

March 2023

Impact Report



RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK



The Food Bank's Chef Nahami helps prepare upwards of 400 meals a day for our Kids Cafe program, including these gorgeous salads made with locally grown greens. Learn more about Kids Cafe on page 3.

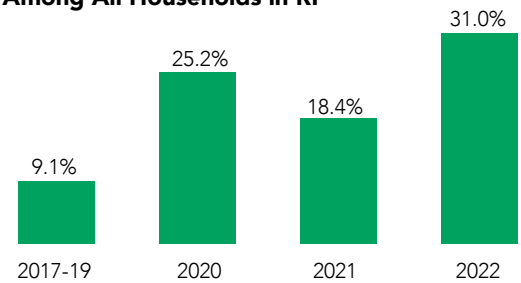
Inflation, Benefit Cuts Worsen Food Insecurity

One in three Rhode Island families struggle to put food on the table

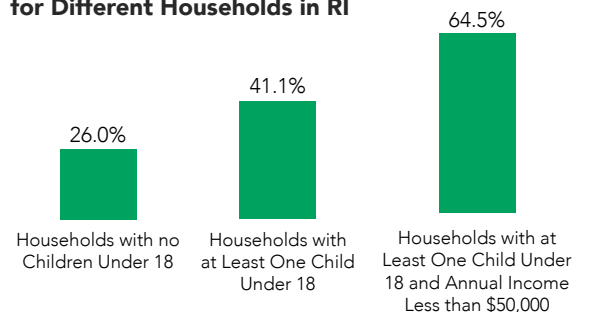
Rhode Islanders are struggling to feed their families at a higher rate than at the height of the pandemic, due to inflation and the elimination of many federal COVID-19 emergency benefits. 31% of households in our state are unable to afford adequate food. And for households with at least one child, that number grows to 41%, according to the *Food Bank's 2022 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island*. Soaring food prices continue to burden those still recovering from the economic effects of COVID-19, with the risk of hunger highest for low-income families with children and communities of color. The study also highlighted the growing demand for food assistance, with an average of 63,000 people per month served by member agencies of the Food Bank in 2022 – 20% more than the previous year.

In January of this year, the federal government announced that the additional SNAP benefits that eligible recipients were receiving since March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 emergency would end in February. Beginning in March 2023, approximately 85,000 households experienced a cut in SNAP benefits of \$153 per month on average. The Food Bank is concerned that this will further increase need at a time when so many families continue to struggle.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among All Households in RI



Prevalence of Food Insecurity for Different Households in RI



Hold your phone's camera over this QR code and click the link on screen to view our 2022 Status Report.

Food and Community at St. Robert's Food Closet

Johnston pantry guests tell their stories

After Donna's husband, who was the breadwinner of the family, passed away five years ago, she and her son moved in with her mom. Things were tight. The family's SNAP benefits weren't getting them through even the first two weeks of the month and although Donna had a part-time job, it was tough to make it all work.

Donna started visiting St. Robert's Church Food Closet in Johnston at the recommendation of a friend. "I didn't think I could come here because I had a job," she said. "But they told me, if you're in need, you're in need."

St. Robert's is one of the Food Bank's 140 member agencies that together serve 63,000 people like Donna across Rhode Island every month. She visits St. Robert's for ingredients for their favorite dishes, like pasta with peas, plus essentials like shampoo and toothpaste. Being able to find these items at the pantry means one less worry for Donna and her family.

Suzanne, another guest, echoes her sentiments. "Things are so expensive today — the inflation is awful," she said. But you have to make the best of what you have." Suzanne also lives with her elderly mom and relies on the pantry for expensive necessities like adult diapers and other care items. "Every little bit helps."

Philly, who also visits St. Robert's, was injured in a serious accident that made her unable to work, and she relies on disability, which doesn't quite cover her monthly expenses. She's careful to plan her month around her food needs, leveraging her benefits and the support of the pantry. "I wouldn't make it through the month if I didn't come here."

Suzanne picks up necessities for herself and her mom at the pantry.



St. Robert's Church Food Closet

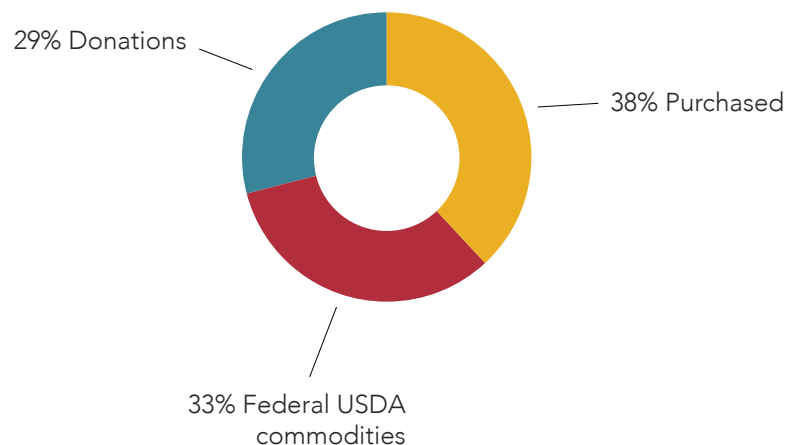
Food Acquisition Strategy Evolves to Meet Demand

The Food Bank stretches your donated dollar further

As inflation takes its toll on Rhode Islanders, the Food Bank continues to evolve to better meet the demand for assistance. In recent years, more food has come from Federal USDA commodities and from purchasing, than is donated from retailers, producers, distributors and the public.

