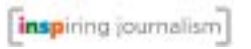


# STREET Zine

Offering financial opportunity to homeless and economically disadvantaged individuals. STREETZine is a program of The Stewpot and a member of **International Network of Street Papers**



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## Combating Food Insecurity Requires Broad Strategies

By Nicole Kiser

Each year, The Stewpot returns to its roots with Soup's On! In 1975, The Stewpot began as a soup kitchen, with the goal of feeding those in need in the community. Soup's On! is a charity luncheon that honors The Stewpot's beginnings by serving soup to donors and clients while raising funds and awareness for The Stewpot's mission to serve the at-risk and in-need.

This year's speaker highlights one pillar of The Stewpot's mission to serve people in need: food insecurity. The speaker, José Andrés, is a chef, restaurateur and humanitarian and founded the nonprofit World Central Kitchen, which specializes in food distribution in the wake of disaster. World Central Kitchen delivered millions of meals to Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria, and now partners with restaurants, small farms and community leaders to combat the increased food insecurity caused by the pandemic.

### What is food insecurity?

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is a "lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life." Food insecurity has **three main components**:

- Lack of food availability: not enough food is available.
- Lack of food access: not enough resources for a healthy diet.
- Lack of proper food use: limited or lack of access to other resources to sustain nutrition and care, such as lack of access to fresh water.

Food insecurity can cause serious health complications. Those in food-insecure households are at a higher risk for **obesity and mental health problems** as well as a variety of other issues. Many food-insecure households face the difficult decision of **deciding between health-care and food**.

### What causes food insecurity?

Food insecurity is caused by a complex, interconnecting web of reasons. While food insecurity is often experienced by those under the poverty level, some people have **full-time jobs and still experience hunger**. Lack of affordable housing, low wages, high medical costs and other factors can all push a family into food insecurity.

Many families are also forced to buy only the cheapest food, which often lacks the substance and nutrition necessary to form a healthy diet. **Lack of physical access** to food can escalate this problem. And lack of



*Clients participating in The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program. Courtesy of Sandra Zelley.*

access to transportation can limit how far a family can go to obtain food. Urban areas, rural areas and low-income neighborhoods are often **food deserts**. Food deserts lack access to full-service supermarkets and grocery stores, which means the only locally available food is the limited (often nutritionally deficient) selection found in convenience stores.

### Food insecurity in Dallas

Food insecurity has been a significant concern in Dallas for years,

with other economic and inequality issues that Dallas faces only contributing to the problem. Dallas has the **third highest child poverty rate** in the United States. The **lack of af-**

*Continued on page 7*

## INSIDE

Financial Literacy is a Key to Food Security: A Conversation with Daniel Millimet - **4**

Helping Yourself and Helping Others: Johnnie's Recipe for a Good Life - **6**

WHAT SHOULD WE COVER NEXT? FILL OUT OUR SURVEY AT:  
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# STREET *Zine*

STREET *Zine* is a program of The Stewpot.



The STREET *Zine* is a monthly newspaper published by The Stewpot, a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. The Stewpot provides services and resources for people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of being homeless. The organization also offers opportunities for a new life.

As part of this ministry, the STREET *Zine* seeks to raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty. At the same time, the monthly publication offers financial opportunity for homeless clients who sell the paper to Dallas residents. Vendors are able to move towards economic self-sufficiency by using the money they receive from selling copies to purchase bus passes, food, and necessary living expenses. Clients also receive stipends for contributing articles to STREET *Zine*.

The content in STREET *Zine* does not necessarily reflect the views or endorsement of its publisher, editors, contributors, sponsors, or advertisers. To learn more about this publication, contact Betty Heckman, Director of Enrichment, 1835 Young Street, Dallas, Texas 75201 or BettyH@thestewpot.org. And to read more about STREET *Zine*, a member of the International Network of Street Papers, go to [www.thestewpot.org/streetzine](http://www.thestewpot.org/streetzine).

