



Willy Elliott-McCrea

During the first ten weeks or so, there was a lot of panic about food supply. People were over-buying, which was much worse for food-threatened people. We reassured the community there would be food and that we're there for the duration. Count on us. We'll do what is necessary. I find that there's more abundance than we realize. Abundance begets abundance.

Action Plans

We responded to the day-to-day needs. Handled over 1600 calls in a day, one at a time. We had to protect older volunteers. We shut down some programs. The food banks reached out through Representative Panetta's office resulting in National Guard support deployed state-wide. We initiated a hybrid food distribution program with both mass distributions at the boardwalk and fairgrounds as well as through existing partner agencies including Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), and Twin Lakes Church. We had other great partners like KSBW who was very helpful communicating the extent of the problem and how people could obtain help. The Board of Supervisors went to FEMA for financial support to purchase more food. The Santa Cruz Health Center increased the food they distributed 10 fold. Mountain Community Resources really stepped up and so many other organizations and people working together made it successful. Because of these strong networks of partners and volunteers Second Harvest is able to distribute 4 healthy meals for every dollar donated.

Ah Ha! Moments?

We realized that mass distributions, which worked initially, were not sustainable. We needed to link families with long term nutrition homes, distribution programs and support stronger community agency cooperation to be able to replace the mass distributions at the fairgrounds and boardwalk which would end at some point.

We were reminded that the food bank is the distribution hub. Community partners are the spokes in the wheel that can most effectively get food to where it's needed. And because of that, we need to invest in our agency partners to make them stronger. It's essential. The food bank can't do it all.

Second Harvest Riding Out The Pandemic...a look back.

A Q&A with Willy Elliott-McCrea, CEO Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County

As Santa Cruz County and the rest of the world begins to emerge from the grips of the COVID19 Pandemic we wanted to take a look back at how the food bank responded to the crisis in this personal Q & A with Willy Elliott-McCrea.

What were you thinking as the pandemic hit?

It was similar to the challenges we faced in the floods of '82 and '95 and the Loma Prieta quake of '89. But its a much longer event and recovery. We had those experiences behind us which taught us to just kick it into gear, don't over-think things, just do what's needed and have faith in positive outcomes.





Appreciating the hands that feed us.

In April, Second Harvest Food Bank celebrated farmworkers, Campesinos Day, by thanking all those who spent the last year working hard to make sure healthy food continued to be available to our community. Second Harvest staff also shared about their own experiences and their gratitude for these essential workers throughout the pandemic.

Volunteers are back. Join us!



Morgan Imel, Looker
Volunteer Team Lead

Robby Olson, Pastor
Volunteer

Justen Harper,
Volunteer

Our volunteer program is getting back to full swing. Volunteers make an immeasurable difference in the lives of others. Oftentimes, they perform with the core intention of helping others. One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to participate in a shared activity together.

We are looking for volunteers to help at our Friday Food Distribution in the fairgrounds in Watsonville twice a month as well as Saturday sorts and warehouse. Contact Jael Salinas, Volunteer Program Manager, at (831) 232-8141 or jael@thefoodbank.org.

Read about volunteers Morgan, Robby and Justen on our blog at www.thefoodbank.org/blog

"I am thankful for every single campesino that everyday work hard to put food on our tables. Especially thru this pandemic. They are risking their lives so that this country can continue eating delicious fruits and vegetables. I have family that work in the fields. From uncles, cousins and the man I love the most in this world my father. For so many years I have seen my father get up every morning and go to work for his family. Never once complaining. He loves what he does." Arturo Fuentes, SHFB Warehouse Manager

"I worked in the fields for 6 months not too long ago, picking berries. I can say it was tough work every day, working long hours. However, everyone literally was always happy because they love what they do, We would all motivate each other to get through the day with music, jokes, and stories about our lives. I admire everyone for working so hard every day to put food in the table for families!" Paula Luna, SHFB Operations

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Willy Elliott-McCrea, CEO



continued from page 1

Disappointments?

It's been a very hard year. So much sadness. Our staff was exhausted.

What Worked Well?

