



### GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Maine is the seventh hungriest state in the U.S. with a rate of hunger that has increased at twice the national average. To respond to a crisis that had grown unabated for a decade, Preble Street took action to offset food supply shortages for food pantries in Maine in 2008 and then created the Maine Hunger Initiative to strengthen emergency food services at Preble Street and create long-term solutions to hunger by building the capacity of volunteer-run local food pantries, build emergency food system capacity, and create practices and policies to assist hungry Mainers become more self-sufficient.

MHI has been operating since 2009, impacting 9 of Maine's 16 counties (Androscoggin, Cumberland, York, Oxford, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Hancock, Penobscot, Washington), with Preble Street staff and the assistance of Anti-Hunger and Opportunity Corps AmeriCorps VISTAs, Emerson Congressional Fellows, Bowdoin College Community Matters Fellows, Hamilton College and Forest Foundation Fellows.

#### **1. Direct service, emergency food programs**

Preble Street meets urgent and increased needs 365 days a year through professional, efficient, and client-centered food programs.

##### Description

Emergency food services 365 days a year include 3 meals a day at 3 soup kitchens (Resource Center, Florence House, Teen Center), a weekly food pantry, and emergency food boxes for people who are homeless or living in poverty and who do not have access to adequate nutrition.

##### Goals/Objectives

To meet the basic needs of the most impoverished residents of Maine's largest urban area and to empower them to move beyond hunger and poverty, Preble Street emergency food programs:

- Provide nutritious breakfast, lunch, and dinner 365 days a year in three locations to teens and elders, men and women, individuals and families
- Provide emergency food supplements once a week to 140 households/500 individuals facing economic hardship, disabilities, or cultural challenges
- Promote best practice food work
- Facilitate access to social work services to help individuals with other urgent needs and access to services through Preble Street or community partners to meet long-term goals for housing, mental health care, legal assistance, employment, etc
- Raise awareness of hunger and engage volunteers in meeting needs and creating solutions

##### Accomplishments

- Consolidated operations of three separate soup kitchen organizations to reduce redundancy and provide consistency and enhanced client-centered service delivery
- Opened a new soup kitchen at Florence House specifically to meet the needs of homeless women

- Increased the number of meals served from 320,000 to 560,000 a year
- Hired and trained professional food service staff
- Recruited and supported 5,000 volunteers
- Improved kitchen and food storage facilities
- Provided nutritious meals 365 days and access to social services for youth, women, elders, and families who are homeless and living in poverty in Greater Portland at:
  - Resource Center Soup Kitchen*—breakfast, lunch, and dinner (850-1,200 meals a day) to individuals and families, including bag lunches for those who are working and cannot make it to the soup kitchen for a meal
  - Florence House Soup Kitchen*—breakfast, lunch, and dinner (80-120 meals a day) to women
  - Teen Center*—breakfast, lunch, and dinner (70-100 meals a day) to teens
  - Food Pantry*—emergency food boxes to (3,600 meals a week) to struggling families

## **2. Pantry organizing**

MHI staff and AmeriCorps VISTAs work hand-in-hand coordinating efforts of 49 Cumberland County pantries. This is on-the-ground work with an extremely fragile, but critical, resource in alleviating hunger, and our work together is designed to be a blueprint for a responsive and sustainable system that can be replicated throughout the state of Maine.

### Description

Focused on assessing the emergency food delivery system, Maine Hunger Initiative first connected with 80 food pantries in York and Cumberland Counties, serving both urban and rural communities and representing diversity in location, size, structure, resources, and history.

MHI organizers spent time at each pantry, meeting with directors, participating in pantry food distribution, conducting comprehensive surveys, providing technical assistance, and developing food sourcing partnerships. The observations and data collected reveal many issues that need to be addressed to better meet the needs of food insecure families and individuals. These include:

- Inadequate food supplies, e.g. fresh produce and eggs
- Insufficient access to available resources, e.g. transportation and storage problems
- Limited ability to recruit and train volunteers
- Insensitivity/lack of understanding of marginalized populations
- Misunderstanding or unawareness of local resources
- Challenges related to accessibility for people who need assistance, including limited hours, gaps in information and publicity to target communities, handicapped accessibility, and language barriers.
- Unnecessary barriers such as eligibility restrictions that impede pantries from meeting their mission

With a need for a comprehensive assessment of the emergency food system required to gain a clearer understanding of the people visiting food pantries. MHI created a client survey geared towards learning about the household demographics of and challenges faced by food pantry recipients. MHI organizers and VISTAs conducted surveys at 38 Cumberland County food pantries and collected responses from over 700 households, comprising over 1,700 people.

