

MFBN - NVFB - TFSCH *Community Collaboration*

Collaboration and capacity building enable action and change. This sentiment became abundantly true when Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN) and North Valley Food Bank (NVFB), our partner in Whitefish, came together with the Trego, Fortine, Stryker Community Hall (TFSCH) just before Thanksgiving to conduct a mobile food pantry to support their local community.

Over the last five years, NVFB has served as a model hub by growing its impact and extending its reach. NVFB sets a great example as a hub for their local network, just as MFBN acts as a hub to our partners on a statewide level.

At a meeting in November, we learned more about NVFB’s outreach into areas as far away as Eureka and Browning. We also learned about the incredible volunteerism and collaboration that happens on Friday afternoons in Trego. Trego is a rural town of 300 households. Just this year, NVFB and the volunteers at TFSCH have received over 7,500 visits to the Trego mobile food pantry.

In preparation for Thanksgiving, MFBN and NVFB combined forces along with more than 20 volunteers from the TFSCH to serve 240 local households through their Trego mobile food pantry distribution. Thanks to incredible collaboration and teamwork, 11,301 pounds of food were distributed in just over one hour! This included 252 whole turkeys, 2,500 pounds of potatoes, bags of fresh vegetables, and 250 22-pound food boxes filled with all the staples needed to make a wholesome Thanksgiving meal and more.

As our understanding of equitable access to nutritious food as a basic human right grows, we see more examples of our network pulling together, combining strength, and bringing necessary resources where they are needed most. **Thanks to everyone who works towards a hunger-free Montana every Friday in Trego and in small communities everywhere.**



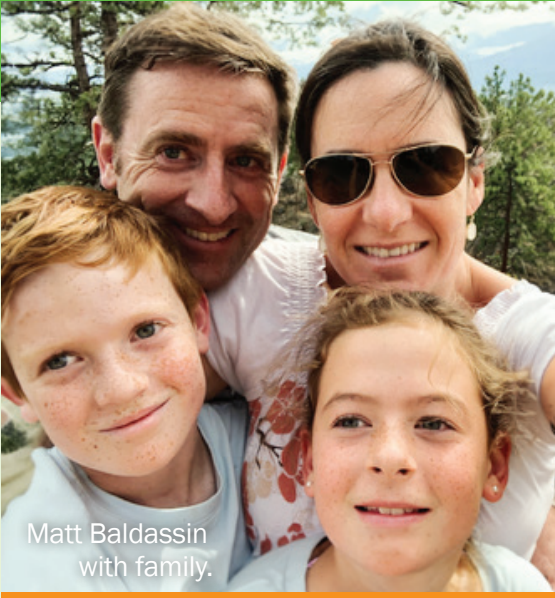
Cars lined up for Trego’s Thanksgiving food distribution.



Food bags ready for distribution in Trego.

INSIDE

LETTER FROM AN MFBN BOARD MEMBER



Matt Baldassin
with family.

“Someone very close to me experienced food insecurity as a child. It had impacted every aspect of their life and continues to influence the way they see the world.”



Working with Montana Food Bank Network has given me insight into a challenge lurking just under the surface in all Montana communities. There are people we know who regularly face food insecurity. Kids who wake up and go to school without breakfast, moms and dads who agonize over that absence, and older neighbors who have accepted that they will probably be just a little hungry every day.

When I was interviewed for a position on MFBN’s board, I was asked whether I had a particular concern or experience that motivated my interest. The answer was, yes – someone very close to me had experienced food insecurity as a child. It had impacted every aspect of their life and continues to influence the way they see the world. Unless you asked them, you would never suspect it – they seem so confident, so healthy, so ... put together. **And it broke my heart to imagine someone I care about having to struggle like that.**

I told Gayle Carlson, MFBN’s President and Chief Executive Officer, that I was most concerned about kids experiencing hunger. I felt it was a terrible condition, not only for them and not just right now, but also for all Montanans today and into the future. These kids will be our neighbors, our coworkers, and our leaders. Not providing the food they need to grow and learn is not only painful for them, it also just makes no sense for Montana.