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## A Letter from the Executive Director

By Brenda Snitzer

As unusually frigid weather blasted its way into North Texas in mid-February, a coalition of nonprofit groups that included the City of Dallas Office of Homeless Solutions, local nonprofits and The Stewpot began to offer shelter, food and warmth to those seeking a respite from the snow and Arctic air. The coalition has worked collaboratively the past three years to provide rides to safe shelter in churches during inclement weather and to hotels during the pandemic. This time, that wasn't going to be enough, not with the temps dropping to life-threatening levels.

The group instead called City Hall and asked about housing folks at the Kay Bailey Hutcheson Convention Center. Within less than two hours, our collaborative leadership team met and handled all the logistics to make it work. Along with a multitude of the collaboration's staff and volunteers, we offered cots, blankets and warmth at the city facility. We also served food to those who otherwise would have gone hungry.

That last element — food insecurity — is a reality we deal with each day at The Stewpot. Our ministry originated in 1975 in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas to address a lack of food for Dallas' then-growing homeless population. Church leaders and members created a soup kitchen in the bottom floor to serve those in need of a meal.

Over the last 46 years, we have provided food each day, first in the church, then in The Stewpot building as our ministry grew and now seven days a week at The Stewpot's Second Chance Café at The Bridge Homeless Recovery Center (The Bridge is the city's facility for people experiencing homelessness). The Stewpot even has a community garden in which clients can help grow produce in non-COVID times.

We couldn't begin to address food insecurity without a dedicated Stewpot staff, volunteers from across the city and support from First Presbyterian Church and generous donors in our community. On March 4, all of those fundamentals of our work will be on display at The Stewpot's annual Soup's On! luncheon.

We are honored to feature chef, restaurateur and humanitarian José Andrés at the virtual gathering. The online audience will hear about his compassionate work to provide food for



communities besieged by hurricanes, earthquakes and other acts of nature through his World Central Kitchen. **Please join us, if you are able.**

Since 2014, our dedication to combat food insecurity has taken on a new dimension: recovering unused food from restaurants, grocery stores and hotels. Instead of vegetables, meats and beverages going to waste, The Stewpot's Meal Service Director Michael Haynes leads a team of staff members who each week use recovered food in providing three meals a day at The Bridge or in distributing food in our garage to needy families. He and a team either pick up the food or committed partners deliver the unused resources to The Stewpot's loading dock.

But perhaps nowhere was the professional and collaborative work of our team required more than during February's 139 consecutive hours of freezing or sub-freezing temperatures. Along with team members from Austin Street Center, Oak Lawn United Methodist Church, Our Calling, The Salvation Army, The Stewpot, The Bridge and the Office of Homeless Solutions, volunteers welcomed clients, handed out blankets and served food. This was only the collaborative's organizing leadership group. Hundreds of volunteers from more than 25 groups were involved in funding and pulling off this effort.

Four leaders of The Stewpot's meal services team even slept five nights in First Presbyterian Church on cots. They didn't want frozen roads to keep them from cooking for guests at The Bridge and to stop them from delivering food to the temporary shelter.

Snowstorms and the pandemic provide a challenge, but compassionate individuals and caring organizations still meet the needs of vulnerable Dallasites. As we move ahead, addressing the deep-seated problem of food insecurity will require us to maintain that same commitment.

*Brenda Snitzer is executive director of The Stewpot.*

## The Pastor's Letter

By The Rev. Rebecca Chancellor Sicks

*This essay is adapted from a Lenten sermon Rev. Sicks delivered at the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.*

On Wednesday, February 17, in the middle of a great winter storm, power outages and loss of water across the state of Texas and beyond, the season of Lent began. The below-freezing temperatures could not stop Lent from coming. Annually, Christians begin the observance of Lent 46 days before Easter on Ash Wednesday. Lent is part of our liturgical rhythm, as we annually celebrate the birth of Jesus, and his baptism and ministry to those on the margins, and then begin to prepare ourselves for his death and resurrection with a season of self-examination and penitence.

