

## BAG BAN MEETS BAGSHARE

A plucky, creative approach to endorsing Northampton's new bag ban



On January 1, the city's new bag ban went into effect prohibiting the distribution of single-use plastic bags. The Center was determined to embrace the spirit of the ban without creating a hardship for clients. As Executive Director Heidi Nortonsmith explained:

*"Clients who are homeless, cognitively-impaired, or making a spontaneous trip while in crisis aren't always able to keep the new bag ban in the forefront of their minds. We needed to take a creative approach that would still allow us to send folks home with the food they desperately need."*

With the ban in effect, the Center immediately switched to using donated cloth bags, and supplemented these by repurposing the dozens of cardboard boxes it takes in every week while stocking the pantry.

Yet, with 40 to 50 families coming for food every day, the available supply of bags and boxes couldn't keep up with demand. An exciting solution came in partnering with the BagShare Project, which innovatively combines used malted barley bags with grommets and a few feet of rope to create sturdy, inexpensive bags that can reliably handle the heavy groceries clients need to cart away. BagShare leaders are now teaming up with volunteers at the Center to produce a steady stream of reusable bags for our clients.



## POST OFFICE FOOD DRIVE: MAY 14

A day of sharing, pitching in, and celebrating community

Every year in early May, volunteers take to the streets of Northampton, Leeds and Florence delivering bags to households to be filled with non-perishable food for the Survival Center. Through this annual Post Office Food Drive, thousands of people donate food, letter carriers give their time and energy to pick up donations for the Center, and hundreds of our volunteers make the food drive a success. In 2015, we received 20,000 pounds of food—enough for over 15,000 meals. This event captures the true spirit of the Center's work—coming together to care for one another as a community.



### What's different this year? The bags!

In previous years we disseminated 8,000 bright orange plastic bags the week before the food drive. Northampton recently passed a ban on plastic bags (see side article), so this year white PAPER BAGS will be distributed. Keep an eye out for these distinctive white bags with sturdy handles, and an orange flyer explaining how you can help.

### What to donate to the food drive?

Think healthy, shelf-stable, unopened pantry items.



“It was very difficult to make the decision to come to the Center, but with some of my friends’ convincing, I agreed. Every client was treated equally. When I came home with that much food, I could have cried. I was so grateful.” —A client



## A NEW REGULATION TAKING A DEVASTATING TOLL ON OUR CLIENTS

A new federal regulation is set to wreak havoc for some Survival Center clients beginning on April 1, as many able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWOD) will find their SNAP (food stamp) benefits summarily terminated. Simply understood, any individual ABAWOD living in Hampshire County who isn't homeless or working (or volunteering) part time will only be able to get SNAP benefits for three months during any three year period, starting January 1 of this year. We don't yet know the scope of this change, but have estimated that as many as 500 of our current clients may be losing up to \$194 a month for food, and we anticipate that many of them will need to come to the Center for additional support. Please stay tuned for more details, and see the story below for how you can help.

### HELP US SET THE TABLE THIS SPRING BY BECOMING OUR BREAD AND BUTTER



Our monthly giving program, the Bread & Butter Club, provides a reliable source of funding, assuring that we will be able to meet our clients' basic needs on an ongoing basis. The nutritious foods we provide are truly the bread and butter for our clients, just as your regular donations to the Center are the bread and butter for us! It's easy to participate, and it makes a tremendous impact—you can donate monthly or weekly through your credit or debit card or automatic bank withdrawal.

If you're already a member of the club, please think "Spring Renewal" and consider increasing your donation by \$5 a month. If every B&B Club member did that, the additional \$16,000 a year would fund about 800 individual visits in the coming year. That would go a long way toward easing the sting of the hundreds of SNAP terminations we expect to see in the coming months (see story above). Please consider joining the club or reinvesting with us today!

#### BREAD & BUTTER CLUB NUMBERS:

**265**  
monthly  
donors

**6**  
weekly  
donors

**\$7,643**  
donated  
per month

**10**  
business  
members

**261**  
individual  
members

**\$91,716** donated per year, representing **14%** of our annual budget



**GWEN AGNA:  
BREAD & BUTTER  
CLUB MEMBER**

“I first became a part of the Center as a young mom in 1985. I couldn't believe my good fortune in being able to model for my children the importance of giving back to the community. **The Survival Center is in my heart and soul.** When I took the job as principal at Jackson Street School, I immediately recognized many of the families from volunteering in the pantry. This might have felt awkward had the Survival Center not had a mission to uphold the dignity of its clients. The families I've known rarely feel anything but gratitude, never embarrassment at having to ask for support. Many choose to give back by volunteering or donating in thanks for the Center's help in their hour of need. It's a truly extraordinary place, and we are honored to support the Center by giving monthly through the Bread & Butter Club.”

