It’s been over a year since the coronavirus hit Vermont. As we look toward a future of reconnecting and rebuilding, you’re making sure that neighbors statewide have enough to eat, no matter what.
“It’s been more than a year since the pandemic began ...” You’ve likely been reading those words a lot lately. Here at your Vermont Foodbank, we finish that sentence with “... and the need for food assistance is still with us.”

The economic damage to people with low incomes is deep, and will take time to repair. I’ve been hearing stories of families borrowing money and using credit cards to keep food on the table. If you were living paycheck-to-paycheck before COVID-19, income loss and debt aren’t easily overcome. That’s why your Foodbank will be here for the long run.

Together we will get through these hard times. It will take government resources to prevent an economic collapse, it will take businesses putting people back to work quickly when it’s safe, and it will take the foundation we’ve built together that can withstand the coronavirus storm. Thank you for helping to make a foundation that is strong and resilient, just like our people.

I can’t wait to write, “It’s been two years since the coronavirus pandemic, and everyone in Vermont has enough to eat.”

Thank You!

John Sayles
CEO
Gabriel and Constancia both had jobs getting food to older adults. When the two of them lost work due to the coronavirus, they found themselves in need of food assistance for the first time. And help was there, thanks to friends like you.

Gabriel and Constancia like to do almost everything together.

Up until March of 2020, they both worked for an organization that brought food to seniors. Constancia helped prepare the food, and Gabriel delivered it. “It is a joy to help others,” says Constancia.

When COVID-19 cases began to rise and people were told to shelter at home, they lost their jobs on the same day.

Gabriel has applied for unemployment multiple times, but there were issues with the paperwork.

“We have zero in the bank. We have no resources other than this place,” Gabriel says, about a food shelf they’ve been coming to since the end of last March. “It’s been a blessing to come here. It’s our grocery store.”

Thanks to the support of friends like you, food shelves have been able to remain stocked, and open, during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Gabriel adds that Constancia is a great cook. She makes Gabriel’s favorite American foods as well as dishes from the Philippines where she was born.

The couple, who have been married for six years, say they never needed food assistance before the pandemic.

“God has blessed us through the years,” Gabriel says. “We have a house over our heads and no medical problems.”

Gabriel says the pandemic has “been painful. It’s been a hard experience, but we stick together.”

It is because of caring community members, like you, that local food shelves can offer nourishing food and the ingredients people need in order to cook a variety of favorite dishes. A meal close to one’s heart can be a real comfort during difficult times — and essential when it comes to all of us staying healthy and strong.

Thank you for helping to make sure families and neighbors across Vermont have had enough to eat throughout the pandemic.
One year in and the lines are still long

With many people out of work and struggling with the economic impacts of COVID-19, food distributions around Vermont are still serving visitors at record levels. Because of you, free, fresh food is available for neighbors who need it, all year long.

“I had been at a food shelf but it’s such a small scale there, and you’re really getting to know each person and family on an individual level, whereas the VeggieVanGos (VVG) are just incredible, the number of families that show up and are receiving food.”

Jenevra is a program coordinator at the Foodbank. On any given day she can be found directing traffic, handling logistics, and greeting visitors at the VVG produce distributions that occur from the Upper Valley to the Northeast Kingdom. Because of the pandemic, these open-air, walk-through distributions have shifted to a drive-through model where visitors can pick up a variety of fresh fruits and veggies. The stories she hears and the people she meets, Jenevra says, make the job both difficult and deeply gratifying.

“At [one] VVG we have a woman who comes and picks up every single time. She usually gets for six or seven families. She just does it for those families, it’s not even for her,” Jenevra says. “People want to help, it’s amazing. I’ve been very inspired ....”

The flip-side to that, she says, is hearing the stories of people who are out of work, or older Vermonters unable to leave their homes. And then there are the sheer numbers.

“[Another VVG] gets 500-600 families, regularly.” Jenevra says, of the distribution that takes place in a small Central Vermont town. “And if you conceptualize, or think of what that looks like in a community, that’s an incredible number of people.”

Thanks to your help, thousands of neighbors facing hunger during the pandemic are able to have fresh, nourishing food in their pantries and refrigerators. And as Jenevra sees it, your help also brings out smiles in these difficult times.