Another word for repentance, penitence is an old “church word” that invites us to engage in practices of being humble and honest about who we are, what we have done or not done, and what we hope for the future. And for many of us and our neighbors, having our power go out and faucets stop running with life-giving water was a stark reminder that we are not in control. It’s humbling to have our basic needs suddenly unavailable, and yet it reminds us of the common Ash Wednesday refrain: From dust we have come, and to dust we shall return.

Reminded of our own frailty and mortality, we enter into the rhythms of the Lenten season: sometimes slower, often more intentional or focused. Observing Lent year after year becomes a rhythm for us not unlike breathing: a comfortable and practiced discipline, but one that calls us to stretch and go deeper each time.

I have heard many remarks over the last few months that we have been experiencing Lent for an entire year. We have been forced to slow down, spend more time alone or at home, and

we’ve given up many of life’s pleasures — things we took for granted, like being able to see other faces in worship on a Sunday morning, shaking someone’s hand, meeting someone for lunch at a restaurant and holding a friend’s new baby.

We have many stories of lament to tell; there’s no shortage. And this has left some people thinking they don’t need Lent this year. They don’t need to slow down. They don’t need to give up something they enjoy. They don’t need more time in quiet meditation or prayer. They feel stuck in this slow and distanced rhythm and are ready for something new.

Whether we like it or not, Lent has come again, and we are reminded in Psalm 51 that we are mortal human beings who sin. The writer of this psalm, who may have been a singer or poet or musician, lays out a beautiful pattern for us. There is a deep faith from one who sincerely believes God is majestic and Almighty and Awesome, a God who can and will have mercy, love steadfastly, wash me, cleanse me, grant joy and gladness and rejoicing, blot out my sin, create a clean heart and new spirit, save me, sustain me with a willing spirit and deliver me.

The deep faith of the psalmist brings with it self-examination and confession: “I know my transgressions, my sin is ever before me. I have sinned against you and done what is evil in your sight.” And there is a promise, a commitment to be in covenant relationship with God: an offering to teach others who are also sinners how to follow God. The psalmist will sing aloud of God’s deliverance and will declare God’s praise.

Lent calls us back to the truth — and the irony — of the gospel: that the only way to have life is to let go. We are called to humble ourselves before God in truth and to live with God and

for God. We give up control in order to find what God can do in us and through us and for us. The promise of grace we find in Lent is that God always wants to be in a right relationship with us. God calls to us again and again out of deep and abiding love. God wants us to turn to God, to return to God. That is the hope of this season: that we will return to God.

Remember, beloved people of God:

Our Creator formed us out of the dust of the earth, and to the dust of the earth we will one day return. Life, in all its forms, both sacred and ordinary, is in God’s hands.

*The Rev. Rebecca Chancellor Sicks is associate pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.*



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## Financial Literacy is a Key to Food Security: A Conversation with Daniel Millimet

By Bill McKenzie

*Daniel Millimet is the Robert H. and Nancy Dedman Trustee Professor in the Department of Economics at SMU, where he has researched and analyzed food insecurity. He and two colleagues surveyed clients at the North Texas Food Bank in 2014 about the challenges of finding a secure food supply. A counter-intuitive, but key finding of their research was that the tools of financial literacy — knowing how to balance a budget and plan for the future, for example — had a significant impact on whether clients were considered food secure or food insecure, no matter their income level. He explained their findings and the importance of financial literacy in this interview with STREETZine editorial board member Bill McKenzie.*

**In your paper on food insecurity, you wrote that “Household economic resources are far from the whole story when it comes to food security.” What did you mean by that?**

*The punchline of the paper is that an individual’s financial capabilities...had a surprisingly large impact on their food security. The more they knew, the more they could most effectively use whatever household resources they had and minimize their food insecurity.*

At the most basic level, which households are food insecure versus which are not does not line up perfectly with who is in poverty and who is not. If household economic resources were the full story, you would expect a nearly perfect correlation between food insecurity and poverty status. That is not what we see in the data. We see a lot of households living below the poverty line that somehow manage to be food secure and plenty of households well above the poverty line that report being food insecure.