MFBN impacts us today and our efforts will continue to improve the lives of generations of Montanans. **As our state and communities grow, the challenge of hunger grows with them. MFBN’s mission is to improve every day in order to confront that challenge. I am so proud to be a part of it.**

Matt Baldassin
MFBN’s Board Chair



No Kid Hungry Montana – KILA SCHOOL

As of July 2023, MFBN is honored to partner with Share Our Strength, a national organization working to end childhood hunger and poverty in the United States, to implement the No Kid Hungry (NKH) Montana campaign. Through this partnership, MFBN added two new, dedicated staff positions, furthering our work towards ending childhood hunger in Montana. In our first year, staff have been building and expanding relationships throughout the state and learning best practices to better serve Montana's youth. Our NKH Montana priorities include increasing participation in school breakfast, promoting implementation of Summer EBT, and increasing access to summer non-congregate meal programs. These focus areas help Montana youth thrive all year long, whether they are in the classroom, at home, or playing with friends.

By the end of 2023, our NKH Montana staff covered nearly 1,060 miles visiting schools and community partners throughout western and central Montana. They learned from those who serve children with heart, dedication, and creativity. For example, the school nutrition team at Kila School in Flathead County takes great pride in dishing out home-cooked meals to their scholars. Carri, the school's Food Service Director, and her assistant, Mindy, offer oven-baked breads, savory soups, and fresh produce that students look forward to each day. They also go above and beyond in welcoming the students into the kitchen culture by having the middle schoolers serve the younger students. **Carri and Mindy cultivate a sense of belonging in the students of Kila who know that the kitchen, and the school as a whole, is their community.**

Across our great state, many people work tirelessly to provide nutritious food to our youth. With full bellies, Montana kids have the ability to reach their fullest potential to learn, explore, and succeed. Montana Food Bank Network and No Kid Hungry Montana are proud to be a part of the food security movement.

To learn more about NKH Montana, visit us at mfbn.org/no-kid-hungry-montana.



Welcome to Kila School.



Carri Hancock, Kila School's Nutrition Program Director, and her grandson, a Kila middle schooler, prepare for lunch service.

Farm Bill & SUMMER EBT



Montana State Capitol building in Helena.

2024 is an important year for nutrition policy. This year, Congress must pass a Farm Bill reauthorizing the agriculture policies that shape our country's food system, as well as programs impacting access to food, including SNAP and USDA commodity programs. Additionally, states will begin implementing Summer EBT — a new, nationwide child nutrition program to reduce child hunger over the summer months.

A **Farm Bill** that strengthens SNAP and invests in TEFAP, the commodity program that helps Montana food pantries keep food on their shelves, is a critical opportunity to connect more Montanans to the nutrition they need. Help us send a strong message to Montana's members of Congress that SNAP is an effective and crucial program that must be protected. SNAP can work even better for Montana families and communities by modernizing access for college students, older adults, and other people who face additional barriers. **Learn more and take action at mfbn.org/actioncenter.**

Along with advocating for a strong Farm Bill, we are celebrating the launch of **Summer EBT** in Montana! Summer EBT was created by Congress as a nationwide program in December 2022. Summer EBT is the result of years of advocacy work by MFBN and other nutrition advocates from across the country, urging Congress to address the issue of summer hunger. Summer EBT is also the result of the success demonstrated by pilot projects

beginning in 2011, as well as critical lessons learned during the pandemic. Summer EBT helps families fill the gap during the summer months when children lose access to school meals. Now, children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals will qualify for \$120 in grocery benefits over the summer months. **Summer EBT is a monumental step forward in ensuring that children have the nutrition they need over the summer to return to school well-fed and ready to learn.**

MFBN License Plate – STAND UP AGAINST HUNGER

Help us end hunger in Montana by choosing Montana Food Bank Network's "Stand Up Against Hunger" license plate the next time you purchase or renew your vehicle registration. Every license plate helps provide at least 80 meals for our neighbors facing hunger. Ask for the MFBN license plate at your local DMV today!



5625 Expressway
Missoula, MT 59808-9071
(406) 721-3825
mfbn.org



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