

*Pictured: Many of the devoted staff and volunteers at St. Francis house Food Pantry.*



Catholic Social Services | Summer 2023

## Faces of Hope

# Hunger is on the rise. You can help.

*More people are seeking food assistance than ever before. Your continued support ensures that St. Francis House Food Pantry is there to provide it.*

On a typical weekday morning, St. Francis House Food Pantry bustles with volunteers sorting and categorizing food, packing boxes to distribute to families, and checking-in shoppers. Currently, the pantry serves 116 families per day on average—and that number is still growing. “A year and a half ago, if we reached 100 households a day, that was a big deal,” Program Director Dwayne Patterson recalls. “Today we did 103 households and it was a normal day. Last week we had two days where we served over 150 people.”

Thanks to your support, St. Francis House was able to welcome and serve over 1,000 new households in the first three months of this year. “It’s shocking,” Dwayne says. **This May was the pantry’s second-busiest month ever, with over 1,900 visits from 1,400 different families.** New households are contributing to the growing number of people served daily at St. Francis House—all families that didn’t need food support prior to this year.

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that a basket of common grocery items costs nearly 40%

more than it did before the pandemic in 2020. “People are going to the grocery store and trying to buy what they need, but their dollars are not going far enough,” says Dwayne.

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—Dwayne Patterson, Director of St. Francis House Food Pantry

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The high prices of food are coupled with continued SNAP delays for many families, who now seek additional help. While the food pantry helps as much as it can, the demand is higher than ever. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) usually provides a large portion of the food we distribute, but

since 2019 the amount of TEFAP food the pantry receives has decreased by 60%. This means more people need food, but there is less food to give.

Because of you, St. Francis House Food Pantry can help fill the gap and feed hundreds of households a week, and that impact goes beyond food. St. Francis House also connects many families to deeper services like case management, income, and assistance, preventing larger

challenges (such as eviction or homelessness) before they arise. **100% of shoppers report that receiving food boxes from the pantry helps ease a financial burden,** which provides flexibility to keep up with rent and afford bills like gas and electricity as the weather cools.

Looking forward, we expect this winter will be a hard one for families in our community. Your continued support is critical as we work together to care for our community.

## Addressing food security from every angle

Healthy, accessible food is essential for each person's wellbeing and permanent stability. Here's how your support increased our community's access to food in 2022.

### Emergency Food Support

3,833 households received over 819,978 pounds of emergency food at St. Francis House Food Pantry—much of which is donated by you—and 100% of households reported that it eased their financial stress.

### Ingredients for Success

Your support provided 122,669 meals to adults, expectant mothers, and children in our shelters as they work with staff and case managers to get back on their feet.

### Access to Nutrition

\$13,000 of produce was purchased at Grow North Farm using SNAP, WIC, and Fresh Bucks vouchers, making healthy food affordable for anyone in our community.

### Local Agriculture

Grow Local, Give Local donors provided \$13,000 of income for local refugee farmers and purchased thousands of pounds of produce for St. Francis House Food Pantry, supporting local food production and refugee livelihoods.

### Community Connection

More than 110 volunteer meal teams provided homemade meals for clients in Clare House, Brother Francis Shelter, and the RAIS program.

## Fresh Connections for Double the Impact

*With Grow Local, Give Local, you can provide hungry neighbors with healthy local produce grown by refugee farmers.*

Every summer, refugee farmers at Fresh International Gardens (FIG) collaborate with St. Francis House Food Pantry staff to bring to life a unique food campaign called Grow Local, Give Local.

Grow Local, Give Local creates the two-pronged impact of **supporting the livelihoods of refugee farmers and providing fresh produce to our neighbors** seeking assistance at St. Francis House Food Pantry.

Early in the spring, Fresh International Gardens (FIG) farmers and refugee entrepreneurs begin cultivating their garden plots. As you donate to Grow Local, Give Local

over the course of the summer, those donations buy the harvested produce from our farmers, guaranteeing sales and providing income to help them resettle successfully.

Using a brand-new cold storage trailer donated by the American Heart Association, the produce bought through Grow Local, Give Local is delivered to St. Francis House Food Pantry to be organized and distributed out to families in need.

So far this year, Grow Local, Give Local donations have purchased and distributed over 1,200 pounds of vegetables—and with rising prices, we want to make sure that healthy produce continues to be available to our neighbors seeking help. Thank you for investing in refugee businesses and making fresh produce accessible in our community!



**Top:** FIG gardeners and refugee entrepreneurs grow and harvest fresh produce from their garden plots in Mountain View and at Grow North Farm.

**Middle:** Grow Local, Give Local donors purchase that produce, which is delivered to St. Francis House Food Pantry with the help of a cold-storage trailer from the American Heart Association.

**Bottom:** St. Francis House Food Pantry distributes that fresh, healthy produce to families in need in our community.



# Promoting small business, local agriculture, and new beginnings at Grow North Farm

*Grow North Farm offers our community high-quality produce, community, and an opportunity to support refugee farmers.*

In its fourth season, Grow North Farm features five independent businesses run by farmers of refugee or immigrant backgrounds, as well as our Fresh International Gardens (FIG) co-op, which provides supplemental income, English-language practice, and fresh vegetables for new arrivals to Alaska.

As a collaboration between Catholic Social Services and Anchorage Community Land Trust, the farm provides a space for entrepreneurs to launch their businesses and brings healthy, accessible vegetables to the Mountain View neighborhood. Visitors can purchase produce with WIC coupons accepted every day and a SNAP double-up program on Thursday. With SNAP double-up, produce is

half-off when purchased using SNAP/EBT, allowing shoppers to enjoy fresh & healthy food at a lower price.

Your support for RAIS and its agricultural programs **expands food access for Mountain View while supporting small-business development in refugee communities.**

Here are two of the businesses operating at Grow North Farm this year:

## **Rainbow Produce**

Rainbow Produce is one of the oldest businesses operating at Grow North Farm. Owned by expert gardener Bhai Subba, the business is named after the many rainbows in her home country, Bhutan. Rainbow Produce sells a range of vegetables including salad greens, onion, bok choy, mint, and Alaskan staples like carrots and beets. Rainbow Produce can be found every Thursday at Grow North Farm.



*Pictured: Bhai Subba*

## **Family Group Farms**

One of two new businesses that opened at Grow North Farm in 2023, Family Group Farms is owned by a trio: Manasi Nsekanabo, Emmanuel Habimana, and Bazima Alex. They sell staple items such as carrots, potatoes, spinach, and cabbage. Family Group Farms is excited to gain some experience in its first season and grow the business in coming years.



*Pictured: Manasi Nsekanabo*