

# The Feeding Frontline

2021 FALL NEWSLETTER



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FEEDING  
AMERICA

LINCOLNFOODBANK.ORG

## BackPack to School

For Kelsey Schiltz, a box of Froot Loops is more than a colorful and tasty breakfast cereal. She watches as the contents of this container transform from a sigh of relief to a source of excitement.

Each week before the pandemic hit, Kelsey, along with a group of students called "Positive Peers," distributed food-filled backpacks to students at Pershing Elementary School in Lincoln. And each week, Kelsey watched the students' expressions as they investigated the food in their pack.

"It can be the coolest thing, but also heartbreaking, to see students get excited by something they might not get in their households, like a box of Froot Loops ... they might not have those treats," the school social worker explained.

Easy-to-prepare meals and snacks, like peanut butter and jelly, cereal, boxed pastas and canned tuna, are at the core of the Backpack Program weekly menus. The program, designed to nourish children and families through the weekend when school meals are unavailable, began in 2004 by serving 50 students and families at Clinton Elementary School. By 2020, the program had grown and Child Hunger Programs

expanded, to serving more than 6,000 families across Southeast Nebraska each month during the school year.

Then the pandemic hit. Like most operations, Child Hunger Programs had to pivot.

For Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), the pivot led to a pause for the Backpack Program and School Food Markets for the 2020-21 school year. To ensure children and families were still getting the meals they needed, seven schools adopted on-

site food pantries and the Food Bank held drive-thru food distributions in Lincoln every Monday-Saturday, including one per week at an LPS site. A partnership with Catholic Social Services helped maintain three Food Markets in Lincoln's Catholic Schools.

### Donation Impact:

It costs about \$250 for one student to receive weekly backpacks for an entire school year. To learn more or to donate, visit [lincolnfoodbank.org](https://lincolnfoodbank.org).

Child Hunger Programs at 29 rural partner sites remained active, with some modifications.

Katie Wergin volunteers as the program coordinator for the Milford Backpack Program. Her team of 12 volunteers had finalized plans to move their operations from a business in downtown Milford to a room in the elementary school when they were disrupted by the pandemic. With only school staff members and students allowed in the building, an internal

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## THE FOOD BANK MISSION

Alleviate hunger  
in Southeast Nebraska.

## OUR VISION

Nourishing our communities  
to end hunger.

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**"I didn't realize how many kids in our area actually needed meals and it just pulled at my heart to get more involved in this program."**

**– Katie Wergin,  
Volunteer**

# A Letter From the President & CEO

## LEARNING AND LEADING

From slates to spiral notebooks to Chromebooks, back-to-school time is an indicator of time and growth. The learning that happens during a school year is both a gift and a challenge. Yet, learning is not confined to classrooms or a particular stage of life. "Learning, re-learning and un-learning" has become a mantra at the Food Bank of Lincoln, where we move through current challenges and prepare for upcoming transitions.

## LEARNING

A friend's 5-year-old grandson was playing at a park recently when two older kids told him he should not be there. Their reason? Because he's Black.

What lessons could come from such a heartbreaking act? Whatever those lessons are, they begin with questions: Why? How? Now what?

Questions are at the heart of learning, and the right ones can transform lives.

The "why" of our work is often summed up with the simple phrase, "people gotta eat." And when we say this, we mean ALL people have got to eat.

The more we can learn about the lives of our neighbors, the better we can serve them, making the "how" and "what next" easier to answer.

## RE-LEARNING

Hunger does not care about race, age, personal identity, urban or rural living, religious affiliation or aversion, social capital or medical condition, among a host of other factors.

Our Core Values fuel our mission to feed. Diversity is one of those values. It is not a buzzword. Nor is it a gentle suggestion. It, along with Compassion, Education, Collaboration and Responsibility, drives our organization's program and advocacy efforts. Re-learning these Core Values not only helps energize us and feed our neighbors, it also helps us forge brave new paths as we address the complicated roots of hunger.

## UN-LEARNING

Prior to the pandemic in Nebraska, our minority neighbors and single-family households experienced the highest rates of food insecurity. These groups remain disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We are called to do better in our service.

As an organization, ours is a year-round education. We seek to un-learn the generalizations that hold back the success and wellbeing of others. We will call out barriers and confront misconceptions. We invite you to join us. We must act — in voice and in deed — to ensure all neighbors who need supplemental food can access it with dignity and without shame, beginning with those who we know are most impacted.

We must acknowledge that every child, adult and senior have value. That the 5-year-old has a place on the playground and at the table. Our values call upon us to speak up. Every one of our Core Values demands us to take notice and act.

As we move into a new school year, we will continue to challenge ourselves to keep learning, achieving and taking action — both for the good of our neighbors facing food insecurity as well as for ourselves. We hope you will, too.

