About the Cover

In 2021, Feeding America, the organization that convenes a national network of 200 food banks, gave the “Living Our Values” award to the thousands of food bank distribution center workers and drivers who rose to the challenge of meeting an increased need in our communities. Donovan Gayle is one of those drivers. He traverses the Finger Lakes region daily, and is one of many Foodlinkers who made our pandemic response possible.

This Impact Report reflects Foodlink’s most recent fiscal year from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

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From our CEO and Board Chair

For the better part of the last decade, Foodlink intentionally set its sights on a future beyond the world of food banking.

The Foodlink Community Kitchen. The Curbside Market. Lexington Avenue Community Farm. Community Health Education. The Foodlink Career Fellowship. All of these strategic initiatives were launched to address root causes of food insecurity. We remained committed to alleviating the need, but our focus was on permanently shortening the line.

COVID — at least, temporarily — changed that.

Need skyrocketed. Lines grew longer. Our community relied on us to get food to people safely and quickly, every single day. This tumultuous year of emergency response also culminated with a milestone: the completion of our most recent strategic plan that outlined the many goals Foodlink set beyond food banking. While the daily urgency of our response remains, we owe it to those whom we serve to reflect on the significant progress we made, even in the midst of a pandemic.

We are your food bank. But our focus will always be on people, first.

As you’ll see in this report, our 2019-2021 Strategic Plan was organized into four pillars. Each pillar was critical in its own way, but the first — “Put People First” — carried even more weight given the events of the past 18+ months. While this mantra certainly holds true for the thousands of people we serve, it also reflects our commitment to our staff, who have gone above and beyond this past year.

In the spirit of putting people first, we decided to dedicate the cover and much of the imagery of this report to the unsung heroes of our distribution center. You can’t operate a forklift from home. Nor can you navigate a 25,000-square-foot industrial cooler. You can’t pick and pack millions of pounds of food for community agencies from home. And you certainly can’t get a truckload of emergency food out to Allegany County. We owe all of these “food responders” our sincere gratitude for how they’ve responded to this crisis with focus, compassion and perseverance.

We would also like to thank you for being on this journey with us. Our response this past year and our achievement of so many goals laid out in our strategic plan would not have been possible without your trust and assistance. As we transition now to a new strategic framework, it is your steadfast support that will enable us to continue toward our vision of a hunger-free community.
In 2018, we spent months with partners and staff charting out a new Strategic Plan. It had four key pillars: Put People First, Improve Community Health, Tell Our Story, and Operate with Excellence. At that time, we couldn’t predict that a global pandemic would bring our economy to a halt, cause food insecurity to spike, and upend our day-to-day operations. And yet, these pillars remained essential guide posts as we navigated our work this past year, and helped us chart a new course for the future.

**STRATEGIC PLAN PILLAR #1**

**Put People First**

When we put people first, we strengthen our staff, volunteers and career empowerment initiatives.

In the past three years, Foodlink has served thousands of people impacted by chronic poverty and a devastating pandemic. At the same time, we prioritized the well-being of the 100+ team members employed by Foodlink — putting them first so that we could be at our best when serving the communities we love.

Foodlink has consistently out-paced New York State’s minimum wage — raising our starting wage to $15.50 and covering 100% of staff health care and dental premiums.

Going forward, we will continue to invest in our staff, and have made it a strategic priority to center all people who use our services so that their voices are lifted, and our work together is more compassionate and collaborative.

A dedicated group of 100+ employees is the engine behind Foodlink’s mission. At right, Brian Knight unloads a donation in the Foodlink Distribution Center.
Improve Community Health

We will lead the way in community health and food security by expanding nutrition initiatives, food access and partnerships.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

This Frederick Douglass quote is often repeated, but too seldom followed. Rochester’s woeful child poverty rate is proof. Foodlink’s commitment to improve community health begins with our youngest residents. In recent years, Foodlink has built stronger relationships with our local schools to expand our school pantry network and develop innovative strategies to feed children during the summer months.

School pantries present a promising path forward for Foodlink’s network to ensure families can put food on the table, and children have the energy to be their best. Following the lead of East High years ago, we now have 19 school pantries in operation, and another 10 in the planning phase at schools throughout our region.

What do children in low-income communities eat when they don’t have access to healthy food at school? The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a problem we already knew existed every summer. The Summer Meals program addresses this issue annually, but with the need growing substantially this past year, we had to innovate.

A partnership with the Regional Transit Service (RTS) produced an “ice cream truck” model of Summer Meals never seen before. The result? The delivery of an additional 42,000 healthy meals to Rochester children — and plans to continue the partnership for years to come.

Foodlink and the Regional Transit Service (RTS) partnered to deliver Summer Meals to children throughout the City of Rochester during the pandemic.
Tell Our Story

When we tell our story, we demonstrate our impact through marketing and storytelling, and broaden our advocacy work to address the root causes of food insecurity.

As faithful stewards of every dollar gifted to us, we owe it to our donors to tell our story in a transparent and thoughtful way. As a nonprofit tasked with connecting people with food in innovative ways, we owe it to our neighbors to provide reliable access to information about where to find food. In making marketing and storytelling a core organizational discipline with our previous strategic plan, serving both audiences has been paramount to our success as an organization these past three years.

The pandemic forced the cancellation of many nonprofit fundraisers and events, and we were not alone in pivoting to a virtual or televised format. We partnered with WROC News 8 for a televised fundraiser in January of 2021, and the community responded! The 30-minute special allowed us to share the story of Foodlink’s pandemic response to a new audience.