The surveys were offered in eight languages, including Arabic, English, French, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili and Vietnamese. The responses and data collected reveal important information and help in countering many of the harmful misconceptions surrounding Mainers who are struggling to put food on the table. Highlights of the findings include:

- In all households visiting food pantries, 42% are working families
- In households with children, 63% of adults reduce the size or skip a meal because there isn't enough food for all of them and their children
- For senior families with a retirement income, 72% fear running out of food as a constant worry

### Goals/Objectives

Maine Hunger Initiative has implemented a food pantry best-practice collaborative effort to enable volunteer-run pantries to enhance their capacity, improve operating procedures, and optimize impact, e.g.

- Lead quarterly regional pantry meetings in Cumberland County, providing reports on updates, successes, and challenges; training; platforms for community providers to disseminate resource information for pantries and their clients; and opportunities for communication and networking.
- Provide technical assistance and support for pantries to implement research-based Best Practices standards, which are:
  1. Accessibility
  2. Food Choices
  3. Food Sourcing
  4. Strong Volunteer Base
  5. Program Development
  6. Communication/Collaboration
  7. Advocacy
- Expand and evaluate Farm-to-Pantry program between pantries and farms in Cumberland County
- Assess individual pantry's strengths/needs for fundraising, volunteer utilization, federal nutrition program outreach efforts and clients' access to nutritious produce.
- Develop a systemic funding application approach for pantries to maximize philanthropic dollars by collaborating on their requests.
- Develop volunteer guidelines for pantries that include recruitment, retention, maximizing use of volunteers in direct service, communications, and administrative roles.
- Pursue food sourcing opportunities for pantries including collective buying to most efficiently maximize donor dollars.
- Make laptops and internet available at food pantries to assist clients in utilizing the new electronic accessibility to the Food Supplement application to be launched by DHHS in May
- Facilitate listing of all 49 pantries information on 2-1-1, including acting as liaison between individual pantries and 2-1-1 and direct assistance in completing required forms.
- Conduct a comprehensive client survey at food pantries to provide the first county-wide analysis of food pantry recipients' demographics and their needs.
- Provide social work services at pantries to assist people in addressing causes of their food insecurity.

### Accomplishments

In addition to an analysis of Cumberland and York County food pantries and several community presentations of the findings, MHI has:

- Created and maintained a comprehensive Cumberland County Food Pantries list, distributed to health care and social services agencies—e.g. DHHS, WIC, Healthy Maine Partnerships, SMAAA, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, United Way—and local farmers
- Facilitated food pantry listings on 2-1-1
- Conducted USDA Federal Nutrition Program outreach to food pantries including the Food Supplement Program (SNAP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and the Maine Senior FarmShare

- Invested \$200,000 in market-based solutions through a Farm-to-Pantry initiative.
  - Year 1: contracted with 9 farms to provide fresh local produce and eggs to 35 food pantries in Cumberland and York Counties.
  - Year 2/3: Connected 22 food pantries with 8 farms providing 1,470 households with approximately 28,000 pounds of produce.
- Provided professional casework for additional resources including employment, health care, housing
- Established quarterly MHI regional food pantry meetings, offering training and technical assistance to the 49 food pantry coordinators. Successful trainings offered included subjects such as
  - How to use local and national hunger data for pantry advocacy efforts to raise awareness of hunger and needs of your pantry
  - Overview of local and state political systems
  - Grant application assistance
  - How to offer basic health screenings at your pantry
  - Volunteer recruitment and management techniques
  - My Maine Connection, Maine's new online portal for applying for benefits
  - Food Supplement Program outreach and application assistance
  - Summer Food Service Program in your community and how food pantries can be involved
  - Federal and local legislative updates and how proposed legislation could impact food pantries
  - Maine's General Assistance program
  - DOA Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) rules, regulations and allocation formulas
  - Maine's Harvest for Hunger program with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension
  - How to access tax preparation support for food pantry recipients
- Created a Volunteer Manual template for food pantries to assist in volunteer management and organization, including volunteer position descriptions, a volunteer training guide, and a sample volunteer appreciation letter
- Developed and distributed a Cumberland County resource list to food pantries
- Solicited client input through focus groups for our work on the Cumberland County Campaign to Promote Food Security.
- Organized food pantry coordinators to attend and testify at public hearings for our efforts with the Cumberland County Campaign to Promote Food Security
- Created a survey tool at the request of a food pantry board to assess their client needs and gain input regarding their pantry changes; provided assistance with surveying clients; and trained their intern to complete the remainder of the surveys.
- Worked with Healthy Maine Partnerships to bring more healthy food options and community health prevention strategies into food pantries
- Assisted food pantries in applying for TEFAP
- Connected Saint Joseph's College service learning students with educational service projects at food pantries
- Participated in and recruited food pantry providers to attend the United Way Cumberland County Food Security Council's conversations to target food security in the Lake Region.
- Assisted in identifying biggest obstacles for food pantries in rural areas of the county, e.g. funding support; food sourcing; lack of awareness of growing hunger in their communities
- Introduced the idea of collective buying amongst food pantries as a potential solution to optimize limited food budgets and further secure food sourcing opportunities
- Helped distribute donated chest freezers to 11 Cumberland County food pantries
- Facilitated partnership between Whole Foods and food pantries to provide customer donated food
- Organized MHI Day at the State House, providing food pantry providers the opportunity to learn about the important role they play in impacting legislation both as individual citizens and as leaders representing marginalized members of their communities