The Food Bank can stretch a donated dollar much further than the average consumer by purchasing food by the truckload from wholesalers and distributors. We purchase more than one third of the food we distribute. Financial support from donors enables us to source the foods most in demand at a lower cost, including fresh, local produce and culturally relevant foods such as avocados, plantains, bok choy and yuca.

2022 Sources of Food





The Kids Cafe meals at the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket are kid-approved!

New Pawtucket Kids Cafe Fosters Healthy Eating Habits

Fourth meal site opens to serve kids in need

It was a busy, bustling day at the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket when we caught up with Cherima Folston, director of operations for the Club. Folston oversees the new Kids Cafe after-school meal program, run by the Food Bank, which serves healthy evening meals to children at risk of hunger. The Food Bank currently operates Kids Cafe at four sites—the Boys & Girls Club of East Providence, the Pawtucket Family YMCA, the Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls, and as of October 2022, the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket. In a time when 41% of households with children are experiencing food insecurity, having at least one meal guaranteed is important to parents.

Folston explained that Kids Cafe was a natural fit for the club. Each child gets a fresh, healthy meal designed to encourage them to try new foods — especially fruits and vegetables. Kids vote for the meals they like and select favorites for the next month’s menu. The Food Bank’s team visits each site five times a year with age-appropriate nutrition education activities to help expand even the pickiest eaters’ palates.

“The food is really good quality,” Folston shared. “And when our staff eats with the kids, it encourages them to try new foods and provides a sense of community.”

The Kids Cafe program at the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket serves more than 100 meals a day, Monday through Friday, to children who come from predominantly low-income families. When asked what the kids thought of the food, Zory shared, “The pasta slaps,” while Faith said the muffins were “bussin’.” Folston tells us that all means “really good!”

Community Outreach Team Helps Pantry Guests Access More Services

From SNAP Assistance to Other Critical Needs

Our Community Outreach team visits agencies across the state each month to assist guests who may be eligible for SNAP benefits. Making upwards of 20 visits a month, the team frequently hears from our member agencies about other challenges guests face, in addition to food insecurity.

“It’s all about developing relationships with our agencies so we can help them respond to the needs of their guests,” shared Jacob Tonseth, the Food Bank’s community resource coordinator.

Recent referrals made at agencies have included helping guests find no or low-cost treatment for chronic medical conditions, assisting veterans in applying for services at the VA, and helping gather documentation and answering questions about heating assistance and Section 8 housing.

Kathryn, a guest of the Jonnycake Center in Westerly, had an error on her SNAP paperwork that prevented her from receiving the benefits for which she was eligible for nearly a year. Our outreach team was able to help Kathryn correct the error in her paperwork, refile for SNAP benefits going forward and connect her with Rhode Island Legal Services, which helped her get the back benefits she was owed.

“You went the distance to understand, do what was necessary and to take action,” wrote Kathryn in a thank you note to the team. “You made a big difference with all this and I’m very fortunate to have had your help.”



Community resource coordinator, Jacob Tonseth was available to assist guests at the St. Joseph pantry and meal site in Newport.

Free School Meals for All Campaign

For two years during the pandemic, public schools received federal funds to provide lunch and breakfast to all students free of charge. Several New England states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont, have continued this program with state funding after the federal mandate ended in September 2022. This has ensured that their students have access to the nutritious food necessary for good health and academic

achievement. In Rhode Island, students must once again pay for school meals based on household income, despite 41% of households with children facing food insecurity.

The Food Bank is working in coalition with other advocates to pass a bill that would create a free school meals program for all Rhode Island students for the 2023—2024 school year. Please visit www.rifoodbank.org/advocate to learn more and see how you can support this campaign.

Helping our Agencies Stock their Shelves with Healthy Options

Member agencies pick the foods most in demand in their communities

Increased costs for just about everything mean that many families spend through their grocery budgets sooner and rely on the Food Bank's network of food pantries for more of the staples on their tables. Recently, we talked to Jose De Barros, director of St. John the Baptist Food Pantry in Pawtucket, and Arthur, a pantry volunteer who came to pick up the pantry's food order.

Guests at St. John the Baptist, which serves more than 400 people a month, frequently look for what the Food Bank calls "core foods," items that they can use to create nutritious meals. The pantry receives regular food deliveries, but De Barros will also come see what's available in more limited quantity at the Food Bank. This time, he selected carrots, potatoes and onions, plus apples, green peppers, salad greens and jalapenos.

"It helps a lot," De Barros said. "I'm trying to rebuild our supplies — the food leaves the shelves so quickly now."



Arthur, a St. John the Baptist volunteer, at front, and pantry director Jose De Barros, pick up an order at the Food Bank



Save the Date: Truck Stop Returns!

Thursday, June 1, 2023 at the Food Bank

Mark your calendar! Last year, this signature event raised nearly \$200,000 to help provide Rhode Islanders in need with healthy, nutritious food. The event includes unlimited tasty bites from more than 20 food trucks, a cash bar, music and fun! Keep an eye out for tickets to go on sale soon.



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