Foodlink also launched a new website in December of 2020, with a key feature being an enhanced “Find Food” map to serve the thousands of site visitors who turn to us for food assistance information. This new tool helps clients facing food-insecurity locate more than 250 resources in our network, from food pantries, meal programs and pop-up pantries — to Curbside Market stops and student meal sites.
Operate with Excellence

When we operate with excellence, we leverage smarter infrastructure and technology to help us better serve our community.

The challenges Foodlink faced last year tested all of our core values, perhaps none more than agility. To meet the day-to-day needs of our communities, certain infrastructure changes needed to happen, and nothing proved more critical than having a nimble, effective fleet. Generous grant and public support allowed us to purchase new vehicles for our community kitchen, distribution center and Curbside Market fleets, and expand our capacity to meet a rising need.

We also invested heavily in technological improvements as Foodlink, like many, adopted new work-from-home policies and made other workplace changes during the pandemic. Our Community Health Education team made some sweeping changes and introduced an all-virtual nutrition education course: Cooking Together. With tremendous volunteer support, we pioneered several courses that delivered groceries to people’s doorsteps, then guided them through more than 60 Zoom lessons from the comfort of everyone’s kitchens!

A nimble fleet and a dedicated team of drivers allowed Foodlink to serve nearly 725,000 meals to Rochester children this past year. At left, kitchen driver Aron Seigler loads meals onto a truck before one of his routes through the City of Rochester.
A year like no other
Foodlink’s COVID-19 response continues

Last year’s Impact Report covered the first four months of Foodlink’s pandemic response. But as we all know, COVID has not gone away. This public health crisis continues to impact the food security of thousands of people we serve. The graphics and imagery reflect the work from our 2021 Fiscal Year (July 2020 through June 2021) and what our generous supporters helped us accomplish.
When the pandemic began, Skip Leonhard became one of our most loyal volunteers. Every day, he’d show up at Foodlink or one of our off-site storage facilities to help out for hours on end. This year, we welcomed him to Foodlink in an official capacity as our Distribution Center Manager!

Foodlink shattered its previous high mark for food distribution in 2020-21 by distributing 25.8 million pounds — a 25% increase over the year prior. At left, Nate Williams picks a food order for one of Foodlink’s member agencies.

While we had to limit the number of people in our building due to safety concerns, generous volunteers like Bonnie Crawford have been invaluable to our pandemic response.

Foodlink Career Fellows and our Community Kitchen team stepped up to produce hundreds of thousands of meals, and distribute them in innovative ways to children across Rochester.
We lost three beautiful souls who were part of the Foodlink family this past year. Each contributed to fulfilling our mission in their own unique and irreplaceable way.

**Marcia Coley (1948–2020)**
Marcia was a Curbside Market Ambassador who championed the market in her JOSANA neighborhood and at events around the city. She also became a strong Foodlink advocate for federal nutrition programs, speaking at a Hunger Action Month press conference, and in TV and radio interviews. She was a mother, grandmother, playwright, actress and election poll worker in Rochester, and cared deeply about the well-being and health of her neighbors.

**Mordecai “Mort” Kolko (1933-2021)**
Mort was a beloved friend and leader at Foodlink for many decades. He served on our Foundation Board until his passing, and graciously — along with his brothers — donated a building on Exchange Street that served as Foodlink’s former headquarters. He was kind, generous and joyful — living out the concept of tikkun olam through his philanthropy, volunteer work, and commitment to social justice.
Mort received the inaugural Thomas C. Ferraro Legacy Award, which was presented to him at The Foodlink Get Together in 2019.

**James “Jimmy” Stiner (1979-2021)**
Jimmy was a graduate of the Foodlink Career Fellowship Class of 2020 and dedicated employee of our kitchen. He was a joyful presence to all who knew him and told his Fellowship classmates that he loved “sharing his smile and love with all people.” He took great pride in his role at Foodlink, and his larger-than-life persona left a void for his family, friends and colleagues. To honor his legacy, a Jimmy Stiner Award has been established for future Fellowship graduates.
Financials

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*Total value of donated product was $31,264,159; Foodlink’s revenue, not including the value of donated product, was $24,151,845.

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Independent Auditor’s Report, audited financial statements and IRS Form 990 available online or at the Foodlink, Inc. business office located at 1999 Mt. Read Blvd, Rochester, NY 14615.

The launch of the Foodlink Community Café

Delicious food, dignified service, and a dynamite training opportunity for Foodlink’s culinary apprentices.

Welcome to the Foodlink Community Café!

The café opened in May of 2021 inside the Central Library’s Bausch & Lomb building on South Ave. The café allows Foodlink to provide an additional training opportunity for our Foodlink Career Fellowship — the first cook apprenticeship in the state. The pandemic, and its devastating impact on public health, caused Foodlink to launch with a unique, pay-it-forward model with lower prices for those who cannot afford the cost of a regularly-priced meal.

After a successful launch and a brief summer break, the café reopened in the fall with a new menu and indoor seating area. The menu features a delicious array of signature sandwiches (including the popular “top-notch” tuna melt), salads, soups, sides and local beverages.

We hope you’ll join us for a coffee or lunch soon!

Raised. Includes public support and non-government grants
Earned. Includes fee-for-service revenue
Government Grants. Federal and state funding
Mission
Leverage the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities.

Vision
We believe that the fight against hunger and the fight against poverty are one and the same. We envision a future in which food is recognized as a human right and every person is able to feed themselves and their families in dignity. Together, we work to create a more nourished, prosperous region.