**What did you find in the relationship between financial literacy and food insecurity?**

The punchline of the paper is that an indi-

vidual’s financial capabilities, including their knowledge of how finances work, how credit cards work, and how interest rates work, had a surprisingly large impact on their food security. The more they knew, the more they could most effectively use whatever household resources they had to minimize their food insecurity.

Poorer households that possessed this financial knowledge could remain food secure despite their resources. The same was true for richer households. You could be above the poverty line and yet be more food insecure if you lacked this financial knowledge. We found these were the people who tended to be more food insecure.

**That’s interesting. People could be at risk even if they were above the poverty line?**

Exactly. We compared our finding to other studies that looked at the effect of food stamps on food security. A previous study found that having access to food stamps over six months had a smaller effect on reducing food insecurity than what we found about raising a household’s financial literacy. So, there is a relatively large effect, equal to or perhaps even greater than the effect of participating in the food stamp program.

**Did these findings surprise you? And do**

*Continued on page 10*

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# “I see opportunities for solutions”: The Connections Between Food Waste, Homelessness and COVID-19

By Katherine Haines

*Food waste and homelessness are often seen as two separate issues. However, there are many organizations across the United States working on solutions to both problems at once. Even with the difficulties of COVID-19, organizations are finding ways to help support the larger numbers of people needing food support by recovering significant amounts of food that would be wasted through shutdowns.*

Every day, over 133 billion pounds of food in the United States is wasted, which is **about 30 to 40 percent of the food supply** every year. Food is the **single largest category** of materials put into municipal landfills that emit methane. This equates to about one pound of food wasted per day for every person in the country.

The US had a high rate of food waste even before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as supply chains struggled to shift when COVID-19 forced many restaurants to close, and panic buying cleared off store shelves, food waste became an even more visual problem.

**News coverage** capturing graphic incidents of food waste at the top of the food distribution chain, like animal euthanasia and milk-dumping at farms, drew explicit attention to the food waste issues in the harvesting, processing and distribution systems that manage and transport all of our food.

While it's clear many of the processes surrounding our food need to be reevaluated, food waste is still something mostly exacerbated by consumers. If anything, the shutdown of restaurants points to an issue of how people consume food. Beginning in March, spending at restaurants and hotels declined by more than **60 percent due to COVID-19, and grocery spending increased by 70 percent and continued to increase by 10 percent through**

**April, May and June of 2020**, pointing to the fact many households relied more on prepared food from restaurants than cooking every meal themselves. But what happened to the food caught in the middle?

## Food recovery and rescue programs

Most people associate food assistance organizations with the idea of a food pantry, a place relying on donations from individuals in the community or from grocery stores. However, many organizations with food assistance programs also have food recovery and rescue programs in addition to accepting donations.

Even before COVID-19, **We Don't Waste** — located in Denver, Colorado — was, and still is, a non-profit organization focused on food recovery and rescue. Communications and advocacy manager Allie Hoffman discussed the motivation for the start of the nonprofit in 2009. “The need is huge for food, and the need is also really huge for food recovery because there's a lot of really good food in the US and globally, but especially in the US, that ends up in the landfill,” says Hoffman.

We Don't Waste now runs with four large refrigerated trucks and an 11,000 square foot distribution center with walk in coolers, and is soon-to-have walk in freezers as well.