- Connected food pantries with: University of Maine Cooperative Extension’s Eat Well and Harvest for Hunger programs and Good Shepherd Food Bank’s Mainer’s Feeding Mainer’s and Cooking Matters
- Presented on Food Supplement Program Outreach at Good Shepherd Food Bank Statewide Conference
- Contracted by Healthy Maine Partnership to rollout the Community Healthy Hub—designed to increase food pantry capacity to make referrals and connect clients with government benefits programs and other food related resources and information—at select Cumberland County pantries.
- Supported local pantries’ fundraising efforts, e.g. Freeport’s Freeze Out and Gray’s Touch a Truck

### **3. Federal Nutrition Program Organizing**

#### Goals and Objectives

Understanding that the solution to hunger is not food pantries but rather the political will and action to maximize utilization of USDA Federal Nutrition Programs, MHI continues to maximize participation to make nutritional food accessible for those in need.

#### Accomplishments

##### ***Food Supplement Program (SNAP)***

- Membership on the Governor’s Work Group to Simplify Benefit Access led to work group providing guidance and input to DHHS’s design, education and implementation of My Maine Connection—the online portal to Maine’s Food Supplement Program, health care, child care benefits, etc.
- Collaborated with AARP Maine to strategize Food Supplement Program outreach plan to seniors
- Participated in My Maine Connection electronic access training offered by DHHS
- Conducted Food Supplement Replacement Benefits outreach and assistance to households that lost food due to hurricanes and ice storms, generating thousands of dollars worth of replaced food for low income families
- Promoted use of Food Supplement benefits at farm stands and farmer’s markets offering double dollar incentives.
- Conducted Food Supplement outreach and facilitated Food Supplement bingo game (an interactive outreach and education tool designed to debunk myths surrounding Food Supplements for seniors) at low-income senior housing sites
- Launched the Senior Food Supplement Prescription Campaign—with AARP Maine and the Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and in partnership with the Maine Medical Association, Maine Primary Care Association, Maine Quality Counts Maine Nurse Practitioner Association, and Maine Osteopathic Association—through a system of over 600 health care providers utilizing Food Supplement “prescriptions” to direct malnourished patients to apply for Food Supplement benefits.
- Collaborated with AARP Maine and the Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging to respond to Maine seniors and conduct pre-screenings and applications for Food Supplement benefits as part of the Senior Food Supplement Prescription promotion
- Provided education at AARP Maine chapter meetings in South Paris, Portland, Millinocket, and Sanford to provide information the Food Supplement Program Training, facilitate a Food Supplement Program bingo game, and distribute Food Supplement brochures and applications.
- Held successful press events to help raise awareness around the importance of USDA federal nutrition programs with prominent speakers, e.g. USDA Undersecretary Kevin Concannon and National Anti-Hunger Expert Joel Berg.
- Created a *Food Supplement Training Manual* outlining Food Supplement outreach and engagement

- Trained food pantry volunteers at Cumberland County food pantries and at Mid-Coast Hunger Prevention Program on Food Supplement Program outreach and engagement

### ***Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)***

In 2013, MHI expanded throughout the state to identify towns/districts where there is a need for summer meal sites and opening sites in areas, such as Hancock County where no programs existed, working to develop, implement, and provide technical assistance in over half of Maine's 16 counties.

