



A Supportive Environment Gives Jessica Hope for Tomorrow The CCAP Pantry Fills in the Gaps for a Health-Conscious Mom

We met Cranston resident Jessica, a single mom to a sweet 5-year-old, on a recent visit to the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) in Cranston. Jessica is disabled and knows her diet impacts her overall health. She eats primarily vegetarian, focusing on fruits and vegetables, beans, and protein pastas – most of which she can find at the pantry. Jessica makes sourdough bread and grows tomatoes, zucchini, and peppers. Leaning on the pantry and growing her own food is part of a conscious effort to maintain a healthy lifestyle for her and her daughter, despite financial challenges.

“Becoming disabled has impacted my world on multiple levels. But being able to come to the pantry without judgment is encouraging. This is my situation today, but it’s not indicative of tomorrow.”

Increases to Jessica’s property taxes and insurance have meant that her mortgage has gone up by \$700 a month. And while she receives support through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, her SNAP benefits have been reduced by \$70 a month in the latest round of changes to benefit eligibility. These financial pressures often force her to make difficult choices between essential bills and food.

Jessica feels that supporting the work of the Food Bank and its member agencies is an investment in the future, especially for families with children. “People are not trying to exploit the system, they’re genuinely in need. A welcoming atmosphere makes sure people get the help they need.”



Reducing Food Waste One Meal at a Time



Chef Ron Lewis, production chef on our community kitchen team, at our composting bins

This spring, the Food Bank took an important step toward greater sustainability by partnering with Black Earth Compost to divert food waste from our commercial kitchen through composting.

The chefs for our Kids Cafe program proudly make nutritious dinners from scratch for more than 400 students. The meals are served Monday through Friday at three after-school programs spanning the state. And now, the waste from the creation of those meals is being turned into nutrient-rich soil.

“Composting in our kitchen is an important extension of our mission. It ensures that even what we don’t serve still nourishes our community,” said Yesenia Barnier, the Food Bank’s director of community nutrition. **“By turning food scraps into soil instead of waste, we model for our youth that every resource has value, every action has impact, and caring for our environment is part of caring for each other.”**

One of our Kids Cafe sites, the Segue Institute for Learning, has already been composting its kitchen scraps. In the future, we look forward to launching composting programs at all of our Kids Cafe meal sites.



IMPACT: We diverted 4,600 pounds of food waste from the landfill in our first 3 months alone. The Food Bank is expected to divert nearly 20,000 pounds in its first year.

Senior Box Pilot Feeds More Older Adults

For over ten years, the Food Bank has administered the federal Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for income-qualified Rhode Island seniors. The USDA provides monthly commodity food boxes to 2,000 seniors a month, which we distribute at low-income housing and senior centers. The program currently has a wait list of over 400 individuals.

With 5% of Rhode Island seniors living in food insecure households and a lengthy wait list for CSFP, the Food Bank is piloting its own senior box program, funded by our donors, to help even more seniors.

“What’s inside a CSFP box is dictated by the federal government, and cannot be changed, even with input from our guests,” shared Jen Tomassini, the Food Bank’s chief operating officer. “We gathered targeted feedback to ensure that our senior boxes include foods our guests want.”

The Food Bank is working with Rhode Island’s Office of Healthy Aging to identify senior housing sites and senior centers in key geographic areas that are unserved by CSFP.

The Food Bank expects to distribute at least 12,000 senior boxes in FY27 as part of the pilot.



What’s in the Box?

- Canned fruits & vegetables
- Canned chicken, tuna or salmon
- Beans
- Pasta, macaroni & cheese, or rice
- Pasta sauce
- Stew or chili
- Peanut butter
- Crackers
- Pudding or jello
- Coffee



IMPACT: An additional 1,000 older adults per month will receive the nutrition they need.



Our community advisory group is made up of guests from across our network of food pantries. While group members preferred not to be identified, they come from various backgrounds.