“We like to say it's not a warehouse because we don't want to warehouse food, but we're able to take large bulk items you can't necessarily flood the community with — because it's something like 13 pallets of black pepper — so we're able to portion it out and get it out to the community as it's



*Photos of volunteers for We Don't Waste organising food stock and preparing for service users. Courtesy of We Don't Waste.*

needed,” says Hoffman.

We Don't Waste focuses mainly on large-scale producers, distributors and venues whereas another organization, **The Stewpot**, located in Dallas, Texas, also has a large food recovery program, working primarily with restaurants and more local businesses. The Stewpot's food recovery program is part of a larger project for social good, as they offer services like mental health counseling, relocation help, ID and housing assistance, mail services and many different classes and workshops,

*Continued on page 9*



*Photos of volunteers for We Don't Waste organising food stock and preparing for service users. Courtesy of We Don't Waste.*



# Helping Yourself and Helping Others: Johnnie's Recipe for a Good Life

By Poppy Sundeen

For close to five years, Johnnie lived on the street. "I slept out in the rain and the cold on a cardboard box using my backpack as a pillow. It took me a long time to realize it wasn't society that put me out there. I put myself out there."

That realization was a turning point for Johnnie. "I swallowed my pride and stopped blaming others," he explains. He resolved to take ownership of his life and start helping himself.

## Losing a wife, a job and a home

Johnnie traces his downward spiral back to the death of his wife. "I was depressed and feeling sorry for myself. Then one day, I just didn't show up for work and eventually I ended up homeless."

In the months that followed, Johnnie learned the ins and outs of life on the street. He learned how homeless people take care of each other by sharing tips on places to get meals and other assistance. He also learned how uncaring society could be at times. "A lot of people just don't want you around. They act like you've got some kind of disease. I got tired of that."

## The Bridge back to productivity

Johnnie's transition back from the streets began at The Bridge, a homeless recovery center near downtown Dallas. "Someone told me they could help me get back on my feet."

Within 24 hours, Johnnie had a case manager who helped him get a social security card and ID. "It was like a light switch went on. I wanted to do everything I could to make it work."

Residents at The Bridge pay for their transitional housing by helping out. In Johnnie's case, that meant working in the dining hall. "I started out wiping tables and pouring water. Once I got going, I just loved doing it. I wasn't only giving back. I was giving back to people I knew."

Soon Johnnie became friendly not just with the residents, but also with volunteers from The Stewpot who provide meals at The Bridge. "I got to know them enough to laugh and joke with them."

Since May 2008, The Stewpot has been the sole meal provider at The Bridge, serving 1,000 meals per day, seven days a week.

## The reward for a good job? A better job.

Johnnie's effort and enthusiasm in The Bridge dining hall didn't go unnoticed. The Stewpot team was impressed enough to ask him for his resume. "Two days later, I had an interview at The Stewpot and was hired the same day."

That was more than two years ago. Since then, Johnnie has been an important member of The Stewpot team, sprucing up the church grounds, working with Stewpot clients and taking on whatever task needs to be done.

Recently, Johnnie took on an especially vital task: helping the Dallas community through a life-threatening cold snap. When temperatures fell to below zero and power outages dotted the city, Johnnie joined fellow Stewpot team members to provide warmth, food and shelter to hundreds of the city's homeless.

"I saw so many people I knew," he says. "They'd come in from the cold, and we'd get them a sandwich and bottled water. It was my chance to give back, and it felt so good."

## An apartment — and a kitchen — of his own

Today, Johnnie lives in an apartment east of downtown Dallas. With a kitchen of his own, he can apply the skills he learned while earning his Associate's Degree in Culinary Arts. "I'm good at grilling meats," he says. But Johnnie's all-time go-to dish is his version of Frito pie. "I make mine a little different from everybody else." And he makes enough for multiple meals.

"That's one of the things they teach you in culinary arts — to serve a lot of people at one time." It's a lesson he learned well.

