



The Berkshire Food Project seeks to alleviate hunger, food insecurity, and social isolation by serving healthy, no cost meals and connecting people to other resources, all in a dignified and respectful manner.

WOW!

It's hard to put into words just how crazy it's been, but we'll try.

Since mid March, we've been providing take out meals only. After just a few days of doing that from the dining room, we moved to the breezeway for a week... and then got the big white tent from which we've been serving since the beginning of April. We've also adjusted our schedule during the crisis - we are open Monday, Wednesday and Friday but provide two meals each day, so we can now provide six meals a week, instead of five. Our entire meal distribution takes place outside, and the building is closed to visitors. Families are encouraged to send one person to pick up meals for the entire family and no one is allowed to eat the meals on the premises. So far over two months now, our operations have been reduced to simply distributing take out meals. We do get to quickly greet our diners, but the days of welcoming diners with a cup of coffee, sitting and chatting, fulfilling our mission to reduce social isolation - well, that all seems like a distant dream at this point. And while we miss having the dining room open for those kinds of interactions, the safety and well being of everyone - diners, staff, volunteers, those with whom we share the building - is paramount. While we look forward to the "new normal" and the dining room being open, we won't be rushing into that without careful attention to what is required to ensure safety. We await guidance from the health officials and elected leaders. We will keep you posted and hope that perhaps sometime in June we will have more information.

We have very few volunteers working with us right now - out of an abundance of caution and to ensure we can staff our back up plans. Each time a person is introduced into the kitchen, they can impact the entire crew. If one of us is exposed to the virus, we will all need to self quarantine! Additionally, we are interacting with 60 - 100 different people each time we distribute meals - if any of those people get the virus, we'd also need to quarantine. And we certainly don't want to cause any of our volunteers to be more at risk for catching the virus. So, please don't think our volunteers are not essential to our daily operations - they ARE. We just had to adjust things for a little while. I assure you we are ALL looking forward to having our usual volunteer crews return as soon as possible. Currently we have three volunteers who have been working with us inside the building and another four who work under the tent. At the end of a month, they've worked about 100 hard hours with us. That's about a tenth of the normal volunteer hours of about 1,000 per month! We really hope to see more opportunity to call back volunteers in June.

Right now we are benefitting from our **THIRD COVID Relief Fund grant from the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Berkshire United Way and Northern Berkshire United Way.** These grants are being used to not only keep everyone fed at the BFP, but also to help make it feasible for local restaurants to stay open for take-out during the crisis. With our small crew, we would not be able to meet the demand right now without these meals being prepared and packaged at local restaurants. This is a win-win for our community as it helps the local businesses and it ensures nobody is going hungry.

We continue to provide emergency grocery items as well - always in an effort to make it possible to create simple meals at home. Sometimes it may be a loaf of bread, with a jar of peanut butter and a jar of jam. Or it may be fresh vegetables and frozen meat. Or some canned tomato sauce and a box of pasta. We make every effort to have a variety of items that can help people create meals at home on the days we are not open, in addition to the meals we can provide every Monday, Wednesday and Friday..



Kitchen Manager Darlene Ellis and her husband working in the kitchen. Husbands don't increase the risk of exposure, since we already live in the same households... so husbands have been recruited to our volunteer ranks while out of work during the crisis.



All meals are packaged individually for take-out. Each day between 375 and 475 meals are provided. For each person in the household we provide a minimum of 2 meals.

Memorial Day

We will be closed on Monday, May 25 - Memorial Day. On Friday, May 22, we will provide extra food including picnic supplies and special weekend items.



Using tables to create space, and tape to mark off distance on the ground, we are trying to keep everyone socially distanced while in line. We also provide masks to anyone who doesn't have one and require masks be worn to be in line or access food. There is a large plexiglass barrier at the table where meals are distributed - an extra measure of caution for everyone's safety. The table at that barrier is sanitized between every diner - it makes the line go a little slower but it keeps everyone that much safer. Walkers and bikers and cart riders and wheel chairs are all able to move through the line.

THANK YOU!

We have been amazed at the support we are receiving from our community, and beyond.

We've had individuals shop for items that people really appreciate - fresh milk, juice boxes, cereal, snack items. We've had people drop off small gift cards for items we don't have - for example, if we give someone a couple of cans of tuna and a loaf of bread, they may need mayonnaise. Or we may have a package of meat and some vegetables, but no potatoes. A small gift card can complete these meals. Perhaps a person has no way to store food or cook - a small gift card to a local fast food or casual restaurant can ensure they are fed at times when there is no pantry or meal site open.

Many people have understood there are just so many unexpected expenses - and they've supported us financially. This helps with the many unanticipated expenses that now have to fit into our budget - take-out containers and bags, labels and ink (every take-out meal needs to be labeled with the contents, the date and directions for reheating), and of course, food. While the Food Bank of W MA is doing everything it can to provide us with additional food, there's simply not as many local donations as usual. If the shelves are being picked bare, local stores that participate in the Feeding America food banking system simply don't have as much to donate.

We are participating in available government programs as well - for example, we've applied for the additional FEMA funds that are soon to be released for COVID response - and grant opportunities- we've recently received a grant from the Mabel A. Horne Fund and the Ruth Proud Trust.

We are doing our best to ensure every donation is used with effective and efficient intention - we take our role as stewards of generosity seriously and thank everyone for every way we've been supported.

Our staff is quite grateful to be able to continue our operations uninterrupted during these unprecedented times. Thank you to everyone making that possible!



Every day that we distribute meals, the COVID Response Team Emergency Operations Center at North Adams City Hall teams up with volunteer drivers from Northern Berkshire Transport to ensure meals get to everyone who need them - especially those who are unable to come to the Berkshire Food Project and pick meals up. This has been a temporary service for some households as they experienced quarantine, but for others it has been long term - their underlying health conditions preventing them from safely coming out to pick up meals for themselves. Individuals, families with children, older couples - everyone is able to access meals this way! We are so grateful that we are able to get meals to all who need it this way - something we would simply not be able to do ourselves! Thank you to all at the EOC, thank you to the drivers, and especially thank you to **Stacy Parsons** and **Angela Swistak** who are the leaders in this superb effort!

We have so many partners in the community making sure people can get enough to eat! The Al Nelson Friendship Center Pantry, as well as many smaller pantries, are providing groceries and other vital items. The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is providing take-out delivered meals on the weekends. The North Adams School District is making sure kids can get meals. And the local media is helping to make sure everyone knows where to go and how to access resources.

[Read all about food security efforts in our community in this article recently published in the Berkshire Eagle.](#)

[We also had a chance to talk to Jeff Snoonian at iBerkshires Television about the Berkshire Food Project's operations during the COVID crisis. You can check out the video on YouTube here.](#)

North Adams Farmers Market
On Mondays, Suzy Helme has been at the BFP to assist those who want to take advantage of special benefits for EBT card users and order from the North Adams Farmers Market on line. This gives people an opportunity to double their SNAP benefits while purchasing local food - which is then delivered to them on Saturday.

We provide prepared meals to take home and heat up every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
This is a temporary change to our schedule due to COVID crisis.
We do our best to meet special dietary needs.
There is NO criteria and no questions asked.
We encourage families to send a single person to pick up to reduce the number of people standing in line.

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