#### Accomplishments

- Facilitated opening 12 sites in 2011, 11 new sites in 2012, and 26 in 2013
- Recruited and worked with SFSP sponsors
- Recruited and trained community volunteers to operate SFSP meal sites statewide.
- Recruited and provided technical assistance to new SFSP sponsors, e.g. Saint Joseph's College in Standish and Freeport Community Services
- Created, produced, and distributed *Making Summer Meals a Breeze: Maine's Summer Meals Best Practices Manual*.
- Produced and distributed outreach materials (flyers, signs, etc.) promoting SFSP.
- Conducted outreach including door-to-door canvassing in SFSP communities
- Connected SFSP meal sites with Cooperative Extension Eat Well Nutrition Associates to provide nutrition education games and activities for children and families
- Presented at the DOE Summer Food Service Program Summit on Summer Meals Outreach and Engagement
- Selected Share our Strength No Kid Hungry Maine Ally
- Delivered/facilitated multiple SFSP presentations, trainings, and meetings
- Helped facilitate nutrition education sessions at summer meal sites

### ***Senior FarmShare***

- Recruited farmers in Cumberland County
- Recruited seniors at food pantries and senior housing units to sign-up for a share
- Connected senior housing programs with a participating farmer and arranged delivery

## **4. Advocacy**

### Description

With the lack of statewide leadership on hunger for several years, Maine Hunger Initiative filled a void in responding to opportunities to help hungry Mainers. Identifying and promoting policies to further self-sufficiency for Maine's hungry people and to respond to and reverse the unprecedented rise of hunger in Maine, Maine Hunger Initiative has become a landmark partnership of six state-wide organizations—AARP of Maine, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Maine Council of Churches, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and Muskie School of Public Service—joining forces in anti-hunger work.

### Goals/Objectives

As households in Maine struggle to put food on their tables it is more important than ever to raise public awareness and incite public will to preserve and augment state and federal programs designed to promote

self-sufficient families and healthy communities. Toward that end, MHI works to maximize media opportunities to educate about hunger and solutions for it, utilize public/private partnerships to increase food accessibility and strengthen laws and policies to alleviate food insecurity.

In addition to supporting and strengthening the efforts of the network of food pantries, the Maine Hunger Initiative has used a solution-focused, innovative approach to provide both immediate relief for those who are hungry throughout Maine and proposals for steps that can reduce the conditions that force people to depend on emergency food programs.

### Accomplishments

- Led a private/public partnership to bring to Maine over \$1 million of ARRA recovery money to provide relief for families in poverty and provide a \$100 food card to 13,800 of Maine's poorest families with minor children.
- Helped initiate and lead the Campaign for Food Security in Cumberland County, as part of the core leadership committee directing the effort and participating member in the larger Campaign coalition.
- Led a multi-sector, highly collaborative Hunger Free Cumberland County request for a USDA Hunger Free Communities grant, with the support of 17 community partners (nonprofit agencies, government, private companies, and coalitions), to provide funding for 8 organizations working to end hunger in Cumberland County.
- Launched statewide anti-hunger advocacy efforts with partners AARP Maine, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Maine Council of Churches, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and Muskie School of Public Service
- Wrote a feature article on hunger for the *Maine Policy Review* special edition on food
- Appeared on a MECEP "State of the State" television show on:
  - *Hunger in Maine* with Joel Berg, national anti-hunger advocate and author of *All You Can Eat: Hunger in America*
  - *Helping Families and Children Fight Hunger in Maine* with Ned McCann, Vice President, Maine Children's Alliance
  - *Fighting Senior Hunger in Maine* with Jessica Maurer, Esq., Executive Director, Maine Association of Area Agencies
  - *Child Hunger in Maine and the Summer Food Program*, with Gail Lombardi with the Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition Services
- Introduced and supported legislation on summer meals for children and tax incentives for farmers to donate produce to food pantries and foodbanks.
- Organized clients to testify on the Governor's proposed supplemental budget that included a cut to benefits for disabled people that would extend their dependency on emergency food systems.
- Served on the Governor's Work Group on Simplifying Access to Public Benefits to inform the state's decision to offer electronic accessibility to the benefit application process.
- Served on the DHHS Electronic Benefits Access Committee, working to facilitate client and caseworker input into design and marketing of the new MyMaineConnection online application system for Food Supplement program and other DHHS benefits.
- Selected as one of two Maine representatives to the North East Regional Anti-Hunger Network, an advocacy coalition that includes 2 representatives from each North East state and national representatives from Bread for the World and the Food Research and Action Center.
- Attended Food Research and Action Center Hunger Leaders Conferences in Washington, DC, CFSC (Community Food Security Coalition) annual conferences, and Vermont Food Bank's Annual Conference, learning best practices and successful policies in anti-hunger work, and networking and collaborating with anti-hunger experts.