*Poppy Sundeen, a Dallas writer, is a member of the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.*

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*Participants in The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program socialize after gardening. Courtesy of Sandra Zelley.*

*Continued from page 1*

**fordable housing** in Dallas has been deemed a crisis. These issues and more contribute to a rate of food insecurity in Dallas County that is **47% higher** than the national average.

The last year has made the issue of food insecurity even more prominent. The pandemic wrought havoc on the economy, and many lost wages and jobs. Employment won't return to pre-pandemic levels **until 2024**. **World Central Kitchen** has distributed over 35 million meals throughout the United States. The **North Texas Food Bank** alone saw a 40% increase in meals distributed. The Stewpot distributed over 35,000 family meals to 692 households between April and December.

The pandemic has also affected the global supply chain, making some products harder to obtain than others. Dallas's status as a food desert causes supply chain interruptions to affect the city more than most.

"While Dallas is one of the biggest distribution hubs in the country, in terms of sending food elsewhere, we don't grow any here at all. Texas grows cotton, soybeans and a few other things that they trade with Mexico and California, where we get their produce," says Dr. Doric Earle, Director of Operations at **Restorative Farms** in Dallas. "Right now, if we shut down the border...we have two to three weeks of fresh fruits and vegetables in the system, and then we would run out because we don't have any supply. Dallas has a huge hole in terms of its own capacity to grow its own fresh fruits and vegetables." This effect is underscored by the recent winter storms that saw grocery shelves wiped clean after delivery was interrupted for less than a week.

### What's being done

Many organizations, like food pantries and the free lunch program, work to fight food insecurity through food distribution. Restorative Farms takes a different approach. The organization seeks to lower food insecurity and increase Dallas's food independence by building a community-based urban farm system. Restorative Farms has donated food to the community, sometimes literally going door-to-door

during harvests to give away fresh food. During the pandemic, Restorative Farms has pivoted to selling raised garden beds, known as "GroBoxes," where every GroBox sold helps fund another GroBox to be placed in the community.

"Despite the beast of COVID, we have delivered seven or eight boxes recently to the Dallas Housing Authority" to be used outside low-income housing at Frazier Courts, says Dr. Earle. "We've been working with churches, we've been working with Frazier Revitalization, with Baylor Scott & White, with Parkland, to identify places that we can take the GroBoxes." Through the purchases of retail GroBoxes and donations, Restorative Farms has been able to place 103 GroBoxes in the community.

The Stewpot's Horticultural Therapy program also gives increased access to food. Stewpot clients that participate in the program work together to garden in the raised beds in Encore Park. They produce fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers, which the clients

enjoy each week at a social meeting, although the pandemic has temporarily halted these gatherings. (For more information on The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program, see page 11).

Programs like Restorative Farms and The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy do more than just produce fresh food. By working with the local community, these programs teach vocational skills and provide income. The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program helps its participants sell extra harvests for profit at a market at the First Presbyterian Church or the Dallas Farmers Market.

Understanding that those at risk for food insecurity often do not have time to volunteer, Restorative Farms works to train and hire from within the community for its different farming projects. "We have a big grant from Green Mountain Energy. They funded a development of a huge hydroponic container...We're going to train people in the community through scholarships how to be hydroponic farmers," says Dr. Earle.

The complex causes of food insecurity mean that the solutions are not simple either. While food distribution, farms and gardens are obvious solutions to food insecurity, more low-income housing, more affordable healthcare, and better public transit can all help improve food access. "One thing doesn't repair a community," says Dr. Earle. "All of these pieces have to be put together."

*Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.*



*Participants in The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program learn about gardening. Courtesy of Sandra Zelley.*



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By Jennifer Nagorka

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 Pre-Made Meals to those in need

**THE STEWPOT** \*Registration Required via Eventbrite\*



Continued from page 5

in addition to running their own street paper, **STREETZine**.

