



Harry Chapin Food Bank
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Notes from Harry

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SERVING CHARLOTTE, COLLIER, GLADES, HENDRY AND LEE COUNTIES

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Things Rarely Go According to Plan

As a fifth-grade teacher, Carleen knows that you can create the perfect lesson on paper, but things rarely go according to plan. A good teacher learns not to panic and how to ease back toward the lesson at hand.

Carleen is just one of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of new faces that the pandemic has pushed to our distribution lines over the past six months.

For Carleen and her family, life has been a six-month struggle to keep moving forward through the challenges of the pandemic.

In the early days, Carleen pooled all of her resources so she could continue supporting her two children, as well as her parents. She kept calm and quickly transitioned her lessons to online learning. Things began to go sideways when restaurants, businesses, and her children's activities started closing their doors. Social distancing restrictions forced Carleen to give up her second job as a private tutor. She tightened her strained budget even more, but she could see that it wasn't going to be enough.

Carleen always encourages her students to ask for help if they need it. Though her pride told her to tough it out, she knew she needed to reach out and accept the help of others.

When Carleen pulled into our drive-thru distribution in late March, her ten-year-old son, Dustin, and five-year-old daughter, Jamielyn, were with her. It was the first time the family had ever been in line for food—an experience that became a life lesson in humility and gratitude. As the volunteer finished loading food into their car, Dustin shouted out his heartfelt thanks from the window. At that moment, Carleen knew she'd made the right choice for her family.

Life is by no means back to normal for Carleen's family, but they are managing each day as it comes. She swears she'll never forget the kindness and compassion they received and hopes to one day give back to those who were there for her family.

While we are continually refining and expanding our response to the pandemic, we know that we have a long way to go. In the meantime, we will be here for families like Carleen's and will heed the advice of Carleen's son, Dustin, who told us that when things start getting hard, "the key is not to panic." It sure sounds like Dustin would make a great fifth-grade teacher one day. ■



Together, We're Making a Difference

Harry Chapin Food Bank continues to do everything in its power to ensure that no one will go hungry, especially during this unprecedented pandemic. We are working tirelessly to meet increasing demands, shifting food resources and overcoming logistical challenges. Yet, there is much to celebrate. We couldn't face this crisis without the help of our community—thank you!



Together, we have achieved these results:

- **Food distribution has increased by 83%.** From March 1-August 31, we distributed **18,953,106 pounds of food**, compared to 10,347,781 pounds during that time in 2019.
- The number of meals served has also increased, from 8,623,150 meals between March and August of 2019 to **15,794,255 meals** between March and August of 2020.
- **We served 1,245,307 people** between March and July of this year. That's a **61% increase**, up from 773,058 during that time the year before.
- The mileage on our truck fleet has **increased by 20%.**
- Before the pandemic, we assembled 912 food kits each week. Current assembly has now jumped to **6,987 kits a week.**
- Since March 30, we have distributed **117,507 COVID food kits** at 22 different sites.
- Our spending on purchased food has increased from an average of \$37,500 per month to **\$1,000,000 per month.**
- From March 1-August 31, **3,709 volunteers** have served a total of **38,323 hours.** That's nearly as many as the entire year of 2019: 4,108 volunteers and 43,025 hours.



Feeding Hope

At Each Distribution Site



Herminia – Lee Civic Center

Herminia lost her job due to the pandemic, and for the first time, she was in line to get food from a drive-thru distribution. Her husband is still working, but his rideshare driving job is bringing in far less money with people staying home more. The distributions have kept her from having to choose between paying the essential utility bills and putting food on the table.

Vel Graham – Florida SouthWestern State College

When Vel volunteers at Harry Chapin Food Bank, she, hears the appreciation expressed by the people in the distribution lines. It is hard for her to believe that so many people are out getting food. The need is just overwhelming. Vel says she's hearing people say all sorts of things, like they never thought they'd be in line, waiting for food, and they are relieved they can get food somehow.

Ellen Harvath – Lee Civic Center

Ellen started volunteering in the middle of March. Though her family worried about her safety, she knew she wanted to help as the coronavirus hit Florida hard. She helps with the food distributions and has seen a lot of tears over the past six months.

“The first time I came, there was a grandma and a little grandchild. She looked at me and said, ‘How did I get here?’ She started crying. Sometimes they can’t even look at you. I want to hug them.”

Zita – Florida SouthWestern State College

Zita, a first-time food recipient, had a full-time job as a banquet server. Slowly the hours dwindled to part-time, then no time. Her husband is working but doesn't make enough to cover the bills. ***“We’re in a difficult position because we bought a house earlier this year, never dreaming that there would be a pandemic.”***

While they wish they had not made such a big investment, she's trying to stay optimistic. ***“We’ll get through this,”*** she said.