I'm so proud of what was accomplished. Our partner agencies and the community truly came together in the face of a crisis. We had the advantage of many experienced non-profit managers who had the confidence and faith to not hesitate.

Preparing for the Future?

We must put more energy in building up our partner agencies. Increased storage, handling, refrigeration, a range of improved capabilities. This needs to happen through community-driven programs. We can increase coordination and communication and work smarter.

We're now transitioning from the emergency to a recovery. As mentioned, we've got to help increase community partners' strengths. It's a time for reflection. We're looking at a three-year business plan. The effects of the pandemic will be felt for at least three years.

We're investigating needs, infrastructure investments and building up our neighborhood food pantry network for sustainability and improving the use of technology are some of the things that should be worked on. Neighborhood pantries are what makes the system work long-term.

Low-income communities were hit twice as hard by the pandemic and increased unemployment. Creating a new normal is essential. We cannot return to the old normal. We must create change and shorten the line. Public policy strongly impacts hunger and food insecurity. Stronger federal food programs like school meals and CalFresh are essential. Federal nutrition programs provide 20 meals for every meal that the emergency food bank network does. These programs are the front line of defense. The food bank is the safety net.

The original article was written by Ford Kanzler and published in the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

Partner Agency Client Story: PVPSA



Pictured: Right: Maria Cervantes, Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance, Middle: Jeronimo Melchor, Left: Bryn Calderon, Second Harvest

Since 1991 Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance (PVPSA) has been providing comprehensive health education, mental health services, substance abuse and intervention and prevention services, and direct counseling to the students and families of the Pajaro Valley including the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD).

“I am humbled, and so grateful for the help and healthy food I recieved”

As part of their services they also serve as a food distribution site for Second Harvest.

When COVID-19 shut down the economy it shut down jobs affecting so many in our community, including many of PVPSA's families. One of those client families is Jeronimo Melchor and his wife and 3 children.

The small farm Mr. Melchor worked for had to let him go during the pandemic and with it his ability to pay the rent. He didn't give up. He collected cans, coins, and anything else he could to make sure his family was provided for. He showed up at Second Harvest distribution sites, like PVPSA, and volunteered to help distribute food. Soon he was picking up food for his neighbors and others who could not get out to access it.

The stress of children trying to do school at home, the loss of income, and the hardship that comes from a year of not being able to work was overwhelming but Mr. Melchor never stopped looking for ways to make it work. PVPSA provided assistance throughout the pandemic to him and his family and he said “it made all the difference and I am humbled, and so grateful for the help and healthy food I recieved”. He continues to pick up and deliver food to others who cannot get to a distribution site.

Mr. Melchor recently returned to work and though money is still tight he never stops looking for ways help others. He is the perfect example of how Second Harvest Partner agencies make a difference in the lives of so many in our community.

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Summer 2021

Thinking Pandemic Economic Effects are Behind US? Think Again

One of baseball hall-of-famer Yogi Berra's memorable "Yogi-isms" is "It ain't over till it's over." The pandemic-related challenges facing a lot of food-insecure people in Santa Cruz County certainly "ain't over." Second Harvest Food Bank continues seeing well-above normal demand and there are a lot of unknowns about what a new normal may be.

Second Harvest has been consistently distributing slightly more than 1 million pounds of food monthly for the last year, according to Suzanne Willis, Chief Development Officer at Second Harvest Food Bank.

"Prior to the pandemic it was about 650,000 pounds monthly. At the height of the pandemic, April/May/June 2020, it was up to 1.2 million pounds. The need among food-insecure people has slackened only modestly but remains consistent. We're anticipating this higher level of demand for the next 18 – 36 months," Willis said. For those who are food insecure, it ain't over.

Read the full article on our blog at www.thefoodbank.org/blog



2nd Quarter 2021 Grant Spotlight



Thank You!
Grants Keep Us
Going.

Grants make it possible to provide food, nutrition education, and so much more. These are just some of the wonderful organizations feeding hope to our community through grants...

California Association of Food Banks Rapid Response Fund
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Feeding America
Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust
Sunlight Giving
Wells Fargo

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