Participants	Children	Employment	Disability	Cultures
Twelve women ranging in age from 30 to 60+	The women have 23 children between them	Most of the group is employed, with 3 working as CNAs	Two receive disability assistance	Dominican, Mexican American, and African communities represented

Focus Groups Help Us Pinpoint Our Guests’ Most Pressing Challenges

Centering the Voices of Those We Serve

A guiding principle of our work is centering the experiences of those we, and our network of food pantries and meal sites, have the honor to serve.

In 2026, we formed our first community advisory group to better understand the challenges our neighbors are facing, to elevate their voices in conversations about food insecurity, and ultimately to shape and influence our services, programs and work.

Led by director of community outreach, Lihna Agostini, and chief operating officer, Jen Tomassini, input from the group has helped us remain focused on food access and equity, while understanding some of the underlying causes of poverty and hunger.

“One of my biggest takeaways from this process has been that we have more in common than we have differences,” shared Tomassini. “People are people. Mothers are mothers, no matter where they come from, or what challenges they might be facing in the moment.”

Among the biggest concerns across the group:

- **Housing:** Finding housing that is both safe and affordable is a universal challenge.
- **Education and Job Training:** Group members remarked on the lack of access to education and training for Spanish speakers.
- **Children’s Healthcare:** Moms agreed there is a need for more resources addressing serious health concerns for their kids, such as lead exposure, dyslexia and ADHD.

In July, advisory group members wrote a series of letters to their legislators sharing their voice on issues that many resourced-challenged Rhode Islanders are facing.

“I have learned that advocating for myself is how I move forward,” shared one member of the group. “As a community, we should be supporting each other instead of always relying on people in power to be our voice.”

“My Life Had a Different Trajectory”

When a Diagnosis Changes Everything

Nick was a full-time commercial truck driver making a decent wage when his partner of 32 years was diagnosed with cancer. Then everything changed. She couldn't work because of her surgeries, and he put driving on hold to become a caregiver. Since then, he's picked up part-time work where he can be close to home in case of an emergency, but the change in pay has been difficult to manage.

We met Nick at the Jonnycake Center for Hope in Westerly, where he visits a couple times a month to stock up on fresh staples like milk and eggs, as well as pantry basics that he can stretch, like cereal and mac and cheese.

“Because I'm not working full-time, I fall into a certain demographic now,” Nick says. “My life had a different trajectory – I've even donated to the Food Bank before. But I wound up being on the other side of things where suddenly this pantry helped.”

Nick says Food Bank member agencies like Jonnycake are a lifesaver. He keeps his visits to a minimum, but he appreciates that he can choose what he wants off the pantry shelves. “Life is adapting to the changes you're constantly faced with.”



We walk with Nick through Jonnycake, while he picks out fresh fruits and vegetables.



IMPACT: Guests have the support they need to weather their current circumstances.

A Career Built on Purpose

Chief Philanthropy Officer Dana DiMarco Reflects on Year One at the Food Bank



Dana DiMarco,
Chief Philanthropy Officer

This October marks one year since **Dana DiMarco** joined the Food Bank as **chief philanthropy officer**, the latest chapter in a 30-year career built on curiosity and purpose.

DiMarco's time in the nonprofit space has enabled her to understand the work from every angle, with roles in national organizations, at smaller organizations immersed in social services, as well as at a major fundraising software provider, where she built a deep understanding of data. This range is part of what drew DiMarco, who lives in Warwick, to the Food Bank. “**This organization's work is not just food distribution: it's policy, partnerships, data, systems, and people, all working together,**” she remarked, “**And it felt like a place where everything I've learned could be put to use in a more impactful way.**”

With a year under her belt, DiMarco says what has struck her the most is the scale of the need, *and* of the response. “Food insecurity touches every community and demographic,” she said. “I've been blown away by the scale and efficiency of the Food Bank's response.”

Visits with agency partners across the state have only amplified that sense of scale. “You realize just how essential, and how real, this network is,” she recalled. But for DiMarco, the mission of the Food Bank comes back to something simpler. “At its core, it's about dignity,” she said. “No one should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from.”



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