

Loaves & Fishes

Food, Clothing, and Connection

Quarter Three Report 2021

Food

During the third quarter of 2021, we gave out 6,895 bags of groceries to our neighbors. This quarter was by far our most successful at filling our new walk in cooler. We gave out butter, eggs, cheese, and milk most weeks throughout the late summer. We continued to rely on our network of contacts to source tens of thousands of pounds of free, fresh local produce throughout the summer. The more our partners hear about the kind and volume of work we are doing, the greater the abundance of food that shows up through donations of products. We also have had great success in using our distributors to source grocery store quality produce at a steep discount. Our bags have weighed between 26 and 32 pounds each week, and that weight does not include any of the milk that we give away. Over the course of the fall, we plan to expand our programs to reach more neighbors.



Loaves and Fishes is now working three days a week (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday), with shifts in that are in the morning. If you are interested in getting involved with making sure our neighbors have enough to eat please reach out and we will see you soon.

Clothing

Joan's Clothing Closet ran effectively over the summer, and we continued to see significant numbers of guests, as well as substantial clothing donations.

We have been operating outside the kitchen door in the parking lot, which is convenient for both guests and volunteers, with tables under an awning holding boxes of sorted clothing items, shoes, and some assorted household items (bed linens, for example). The hung items we just roll out through the kitchen on wheeled racks.



It is now our fall "transition period," meaning we are starting to store summer wear and beginning to put out sweaters, light jackets, etc.—all of which can make for a messy situation in the clothing area, but we do manage to keep it under control. Fortunately, we have a good volume of warm clothing, including coats, on hand to begin the winter season, as you can see in the picture we are already creating a stockpile.

We will move forward into colder, damper weather, as we did last year in mid-November, moving the clothing operation indoors and basically providing "personal shopping" to those who come to the kitchen door: last year we asked for sizes and what clothing items were needed, and did our best to source them from our stock.

Connection

Loaves and Fishes is required by Connecticut Food Share (the newly merged organization of the Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare) to register all our neighbors who receive food from us. In the past registration forms consisted of a two-sided piece of paper collecting neighbors' information and taking several minutes to complete. These documents are stored at all food pantries separately, and then numbers are gleaned from those registrations and sent to Connecticut Foodshare. Loaves and Fishes partnered with a student at Quinnipiac Medical School to create an online registration system that has cut our neighbors' wait time for groceries significantly. It also allows them to register at our pantry as well as every other pantry in the city.



We have enlisted United Way to be the central data holding organization. In the next few months we will be rolling this out to other pantries in the area. This new software will allow us to serve more folks faster, as well as providing citywide data that can be used for advocacy efforts on the state and local level. This is a true game changer, and your support of Loaves and Fishes is making this happen. We will keep you up to date about additional advocacy efforts in the coming months.

Captains' Corner

A breath of fresh air. A burst of new energy. And bracing new insights about how Loaves and Fishes can expand its mission to help people in need of food, clothing, and community support.

That is what Karina Lopez has brought to Loaves and Fishes since being hired for the new position of program coordinator in August.

Her life story, as well as her enthusiasm and drive, make her a great fit for the job.

Born in Ecuador, Karina came to the U.S. when she was 18. For the next 14 years she was undocumented, but says that helps her “understand firsthand the challenges many immigrants experience in terms of culture, language, and legal status, among many others.”

Since then, she has earned a paralegal certificate, obtained an associate's degree in liberal arts from Gateway Community College, and now attends Southern Connecticut State University with plans to major in sociology.

Before coming to Loaves and Fishes, Karina worked for Apostle Immigrant Services for four years as an accredited representative helping people navigate the immigration system.

In her brief time with L&F thus far, Karina has discovered the rewards of working with diverse volunteers, who she now also helps to recruit. “I am always amazed by their selflessness and drive to help others, and I am grateful for all the lessons I learn from them,” she says.

“I have also been able to observe many of our volunteers who come from difficult backgrounds, put their own difficulties aside on behalf of others, which is once again a testament that helping others can help one's own healing.”



Current Needs

Loaves and Fishes needs you to be in community with our neighbors. There is so much need in our city, and there are so many ways to get involved with Loaves and Fishes. We need you. You can make a difference and be a part of a movement that offers food, clothing, and connection to anyone who needs them. The pandemic has been a long slog for our neighbors and the volunteers and staff at Loaves and Fishes. We are looking for a new spark to get us going. We are looking for folks who want to step up and make a commitment to volunteering with us regularly on Saturday mornings. Having consistent volunteers on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday mornings allows us to serve more of our neighbors and welcome more new volunteers with ease.



In the photo above you can see our annual volunteer picnic that we hold to thank our strong corps of volunteers. We are truly a community who not only volunteers together, but is a support system that many of us lean on.

We are also looking for courageous visionary leaders to serve on our Board of Directors. We are looking to recruit new directors who share our sense of justice, place, and hope. This is your turn. It is your time to help your neighbors. We will see you soon.

Director's Note

Loaves and Fishes has been growing in so many extraordinary ways. In the past 18 months we have partnered with new agencies, institutional partners, service providers, funders, volunteers, and neighbors who use our services. We are creating new long-term sustainable solutions for persistent problems emergency food providers face through our work with the Coordinated Food Assistance Network, like our new intake system described above. All of these new opportunities allow us to continue to serve more of our neighbors, and that is why it is such an important and needed step that we have added Karina Lopez to our staff as a program coordinator. With her on our team, we are going to be able to say yes to more opportunities and meet more of our neighbors needs. I cannot how excited I am to have such a great partner in this work.

We have hired Karina because she is an empathetic leader who fits into the culture of Loaves and Fishes by bringing a great skill set of previous advocacy work and grassroots aid. While she continues her education in the next few years, we hope that she will also become of student of the work that we do at Loaves and Fishes. We hope that all of you get a chance to meet her in the coming months. Please feel free to reach out to her and talk about what makes the work that we do important to you and how you fit into our community. As we welcome new folks into our organization it is important for us to keep our sense of place and history and you are part of our story and our journey. You can reach her at klopez@loaveandfishesnh.com

Please visit our website www.loavesandfishesnh.com for more information about Loaves and Fishes, how to meet the needs of our neighbors, and food insecurity in New Haven.

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