## REACHING OUT: NEW EFFORTS TO CHECK IN ON FORMER CLIENTS

An opportunity to dig deeper on some confounding statistics

For years we've faced a big gap in our understanding of what happens to clients once they stop coming to the Center for help. On average we see about 1,000 new clients every year, but unless our volume of clients is on the rise, that often means another 800 or more may stop coming that same year. We're left wondering whether it signals a success or a concern for those individuals.

Now we're fortunate to have an intern, Jen, to help us discover the answers. Jen is calling clients who have not been back to the Center in several years. Talking with them, she is finding out how they're doing, why they haven't been at the Center recently, and whether they continue to

need our services. Clients have been very grateful for the concerned outreach, and we're learning more about how they're doing and what help they may still need.



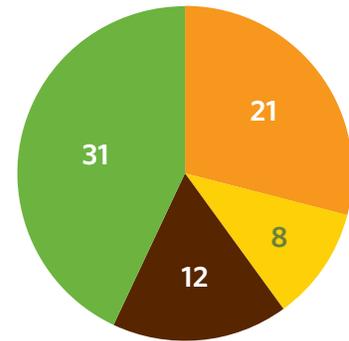
Having volunteered here before her internship, Jen (at right) continues to connect with clients, like Margaret (at left), with whom she's worked at the produce counter.

“You guys are absolutely wonderful to check in on me. I feel like a bright light has shined on my day.”

—Past client during call with Jen

### OUTCOMES

Of the 534 past clients Jen called, she engaged with 72. Here's what we learned from them.



- Will return to the center
- Will return to the center and Jen arranged for other services to assist them
- May return to the center
- No longer in need of the Center's help/relocated

### What do our past clients look like? Here's a snapshot.



CLIENT 1 needs to come back to the Center for food, but has a newborn and cannot. Jen informed her that she can have someone come in on her behalf with a letter and she said that she is definitely going to do that.



CLIENT 2 has no retirement savings; she is disabled and her husband will be retiring soon. They're caring for both an elderly parent and a toddler grandchild, and are planning to come back to the Center for food upon retirement.



CLIENT 3 has been taking care of his elderly and severely-disabled wife, and needs to come in for food, as soon as he can arrange reliable homecare for her. Jen called Highland Valley Elder Services and arranged for a home visit to get them help.



CLIENT 4 moved out of town and is working a job that supports her family. She says that she was so grateful for the Center's help and would like to come back to volunteer.



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United Way of Hampshire County

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: DEBRA & JOE

How one mother/son team are making time to connect with each other and their wider community

“ Last August, I was laid off from my job of 10 years. It was a blow, of course, but it had a silver lining. I'd finally have time to serve as a regular volunteer at the Center, something I'd wanted to do for years. I've known about the Center's vital role in our area ever since we moved to town in 2005, and my husband, John, and son, Joe, and I had all donated to its cause.

But now, with no fulltime job to fill my days, I welcomed the chance to get hands-on. Joe, a junior at Northampton High School, was interested in volunteering too. We both attended an orientation session with Diane, and she soon found us an after-school work slot, so Joe and I could work the same shift.

I volunteer behind the grocery counter, showing the clients all the items offered each week and giving them whatever they choose. Joe helps the clients with their grocery carts, loads bags into their cars, and handles various tasks behind the scenes, from sorting bagels to breaking

down boxes. We both love getting to know the clients, and we enjoy the other volunteers too. My family has known its ups and downs over the years, and I'm aware how fragile a family's finances can be. **I'm really glad that Joe is getting a close-up sense of how a community can come together for mutual support, and I'm so thankful that the Center is there for all.**”

—Debra, pantry volunteer with son, Joe, since 2015



## Crabapple Farm delights us with a donation of 1,400 pounds of local beef



A regular donor of apples since 2007, Crabapple Farm turned to us this winter as they prepared to retire two working oxen from their farm. Not originally raising the animals for their meat, the owners recognized the opportunity to turn these healthy animals into 1,400 pounds of protein-rich ground beef and stew beef for Survival Center clients. It's unprecedented to get a meat donation of this volume, thoughtfully prepared into 1- and 2-pound packages that make them useful for every household size. This donation has inspired a Northampton chef, Deb Christakos, instructor and owner of Cooking from Scratch. Deb



volunteers doing regular cooking demonstrations for our clients, and she's created a recipe incorporating ground meat and other staples we carry at the Center, which she's introduced at the Center along with taste samples for all.