Rob Guild, manager of food recovery for The Stewpot, constantly reiterates that there's no donation too small. He uses the 'stone soup' metaphor when looking for donations: "I grew up with this story called stone soup. I'm going to bring these rocks and then you pour water over them and then all the city people are like 'hey what you got there?' 'Oh it's stone soup, but you know it's better if you have some salt and pepper.' 'Oh well hang, on I've got some salt and pepper,' and that person brings some salt and pepper... and then one other person says 'Oh well I've got this...,' and then the next thing you know the whole community is gathered and they've built this cauldron of soup. They all eat it because they all participated and that's the idea we're trying to foster."

These organizations help to recover food waste after production and/or distribution, and continue to during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most of the food assistance programs and organizations across the country have had to shift their approach to both taking in food and getting it out to their communities.

***"[The pandemic has] put our foot in the door of a lot of places, conversations we never would have had, restaurants that never would have contacted us, thinking 'throwing this stuff away is the cost of business' but it doesn't have to be," said Guild.***

#### **Adapting to COVID-19**

Throughout the pandemic, **only 19 percent of American households reported no change in their eating habits**, suggesting many US households experienced some kind of effect on their access to food. While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hasn't gathered its yearly data for 2020 yet, many **experts** predict from the rise in unemployment and increased use of food assistance programs that many more households have struggled to maintain food security during the pandemic.

The Stewpot recovers food from restaurants and local businesses to feed people cafeteria-style, but



*Photos of volunteers for We Don't Waste organising food stock and preparing for service users. Courtesy of We Don't Waste.*

also to distribute to the community. Guild says, before COVID-19, The Stewpot held one food distribution week a month that people could sign up for online and then come collect free food for their families. Now they hold three weeks of food distribution a month and serve between 130 and 150 people a week, compared to about 100 a week before COVID-19. The Stewpot also expanded their food servicing to make and donate meals to the 500 homeless people a night who were being sheltered in the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas for six months.

However, they have had to adapt their strategies in serving the community in order to stay safe. Their food distribution weeks are now drive-throughs, and there have been significant modifications to their cafeteria approach. They now use single-use trays, cups and cutlery rather than reusable ones, have cut the amounts of chairs at tables, and space out the line to meet distancing guidelines.

Similarly, We Don't Waste has adapted by doing no-contact pickups to receive food and no-contact deliveries to get the food out to their community partners. We Don't Waste has also increased the number of their mobile markets from two to eight during COVID-19 and transformed them from a farmers-market style to a drive-through contactless mode.

#### **On the bright side, we've learned what things work**

There is hope that a pandemic pointing out our severe failures in food distribution may encourage people to find solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how food assistance organizations like food pantries and food banks have interacted with their communities. Schafer from **MontCo (Montgomery County) Anti-Hunger Network (MAHN)** said three of the 43 pantries in their network have the capacity to do online food ordering, which they were able to really rely on and even expand the client base they served during the pandemic.

Guild praised the extra safety precautions necessary for protection, but he also likes the idea of keeping it around post-COVID as just another layer of safety for his staff and those they serve.

He also said more of an awareness, about what people can do with their food rather than throw it away, came from people having to look at massive amounts of food and having nothing to do with it, but not wanting to dump whole kitchens worth of food. People saw the inherent value of donating food that hadn't even been prepared yet. In reaching out to The Stewpot, restaurant and store owners were able to learn not only could they donate food that was unprepared and in excess, but they could also donate prepared food too.

"It put our foot in the door of a lot of places, conversations we never would have had, restaurants that never would have contacted us, thinking 'throwing this stuff away is the cost of business' but it doesn't have to be," said Guild.

*Katherine Haines is an INSP intern. Courtesy of INSP.ngo*



Continued from page 4

### they hold true as well today?

It wasn't surprising that we found an effect, but the extent of the impact was surprising.

The literature on financial literacy had not looked specifically at the effect on food insecurity. It had looked at the effect of financial literacy on other economic wellbeing measures and found a consistent effect. So, some researchers are pushing for greater financial literacy and education, even down into middle school and high school.

