



Students at Oakland Beach Elementary in Warwick learn to love their veggies in a Healthy Habits class. Oakland Beach is also the site of one of our school food pantries.

Prioritizing Families with Children

According to the Food Bank's 2023 StatusReport on Hunger in Rhode Island, 38% of households with at least one child don't have adequate food to feed their families. The Food Bank has programs in place to help ensure kids are getting the nutrition they need.

Healthy Habits: Eating Well on a Budget brings practical, science-based nutrition education to guests at our member agencies, helping them to make healthy choices for themselves and their families. Healthy Habits'

preschool curriculum focuses on trying new foods with class mascot, 'Lana the Iguana,' while older kids learn practical kitchen skills and how to build life-long healthy habits.

"Healthy Habits is an amazing program that I'll continue to utilize every year. My students love it and find it fun and engaging. With childhood obesity and diabetes on the rise, it is important for the kids to learn at a young age what is healthy for them." — Lonna Razza, Oakland Beach Elementary School.

(continue on page 2)

You Support Seniors Struggling with High Food Costs

Julia and Maria are neighbors, friends, and one another's chosen family. We met the duo at Food Bank member agency Connecting for Children and Families in Woonsocket.

Maria moved here just five years ago after retiring from her work as a police officer, so she now relies on Social Security. Julia and her family have lived in the area since 2008 and she receives disability benefits.

"Prices are so high," Maria shared.

In a lively conversation through a translator, the friends shared that **since prices for food have remained elevated, it's difficult to afford healthy groceries on a fixed income.** At the pantry, the women both selected eggplant – an example of



Neighbors and friends Julia and Maria pause on a visit to Connecting for Children and Families in Woonsocket.

a healthy food they wouldn't be able to afford to buy at the store.

The friends expressed their gratitude for the community of support they have at the agency – and in you. Thank you for partnering with the Food Bank and our agencies to make sure Rhode Islanders of all ages have nutritious food on the table and hope for tomorrow.

(continued from page 1)



Kids Cafe provides healthy evening meals to children at risk of hunger at four after-school programs, including the Boys & Girls Club of East Providence, the

Pawtucket YMCA, the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket and Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls. Over the last year, these sites have seen an increase in the number of meals served, with Kids Cafe providing between 400-500 meals daily.

"The resource the Food Bank provides to our families through Kids Cafe is a wonderful

opportunity for our kids to not only get a nutritious meal, but to try new foods they wouldn't otherwise." — Zach Handleman
Childcare Director, Camp Director at the East Providence Boys & Girls Club.

Meals4Kids Boxes provide five healthy breakfasts, lunches, and snacks including things like boxed macaroni and cheese, soups, cereals, oatmeal and milk. These boxes help fill the gaps during times when students are not receiving school meals, ensuring year-round nutrition. Our agencies love to have the boxes on hand.

"Healthy food is a right – not a privilege – for every child. These boxes are meeting the need of every child we serve." — Jackie Reyes,
Olneyville Food Center.

St. Martin de Porres Senior Center Food Pantry

St. Martin de Porres Senior Center in Providence provides critical social services to seniors — including a food pantry and meal site. It's there that we met Valerie, a grandmother of nine grandchildren who understands the importance of stretching her limited budget. She and her husband rely on their pension and Social Security income to pay the bills.

"It's hard to live off a fixed income. I make it stretch by being really frugal," Valerie shares. "They help me out here. I used to volunteer at a food pantry and I like being around my people, in my neighborhood, and helping others."

Linda is the multi-service director at the senior center. "I grew up the oldest of 13," Linda says. "Things were really tough. So, when I see people out there struggling, it hits home."

The food pantry typically serves over 500 guests a month — up from around 25 people a month before the pandemic. Many guests are unhoused, or like Valerie, on a fixed income. In addition to pantry items, the agency offers clothes and personal care items to foster dignity in its guests. Healthy breakfasts and lunches are also served at the meal site and Food Bank SNAP Outreach team members assist guests in applying for SNAP benefits.

Linda shares that many food pantry guests are of Haitian, West African and Middle Eastern heritage.



Valerie, a guest at St. Martin de Porres at left, with Linda, the program's director, at right.

Your gifts not only help provide healthy food for guests, but also food that meets the dietary needs of many diverse communities.

"Without the support of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, we couldn't do what we're doing here," Linda says. "We appreciate it so much, and I know the community really appreciates it too."



Help Advocate for Free School Meals

During the pandemic, Congress allowed schools to provide breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. When federal support for this program ended in 2022, schools in Rhode Island returned to a tiered fee system, charging parents for school meals based on their household income. But many of the families who didn't qualify for free meals struggled to pay the fee, resulting in kids going without.

This year, the Food Bank is once again part of a coalition advocating for Rhode Island to bring back free school meals for all. To follow our progress and show your support to our legislators, visit www.rifoodbank.org/advocate-for-change.

Lacey sorts through bread options at the pantry at WestBay Community Action Program in Warwick.

When a Full-Time Job Isn't Enough

When COVID hit in 2020, Lacey was working in the medical field and expecting her third child. Not wanting to endanger her baby by continuing to work in the hospital setting, Lacey gave up her role as a CNA.

The family had to rely on her husband's full-time income at the Port of Providence, plus the enhanced SNAP benefits they received throughout the pandemic.

Now, her youngest child is three and Lacey continues to stay at home with her kids because the cost of daycare far outpaces what she would make going to work. "We don't qualify for SNAP anymore," Lacey shares.

"My husband doesn't make a lot, but it's a little more than the [SNAP] income guidelines allow."

I don't know how they expect us to do it. When we were getting SNAP during COVID, it was so helpful."

Lacey and her husband find themselves in a position faced by many Rhode Island families – they have a steady income, but it's not enough to offset the increasingly high costs of rent, food, utilities and childcare. That's why the family is so grateful for your generosity that allows them to turn to the pantry at WestBay Community Action Program in Warwick for extra help with food.

"Inflation has been hard," Lacey says. "The prices of everything are absolutely insane. But the pantry provides good, nutritious food and it helps with the grocery bills – one less thing to worry about."



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