Norberto – Golden Gate Community Center

Norberto worked at a Quality Inn before it closed due to the pandemic. His wife is home taking care of their two children while he waits in line, for the first time in his life, to receive food. He's scrambling to keep his utility bills paid and shares that he is anxious about what the future holds, but he is grateful that he's able to keep food on his family's table right now. ***“Nobody knows what will happen. I just try to stay hopeful and positive while we move through this.”***

Richard – Lee Civic Center

At 7:25 a.m., Richard was in line for a food distribution. He was nearly three hours early, but he wanted to make sure he got a spot so he could bring food home to his wife and two children. This was his first time coming to a drive-thru food distribution after losing his job with a flooring company during the pandemic. ***“I do what I can just to make sure the bills get paid, and thankfully my landlord is going easy on me,”*** he said.

Arlene Adams-Hardoin – Golden Gate Community Center

When Arlene can make someone in the distribution lines feel good about the experience, it makes her feel proud of what she is doing. ***“I totally believe in this, and I believe it's such a necessary thing I can be a part of, something that helps in a real way that I can contribute to right now.”***



There is Something Special About Soup

A simmering pot of delicious homemade soup delivers a sense of comfort and restoration for many of us, including Hilda, a senior living on a fixed-income, who recently wrote to thank us for food that has truly nourished her body through the pandemic. She included a picture of the soup that she made from our food kits and fresh produce that she received at our drive-thru distribution.

For Hilda's family, soup provides warmth and comfort in their lives, no matter the circumstances.

Hilda said that she is grateful for the amount of time she is spending cooking with her daughter during the pandemic. They especially love creating delicious, soul-soothing soups together from the various ingredients they receive each week at our food distributions. For their family, soup provides warmth and comfort in their lives, no matter the circumstances.

Thanks to the timely and generous help we've received from thousands of donors and volunteers, combined with an enormous groundswell of support from our Southwest Florida community, we are providing some of what soup embodies to those we serve...nourishment for the body and soul during these unpredictable and challenging times.

Despite the need for protective masks, gloves, social distancing, and the implementation of other necessary safety precautions, we swiftly adapted our distribution model to work effectively in our new normal. Hilda and hundreds of other people wait in car lines at our drive-thru distributions to receive a pre-packaged kit of shelf-stable food—enough to feed a family of four for five days. In addition to the kit, we also provide whatever fresh produce is available, like onions, potatoes, zucchini, eggplant, or other fruits and vegetables.

Since early in the pandemic, we have provided kits to a staggering number of people who—many for the first time in their lives—found themselves in desperate need of food. Despite a 600% increase in the number of people needing assistance since early March, we've distributed more than 12 million pounds of food. Our drive-thru distributions are feeding more than 6,000 families each week.

With many essential items unavailable or increasing in cost during this pandemic, it's no surprise that Hilda and so many others in our community have come to rely heavily on weekly visits to our mobile distribution sites. Thank you for all you do to help us to provide food and comfort for those who are struggling right now. ■

Giving Something Back

Nearly ten years ago, Harold Kallestad made his first visit to one of Harry Chapin Food Bank's partner agencies. Though out of work and in desperate need of food, he found it difficult to swallow his pride as he waited for his turn.

Looking back on those difficult times, he doesn't know what he would have done without the support. When the pandemic hit our community this past spring, all of those memories came rushing back. He recalled being hungry and feeling hopeless, but what he remembered the most was the kindness and generosity shown to him as a first-time visitor. There seemed like no better time to return the favor than right now.

Though he had lost his restaurant job in March during the COVID-19 lockdowns, he had wisely put some money aside. While hunkering down one night watching the news, Harold saw reports of the long line of cars waiting at the food bank distributions. Harold knew that this was his opportunity to give back.

First, he volunteered to pack kits of non-perishable food. Volunteering at the warehouse was exhausting, but he felt proud of how he was helping others. Soon Harold started helping at the drive-thru distributions as well—handing out food to the long lines of cars. He was stunned and heartbroken at seeing the tremendous need in our community up close. The people in line were from all walks of life—moms, children, seniors, others who had lost their jobs or could not make ends meet. Some were crying, saying they had never been in line for food before, or they didn't know how they would pay their rent. This pandemic seemed to be impacting everyone.

Like so many of our generous donors and



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volunteers, Harold was there for our community as we stepped up our hunger-fighting efforts throughout this crisis. Not only did he find a sense of purpose and satisfaction, but he felt like he was paying forward the assistance that he was given when life once left him with nowhere else to turn.

We are happy to report that Harold is back at work after securing a job selling RVs. He might not have as many hours to commit to volunteering, but he is planning to start up again one day a week. It's more than fulfilling a three-hour shift for Harold...it's about being a part of a community that is helping those in need.

Thank you, Harold, for giving back to our community! ■



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