



FOOD Matters

SPRING 2020

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An Update from the Executive Director

A year ago I wrote to you as the newly named Executive Director of the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. I was excited, honored and more than a little intimidated by the opportunity I had recently accepted. One year later, I remain excited and honored, and only a little less intimidated.

But I have been through the cycle of a food bank year and, while I still have much to learn, I know far more than I did then. I am indebted to the staff, who have accepted the challenge to make the world a little bit better every day by feeding people who need food. They have been a great help to me and have patiently answered – sometimes repeatedly – my questions as I strived to learn.

One major accomplishment this year was the drafting of a strategic plan for the next three years. (You can read more about the goals of the plan in an article in this newsletter.) The strategic planning process is critically important to the success of any organization. You simply will not get where you say you want to go without a clear plan for getting there. I am excited about the plan and ready to implement once our board approves it.



I am especially grateful to each of you. Your commitment to our mission and vision through volunteer service, food donations, and financial support is humbling. You have painted bowls for Empty Bowl and attended the luncheon; you have led teams for Hunger Bowl; you have bought tickets to Will Rock for Food; you have been faithful monthly, quarterly or yearly – have told people why you support the Food Bank and encouraged them to do the same. On behalf of the board and staff of the Food Bank, thank you!

Chuck Toney
Executive Director

Giving Back After Recovery

“I did everything right, you know, the way they tell you you’re supposed to,” says Ellen. The former nurse describes her job as an RN, her savings account, her daughter’s college account, even her excellent credit score. “I don’t know what else I was supposed to do,” she says “I did everything right.”

It’s a story that is all too common – an unexpected hardship, the scramble to fix things, an empty pantry. Ellen is like millions of Americans who must find another way to survive when times get tough. Forbes recently reported that 78% of U.S. workers are living paycheck to paycheck, meaning that just one month out of work can mean serious hardship for more than one-third of Americans. “It’s easy to think it can’t happen to you, that you’ve got a cushion, that you’ve prepared and that you’re safe, but it can happen because I used to think that and it happened to me,” she says.

Ellen worked as a nurse for 15 years, in the Intensive Care Unit of a hospital and loved what she did. She had a daughter, Samantha, who had just turned 15 and a dog, Lexi. She had been raising her daughter as a single parent since Samantha was seven when her husband John passed away unexpectedly. “It was hard without John, there were some growing pains, but we were making it work,” she recalls “I’m not saying things were easy, but they weren’t impossible, because John and I had planned for if things went wrong, and then after things did go wrong I kept planning because I knew better than most that things could go wrong.”

In December 2013, Ellen finished her shift at the hospital and sent a quick text to Samantha to let her know she would be home soon. Ellen got into her car and started driving home. “I woke up in the ICU, the same one I worked in, and they told me someone hit me head-on,” she says. “I didn’t know how bad it

was; I assumed I would be back up and working in a few weeks.” Ellen suffered a traumatic brain injury as a result of her accident and a spinal fracture, causing serious and permanent nerve damage. It quickly became apparent that Ellen would not be returning to work. “It takes you a long time to put away savings, but no time at all to drain it to nothing.”

Over the course of a few short months Ellen and Samantha became two of the 39.7 million Americans living in poverty and Samantha became one of the 20.4% of food-insecure children in our service area. “I had to put my pride aside. It’s not always easy asking for something from someone else, but Samantha having food on the table was more important than my pride.” So, Ellen called the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. “I talked to the receptionist and he helped me find the closest mobile food pantry to me and then I went. I needed it and I don’t know what I would have done without it. There was no food without it.”

Ellen became a regular at the mobile food pantry. She went when she and Samantha simply could not get by any other way; she went while Samantha finished school; she went while she finished two years of physical therapy; she went until she felt she would be okay without it. “I’m a hard worker, and once I finished physical therapy I found a job as soon as I could. I work in a doctors office now since it’s less time on my feet.” Ellen doesn’t use the Food Bank anymore, but she does make sure to set aside some time to go volunteer at the mobile food pantry where she used to receive food.

“I make sure to volunteer whenever I can. I want to give some of the people there hope. You have to keep hope. If you have almost nothing else you always have hope so you have to hold onto it, and that is what the Food Bank does, it helps us hold on to hope.”



Food 2 Kids

The largest, and most popular, childhood nutrition program that we have at the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia is our Food 2 Kids program. There are more than 1,500 children participating in this program every week across an 11-county area. The program works by delivering bags each week to schools for students by utilizing a team of volunteers. The children receiving bags are identified by their school as food insecure, meaning they may not know where their next meal is coming from, and are given the bags to bring home over the weekend. Each bag contains approximately 6.2 pounds of food and provides breakfast, lunch, and dinner for each day of the weekend plus one snack per day. The meals in the bags are designed to be nutritious, easy to prepare, and child-friendly. The Food 2 Kids program is currently looking to expand, as there are still children on the waiting list.