With gratitude,



**Michaela Kumke**  
President & CEO  
Food Bank of Lincoln



# Raising Our Response to Hunger



Exterior walls and steel framing officially surround the 60,000 square-foot perimeter of the future headquarters of the Food Bank of Lincoln. These walls, located at 1221 Kingbird Road in Lincoln, enclose the new facility that aims to get more food to more people, increase access to healthy foods, and shorten food lines through education and community stability.

## Facility Features:

- The new facility will triple the Food Bank's current refrigerated capacity and incorporate smart monitoring systems to help reduce spoilage and waste while increasing energy efficiency.

- The Distribution Center will include an increased number of docks with designated space for partner agencies and deliveries to improve food distribution efficiencies.
- New classrooms and volunteer work areas will offer safer, more welcoming environments for the community to engage in activities to help shorten food lines through education and empowerment.

Each day, we are one step closer to realizing our vision for a new facility and are grateful for the community partners, friends and supporters who are joining us as we Raise Our Response to Hunger. Thank you.

## Progress Report:

At the time of print, \$9 million of the \$10 million needed has been raised for this campaign. We're asking for your help in raising the remaining \$1 million. To learn more or to donate, visit [lincolnfoodbank.org/raiseourresponse](https://lincolnfoodbank.org/raiseourresponse).

## Why I Give:

**"I hope that if I ever need help, it is there for me.  
Thank you for all the good work that you do."**

**– Kiley**



## A Dash of Hope

Food is now reaching more neighbors facing hunger, thanks to a partnership with United Way and DoorDash. Through the "Ride United: Last-Mile Delivery Program," Lincolniters who are seniors, homebound, with small children or without transportation can sign-up for weekly home delivery of shelf-stable foods. DoorDash drivers pick up food bags at the Food Bank or our partner agency, Center for People in Need, and deliver them directly to doorsteps, free of charge. The Food Bank has been participating in this program **since May and serves about 135 households each week.**

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## BackPack to School



team, led by a dual Backpack volunteer and school staff member, completed the move.

Katie trained a group of paraeducators on the logistics of the program — the group that would lead operations until Katie's volunteer group resumed management in September 2020.

"I really enjoy knowing that we are feeding families in our community," Katie said. "I didn't realize how many kids in our

area actually needed meals and it just pulled at my heart to get more involved in this program."

This fall, pre-pandemic Child Hunger Programs, including the Backpack Program and School Food Markets, joined LPS students in going back to school — a welcomed return.

**"I can think of many families that will be relieved for the weekly staple," Kelsey said. "Feeding children and families, I cannot think of anything better."**

Added Katie, "Without everyone, this program wouldn't be able to operate. We're forever grateful to each and every one of you!"





## Staff Introduction: Lauren Ritta

Lauren Ritta has a passion for food and feeding people. It's what inspired her to work in the food and beverage industry for 15 years, most recently as a kitchen manager for Lincoln

Public Schools, and the same reason she was motivated to become the new volunteer coordinator at the Food Bank. Since joining the staff in May, Lauren has facilitated the return of volunteer activity following a year-long pandemic pause and has focused on creating positive experiences for Food Bank guests and volunteers.

**"Volunteers are essential to the Food Bank's ability to maximize our impact,"** Lauren said. "It's important for our guests to have their own neighbors helping neighbors, knowing they have a genuine desire to be there for them. I will be successful when our volunteers become outspoken advocates for food security, financial stability and human dignity in our community."

For volunteer opportunities, please contact Lauren Ritta at [LRitta@lincolnfoodbank.org](mailto:LRitta@lincolnfoodbank.org).



## Hunger Action Month

More than 42 million people (1 in 9) living in the United States may experience food insecurity this year, including 57,510 (1 in 8) neighbors here in Southeast Nebraska.

September is Hunger Action Month, a time dedicated to learning more about food insecurity in our community and taking actions to alleviate hunger.

Whether you advocate for neighbors trying to make ends meet, host a fundraiser or volunteer your time and talents, we hope you'll join us — and our friends across the country — for these 30 days of learning, listening and hunger fighting. For ways you can make a difference this September, visit [lincolnfoodbank.org](http://lincolnfoodbank.org).

Hunger Action Day is Sept. 17. We invite you to wear orange to help raise awareness about hunger in our community.



Save  
the Date  
Wednesday, Sept. 8

Dine Out at any participating restaurant on Wednesday, Sept. 8, and a portion of the proceeds will be used to help feed neighbors facing hunger in our community. For a list of locations, visit [lincolnfoodbank.org](http://lincolnfoodbank.org).

**Edward Jones**  
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

## Donation Location

Thanks to our partners at Edward Jones, you can once again donate food and personal care items year-round at all Edward Jones locations in the Lincoln-area. For a list of most needed items, visit [lincolnfoodbank.org](http://lincolnfoodbank.org).



### HOURS

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Monday-Friday

### CONNECT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



/FoodBankofLincoln



@FoodBankofLincoln

### LOCATION

4840 Doris Bair Circle, Suite A  
(next to Doris Bair softball complex)



@FoodBankLincoln



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### MAILING ADDRESS

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