- Took a lead role in Maine with select states/organizations to successfully oppose Standard Utility Allowance changes that would have resulted in 40,000 low-income Mainers (half of the households including elderly or disabled people) having their Food Supplement dollars drastically cut December 2010 and temporarily continuing the food benefit.
- Invited to participate in the Maine Leadership Forum for Sustainable Food Systems, a collective organization incorporating the agricultural and fishing communities, economic development and academic systems to build communication structures and provide leadership development for food systems throughout Maine. Our role in bringing an anti-hunger perspective to food and agricultural groups is an important step in ending food insecurity in Maine.
- Wrote a “Maine Voices” article on hunger in Maine that was published in the *Portland Press Herald* on Thanksgiving Day.
- Represented MHI work in the Campaign for Food Security in Cumberland County press conference for the release of the Campaign report.
- Earned front-page headlines with the announcement of the MHI state partnership
- *Portland Press Herald* editorial support for the idea of the MHI partnership and goals.
- Participated as a panelist at York County Faces of Hunger Workshop
- In 2010, MHI helped draft and organize testimony for successful legislation—An Act to Reduce Hunger and Increase Student Performance—to leverage available federal funds so eligible children receive adequate nutrition year round
- In 2013, MHI worked with Senator Alfond to draft and promote passage of LD 1353—An Act to Further Reduce Student Hunger—to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program.
- Testified at hearings impacting hunger, including:
  - LD 75 - A Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend its Rules Governing Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards
  - LD 860 - An Act to Reduce Hunger
  - LD 601 - An Act to Set Aside 1% of Committed State Funds for Food Projects
  - LD 1164 - An Act to Support Maine Farms and Alleviate Hunger
  - LD 474 - An Act to Reduce the Property Tax Burden and Improve the Circuitbreaker Program
  - LD 735 - An Act to Allow the Use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Funds at Farmers’ Markets
  - LD 455 - An Act to Increase the State Earned Income Tax Credit. Testified against proposed cuts in the Supplemental and Biennial budgets to the General Assistance program
  - LD 1411 - Resolve, To Require the Department of Health and Human Services To Request a Waiver To Prohibit the Use of Food Supplement Benefits for the Purchase of Taxable Food
- Advocated for full restoration of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) that led to restored funding for all counties that requested it.
- Facilitated “MHI Day at the Statehouse” to bring food pantry coordinators to meet their legislators, tour the statehouse, learn how a bill becomes law in Maine, observe the legislature in action, and create a process for mobilizing pantry coordinators when action is needed in response to legislation
- Met with Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan and Representative Chellie Pingree at the congresswoman’s office in Maine to discuss hunger in Maine and the importance of the Farm Bill in addressing problems of hunger
- Attended FRAC’s 2013 National Anti-Hunger and Policy Conference and conducted visits with federal delegates while in Washington D.C.
- Invited by Mayor Brennan to be a member of Portland’s Food Initiative
- Organized food pantry participants to testify at the “Cover Maine Now” Medicaid expansion effort.
- Hosted the Portland premier of the landmark film, “A Place at the Table,” with a panel of statewide anti-hunger experts and state and national Call to Action for federal delegates to sign onto Senator Gillibrand’s Amendment asking for SNAP to be fully reinstated in the Farm Bill.

- Collaborated with 11 other anti-hunger groups—AARP Maine, Bread for the World, Maine, Catholic Charities Maine, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Maine Children's Alliance, Maine Council of Churches, Maine Equal Justice Partners, Maine People's Alliance, Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program, and St. Mary's Nutrition Center of Maine, to ask Senator Collins and Senator King to support fully funding SNAP in the Farm Bill and oppose any cuts to vital safety net programs.
- Utilized social media to ask our national delegates to restore the recent \$4.1 billion cut to SNAP benefits and to hold Congress and the Obama administration to its promise to restore the cuts made to SNAP in this last session
- Provided input on the Farm Bill and to educate the public how this national legislation has major impact on hunger and nutrition in our country