Bringing Fresh Food to the Community

At the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia we have been working hard on being the best organization we can for our community, and this year we have made a big change toward improving ourselves. We have decided to increase the amount of our fresh produce into distribution to aid in two large efforts: the health of our community, and the reduction of food waste.

Health is directly correlated to the quality of food that we put into our bodies. It is important that we not only provide food to people who need it but that the food we provide is healthful and nutritious. In order to do this, we have increased the fresh produce that is coming through our door and going out to our community. Our goal with this new effort has been to increase the fresh produce coming through our doors by 100,000 pounds and six months in we are well on our way.

We have been able to make this increase by focusing more of our time and resources into produce through the hiring of a Food Procurement Specialist. They have been working hard to bring in healthful food through a mixture of food drives, donations from retail grocery stores, and building relationships with farms.

Grocery stores and food service businesses waste about 40% of their food on average, and part of our effort has been to reduce this waste. We are working alongside grocery stores, restaurants, and businesses in an effort to reduce food waste while simultaneously distributing the food to those in need in our community.

Hunger Bowl 2019

The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia held our 8th annual Hunger Bowl in November. The event kicked off on October 24th at the Graduate Athens, with a breakfast sponsored by the Graduate. **This year a total of 59 teams participated, collecting 395,773 pounds of food during the two-week event.**



ATHENS WINNERS

Total Pounds Collected
Athens Christian School

Total Pounds Per person
SBG Athens

Wee Business
Stockman Oil

Small Business
Classic City Orthodontics

Medium Business
GA Center for Sight

Large Business
Cable East

Grand Business
Caterpillar

Apartment Complex
755 Broad

Church/Religious
Our Hope Metropolitan
Community Church

UGA WINNERS

Total Pounds Collected
UGA Housing

Total Pounds Per Person
UGA Franklin College Arts & Sciences

Small Group
UGA Finance & Administrative Group

Medium Group
The State Botanical Garden of Georgia

Large Group
UGA EITS

Grand Group
GA Center for Continuing Education

RABUN WINNERS

Overall winner
Rabun County Elementary

Overall winner pounds per person
Rabun County Library

In-School Food Pantries

Constantly thinking of innovative ways to make sure everyone is getting the food that they need is a big job here at the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia. In the past few years a new program, In-School Food Pantries, was started in an effort to target a portion of the population that we feel was not properly served, high-school-aged students.

In order to make sure that these students are getting the food and hygiene supplies they need we have partnered with local sponsoring agencies to bring In-School Food Pantries into schools. These pantries stay in one location within the school and allow students to gather food and supplies to bring home with them so that they know where their next meal is coming from. High-school-aged students are counted as part of the 20.4% of food-insecure children in our service area, so making sure their needs are met is important.

Food Bank Develops Strategic Plan for the Next Three Years

During the last half of 2019, a committee of 13 Food Bank board members, staff and donors drafted a strategic plan to guide the operation of the Food Bank through the fiscal year 2022. Led by facilitators from the Fanning Institute of Leadership at the University of Georgia and with input from community stakeholders, focus groups and email surveys of employees and agencies, the committee went through a series of exercises to create goals for the Food Bank. Each goal is accompanied by a responsible party, a timeline, and accountability measures.

"This plan is a great foundation for the Food Bank to build on," said Bobby Erwin, past chair of the board. "I think our new strategic plan will create an excitement in our service area that will help us be the best a Food Bank can be."

Once approved by the board, the plan will be implemented immediately.

"I am truly excited about the strategic plan and eager to begin implementation," said Executive Director, Chuck Toney. "I am grateful to the members of the committee for their time and valuable contributions to this process, and to the members of the community and our partner agencies who participated. Great days are ahead for the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia!"

The five goals of the plan are:

- Enhance programs and services to serve more people
- Diversify resources and fund development
- Educate the broader community
- Build capacity for partner agencies
- Improve food management

The committee also drafted a new vision statement, mission statement, and values. Those will be announced after approval by the board.

It is easier than ever to get involved!

To donate funds please visit the Food Bank's website at Foodbanknega.org; to donate food, please visit our Athens or Clayton locations; and to donate time email volunteers@foodbanknega.org. Help us make this a great year for all of our friends, families, and neighbors.

Corporate and Community Sponsors



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Vision

Creating a community where no neighbor experiences hunger.

Mission Statement

Empowering our community to target the root causes of hunger by providing healthy food, nutrition education, and innovative distribution methods.

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