“At [a recent] distribution we had milk, and I told a family ... a couple, what we had that day and I said, ‘We have milk,’ and they said, ‘Oh you have milk!’ And then we both started jumping up and down and getting really excited,” shares Jenevra. “So that’s the positive side of things. People are so thankful, and so happy, they say, ‘Thank you for being out here, thank you for being here.’”
Are you interested in leaving a gift in your will?

Over the years, many donors have informed us of their intention to include a gift to the Vermont Foodbank in their wills. Solving hunger takes generations. You can join these supporters and make sure help is always there by including the Foodbank in your will or estate plan.

Request your informational brochure today by contacting Allison Mindel at (802) 477-4108 or amindel@vtfoodbank.org.

“People want to help, it’s amazing ...”
Throughout a time of uncertainty and increased need, community members like you are working together to make sure we all have the food we need to take care of ourselves and our loved ones.

“When the pandemic began, I literally thought it would be controlled within a month,” says Colleen, who coordinates the Brandon Area Toy Project. “As this went on … families in the Toy Project started communicating with us about running low on food and accessibility. Because it was summer, many of us had gardens and were able to grow an extra row and share. This was great until summer wound down. And I had people who work full time talking about not being able to afford groceries.”

When it became apparent that the coronavirus wasn’t going to be quickly controlled, the Toy Project pulled together with other Brandon groups to find new and different ways to serve the people of the five town community.

“The Toy Project has been around Brandon forever,” says Colleen. “It used to just give toys to kids at Christmas and that was it … and we just have changed because needs have changed and now we do more.”

Besides distributing over 3,000 homemade masks last March and helping older neighbors get registered for vaccines, Brandon area volunteers have been making sure that neighbors have enough to eat throughout the pandemic.
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“The families who are in the Toy Project are low income. **When you have maybe one income, and that income is not coming in anymore, it’s a crisis,**” says Colleen. **Volunteers started going to food distributions, that you help support, to pick up food for their neighbors.**

“I would show up at the Farmers to Families [food distribution] with my registrations and I’d drive off with 30 boxes and I’d deliver them,” says Colleen. “We’ve gotten a lot of people who go to VeggieVanGo [a free, fresh food event] now … when that happens. And so instead of just picking up for their family, they’ll pick up for like five families and go distribute that.”

The Brandon community has so many volunteers that Colleen says she has to schedule them, otherwise too many people will show up. “Which is a great problem to have.”

“A lot of the volunteers are parents who used to be receiving toys, receiving coats, and now they’re at the point in their lives where they can help give out meals and help do things for people,” explains Colleen. “That makes them feel good, you know?”

During a typical holiday season at the Toy Project, parents choose toys to give to their kids — the most popular are arts and crafts supplies and Legos. But this past year, the Toy Project wanted to make sure families had food as well.

**“We worked with Melissa [a Foodbank program coordinator] and we were able to get boxes of food for each of our Toy Project families at Christmas. And honestly, I don’t know if the parents were as excited about the toys as they were about the food. Because the box happened to have strawberries in it — fresh strawberries.”** shares Colleen.

During this time of heightened need, Colleen says that the collaboration within the community has been key. “With everybody working together, we’re able to do this,” she says. “But if we worked apart we couldn’t do any of it.”

This is a sentiment the Foodbank has heard again and again during the pandemic: Vermont is strongest when we’re standing together.

“This is difficult for people. It’s so much easier to give than it is to accept,” says Colleen. “And it’s like, sometimes you have to accept it.”

“I never thought I’d be waiting in lines to get free food to feed Americans, but here we are. I also never thought that a small Rec Dept. would be using our connections to develop a distribution system instead of soccer teams, but whatever works … works. So grateful for the Vermont Foodbank … for getting food directly to the people who need it — now!”

Thank you for making sure food is available for anyone who needs it. For standing with your community through this health crisis. For all you have done to care for those around you. It’s been more than a year, and you’re still here.
Your right to food

The pandemic has changed a lot about our lives, but it hasn’t changed our basic human rights. If you or someone you know needs help filling the refrigerator, please visit our website at vtfoodbank.org, or reach out at (802) 476-3341. We’re in this together.

We all have a right to nourishing food.