

News from the Berkshire Food Project

July 2012

This has been a tumultuous year for the Berkshire Food Project. We held another of our biennial Empty Bowl dinners in April, and it was wonderful. Until two weeks before, we thought we would be short of bowls, but the potters really came through! In terms of operations, like many social service agencies, in 2011 our income went down even as demand for our services rose. We had to conduct our first-ever emergency funding appeal in March of this year. Happily, it was successful in covering our deficit through this month. We also responded by strengthening our Board and improving our financial reporting, and we were rewarded with an increased allocation from the Northern Berkshire United Way, where we have been a member since 2002.



We have had extraordinary stability in other ways. Our Executive Director since 1993 has been Valerie Schwarz. Along with our Kitchen Manager, she leads a group of some 25 regular volunteers, and many more irregular ones—scout groups, high school and college students, and members of the community.

The BFP remains focused on its three missions: to alleviate hunger and food insecurity; to provide an oasis of sociability for the isolated elderly and disabled; and to bring helpful information to those who eat with us. On the last, we still invite social service agencies and experts to address lunch gatherings on such varied issues as tenants' rights, voting

registration, smoking cessation, programs for the elderly, public assistance, child and health care, Social Security, and nutrition. We have also continued our hands-on nutrition and cooking classes through the PHOP (People Helping Other People) program, for young at-risk parents referred by Healthy Families, a local counseling and aid center.

WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM

Apart from retail purchases at local grocery stores and our own small vegetable garden, we have shares at Caretaker Farm; we get produce and cheese from Cricket Creek Farm, thanks to Share the Bounty; we also get produce from Square Roots and food from local restaurants and Williams College. Our largest supplier is the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, in Hadley.

"I came here today knowing that I would get nourishment for my body but I got more than that. I also got nourishment for my soul."

--Joan, an elderly regular lunch guest

Operations in 2010 and 2011

	2011	2010
Meals Served	27,037	23,771
Expenses	\$142,123	\$125,848
Revenue	\$107,376	\$121,914
Shortfall	\$ 34,747	\$ 3,934



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BFP

In 1986, a group of Williams College students, with the support of several local residents and, above all, the encouragement of Rev. Elizabeth Wheeler (then minister of the First Congregational Church of North Adams) decided to create a program to offer regular free lunches in North Adams. The Berkshire Food Project began its operations in January 1987. More than a meal program, the Project aspired to be a community forum where people of widely different ages and circumstances can meet one another in an atmosphere of friendliness and mutual respect.

With demand rising, in the fall of 2007 we shifted from three to five lunches per week. In 2006 we served about 13,000 meals. By 2011 we were serving 27,000. But even at this volume, the BFP is emphatic in its determination not to be a soup kitchen. We have no "chow line": we serve each client at the table.

The BFP arose in response to dire needs, and we would be happy to close it down on the day nobody needed it anymore. But the way things are, we have to expect that ours will be an ongoing project.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Valerie Schwarz, Executive Director
Mary Terio, Kitchen Manager

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