run these member agencies. Let me tell you, these folks are amazing! For example, the program director at the Northampton Survival Center is super organized and can probably quote the Member Agency Handbook better than me. And the executive director of the Easthampton Community Center is a one-woman wonder who must have many extra hours in her day

than the rest of us — I don't know how else she can possibly do everything she does. We have members with great home delivery programs, others that offer vegan options, and many that are really great at creating a welcoming space for their guests.

Not only do we get to know our members' strengths, we also get to know their needs. We offer capacity-building grants to address critical needs like new fridges and shelving. During the pandemic, we also provided grants for tents and heaters for outdoor distribution, and new laptop computers to do contactless check-in or allow guests to place orders and schedule pickup appointments online. The resilience of our members has been truly astonishing throughout this pandemic — the ways they have stepped up to serve their neighbors in new and creative ways.

The Gray House in Springfield, for example, implemented a new barcode scanning system and a permanent outdoor distribution structure. They've grown to one of the largest food pantries in our network, serving 185% more people than they did in 2019.

Stone Soup Café in Greenfield serves a Saturday lunch with a fabulous vegan, gluten-free, and culturally-diverse menu. During the pandemic, the number of meals they provided more than doubled. They began offering takeout and online ordering as well as home delivery using a small army of volunteers. They also added a food pantry and "Community Free Store" to better serve their neighbors.

The Amherst Survival Center moved its meal distribution outside, and vastly expanded the number of people its pantry served by offering delivery to local housing complexes. Its staff and volunteers also initiated curbside pickup appointments that guests could book online. These additions have increased access to the pantry and become a permanent part of their service model.

The South Congregational Church in Pittsfield also started home delivery, and now serves more than 300 families each week. Our Community Food Pantry in Southwick and the Franklin Area Survival Center in Turners Falls began utilizing DoorDash for their home delivery. Through a generous partnership with The Food Bank, DoorDash has made their services available for free to Food Bank members. This partnership has resulted in over 1,600 deliveries to neighbors facing food insecurity since June of 2021.

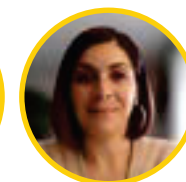
At great peril to their staff and volunteers' health and safety, our members did all this tremendous work because they are dedicated to making sure their neighbors have enough healthy food to eat.

It's my honor and privilege to work with my colleagues to support our members in our shared mission to feed our neighbors in need. I have never been prouder of them than during these last two years. They have persevered, innovated, and adapted, buoyed by their resilience, and above all, their tremendous hearts.

IN PARTNERSHIP,



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