

berkshire foodproject

The Berkshire Food Project seeks to alleviate hunger, food insecurity, and social isolation by serving healthy, no cost meals and connecting people to other resources, all in a dignified and respectful manner.

We're Distributing From Inside!

On June 1, after two and a half months outside, we moved our take-out meal distribution inside. On June 15, we began welcoming volunteers back on a very limited basis. These changes will make it possible for us to continue to provide meals to all who need them. In April, we provided over 7,500 meals - this was about double a typical April. In May, we provided over 8,000 meals - during a typical May we provide around 3,000 meals. The COVID Crisis will have long term impact on the financial stability and food security of many households in our community and we will continue to provide meals and grocery items to ensure everyone has enough to eat. In fact, we have been providing six meals per week and will continue with that for the foreseeable future.

Our current schedule is Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM - each day we distribute two meals.



Veteran Volunteers gather for a quick photo opportunity with our Kitchen Manager Darlene before resuming socially distanced work stations.

For many years Jen Munoz has coordinated a gardening program throughout our community, and this includes several raised garden beds at the Berkshire Food Project. Most years students from Brayton Elementary School help to plan what gets planted and then come to the BFP and plant the garden for us. This year, the COVID crisis closed school and thus the student involvement with our garden couldn't happen. Several students who missed out on that opportunity have created artwork illustrating the importance of locally grown food. Sam Bellows, Wyatt Bellows, David Brooks, Millie Bullett, Addison Cooper, Abby Hamilton, Hunter Lemaire, Ella Morgan, Adamaris Sanchez Banegas and Sadie Wilhelm have shared their work with us. We missed their visit to the BFP, missed visiting with them at school to plan too... but we are enjoying their artwork. We have an album of them on Facebook and have included a couple of them here too.



Locally grown food is a favorite at the BFP. We have SIX Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares at three different farms! From the Berkshire Grown "Sharing the Bounty" program, we receive two shares from Caretaker Farm and two more from Full Well Farm. A local family has purchased two shares at Red Shirt Farm for us too! This photo shows our first week's share from Caretaker Farm.

Additionally, we have begun receiving lettuce grown in the Aquaponics Lab at the Berkshire County House of Corrections. Inmates build their skills and knowledge while working in the lab - raising fish and growing leafy greens like basil and lettuce. Having fresh, local food enhances the nutritional quality as well as the taste of our meals. We are so lucky to live in an area with such abundant farming operations as well as such generous supporters.

Thank you Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Berkshire United Way, Northern Berkshire United Way and Williamstown Community Chest for creating the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund. The BFP is grateful to be among the 97 agencies receiving grants from the fund. \$1,960,800.00 has been disbursed in 121 grants. **THANK YOU TO ALL INVOLVED!!**

We Can't Say THANK YOU! Enough!

Since the end of February when we began removing chairs from our dining room in order to keep people from sitting too close together during the burgeoning public health crisis, to the middle of March when we cancelled all volunteer shifts and went to take-out meals only, through April and May when we provided more than double the typical number of meals for those months... we have shifted gears quickly to respond to the continually changing circumstances. When we switched from five days a week to three days, we began providing two meals at a time - hence adding an extra meal each week. We have tried to maintain a stable, consistent and welcoming opportunity for people to access meals despite an increasingly chaotic and crisis filled world around them. We've been able to do that because our supporters have risen to the occasion and ensured we have what we need to do so. The COVID crisis has been financially devastating for many individuals, families, local businesses and organizations. There's no doubt it has been very expensive for the Berkshire Food Project - and we have been able to continue to operate because of the support we have received. Whether directly donating to the Berkshire Food Project, donating to the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County or providing resources directly, you have made it possible for us to meet the increasing need. We have not turned a single person away hungry. We continue to build our capacity to provide more meals - recently we added another stove to our kitchen because we simply didn't have enough burners or ovens to prepare the number of meals we are now preparing! We have a number of new volunteers added to our volunteer cohort, as well as some veterans who have stepped in whenever possible throughout the crisis. Our staff is quite grateful to have been able to remain open and continue to provide meals for the past four months, despite the unprecedented events going on. Thank you all!

Making Connections

Although the dining room is not yet open, we are pleased to have resource outreach happening anyway.

Representatives from the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition have been on hand to tell people about new engagement opportunity they have for those being impacted by the social isolation of the current public health crisis. Participants can sign up to connect with a "pen pal" via a number of different methods from traditional mail to e-mail to phone calls to social media messaging.

And on Mondays, Suzy Helme continues to assist those who want to take advantage of special benefits for EBT card users and order from the North Adams Farmers Market on line. This gives people an opportunity to double their SNAP benefits while purchasing local food - which is then delivered to them on Saturday.

Congratulations Class of 2020!

It has been a rather unusual year for all students, and especially so for those graduating after months of online classes and cancelled events. Everyone here at the BFP sends out our best wishes to all the graduates.

We want to particularly note our veteran volunteer Francisco Alicandri, valedictorian of the Drury High School Class of 2020.

And our congratulations to Natalie Ellis, graduating from Charles H. McCann Technical School, a BFP volunteer and daughter of our kitchen manager.



We provide prepared meals to take home and heat up every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM. This schedule remains in effect for the foreseeable future. There is NO criteria and no questions asked. We encourage families to send a single person to pick up to reduce the number of people standing in line.

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