If anything, this finding is even more important today. Given what people can find on the internet, it's much more important that people have financial skills to navigate life today. And that's not just because of the internet. It's also because of such things as identify theft and predatory scams. Having adequate knowledge of what's real and what's not is even more important as we move forward.

### How do you define financial literacy?

There are a standard set of five big questions that researchers use, and we used them, too. They are considered financial knowledge questions. For example, do people understand inflation and interest rates, and how those work?

We also borrowed from other surveys and asked whether households had a budget,

planned ahead and had access to credit cards and bank accounts. We asked more about actions than theoretical issues.

### What needs to happen for financial literacy to become more common?

Two things need to happen. The long-term change can come about through incorporating it into school curricula. Most states now have some financial literacy requirement as part of their curriculum. My kids in middle school in public school in Texas have had at least a little financial literacy. Maybe you could make it a requirement for high school students, like a course on life skills or financial skills.

As far as adults who have already finished high school, nonprofits and service providers can incorporate financial courses and skills into the services they already provide. Organizations like food banks that have clients coming in for food could make this part of their work. A couple of big nonprofits already have curriculum they can use.

### What are some common mistakes with financial literacy? Meaning, people may think they are financially literate, but perhaps they are not.

Take payday loans. They could help smooth things out for people in a short-term situation. But you can get yourself into a lot of trouble if you don't understand the interest rates and the costs of such a loan. Avoiding getting yourself

**At the most basic level, which households are food insecure versus which are not does not line up perfectly with who is in poverty and who is not. If household economic resources were the full story, you would expect a nearly perfect correlation between food insecurity and poverty status. That is not what we see in the data.**

into trouble because you don't understand the consequences of certain decision is important.

But the budgeting and planning aspect can help you be more forward-looking. They can help you get ready for a rainy day.

### Is being able to avoid the downfalls of a worst-case scenario the greatest benefit of financial literacy?

Yes, definitely. Outside of avoiding predatory loans, planning ahead can allow you to weather at least some of the storm.

*Bill McKenzie is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREET-Zine Editorial Advisory Board.*

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# Around The Stewpot: Horticultural Therapy Program

By Nicole Kiser

*For this month's Around The Stewpot, STREET-Zine spoke with Sandra Zelle, a Dallas County Master Gardener and certified Horticultural Therapist that leads The Stewpot's Horticultural Therapy program.*

With the opening of Encore Park in 2014, a whole new realm of possibilities was available to The Stewpot. In addition to an event space, Encore Park provides raised beds for gardening. These raised beds are available to the community to rent; The Stewpot has reserved a portion of them for its Horticultural Therapy program.

Horticultural therapy is any activity or process, typically gardening, "that connects people with nature to improve wellbeing," says Sandra Zelle, a Dallas County Master Gardener and the certified Horticultural Therapist that leads The Stewpot's Horticultural Therapy program.

***Gardening as an activity has been shown to relieve stress, help with anxiety and depression, lower blood pressure and aid with sleep. The Stewpot's Horticultural Therapy program seeks to go beyond those benefits.***

Gardening as an activity has been shown to relieve stress, help with anxiety and depression, lower blood pressure and aid with sleep. The Stewpot's Horticultural Therapy program seeks to go beyond those benefits. According to Zelle, working in the garden helps clients to connect with their past memories involving nature, as well as consider and discuss future goals. By meeting consistently each week, the program also gives clients the opportunity to form friendships and to learn, practice and teach new skills, including garden-



*Clients watering a raised garden bed as part of The Stewpot Horticultural Therapy program. Courtesy of Sandra Zelle.*

ing, flower arranging and landscape design.

The Horticultural Therapy program can also be a source of food. After working in the garden, clients get to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Each meeting, clients work together to prepare their harvest for a shared meal, which helps to prevent social isolation.

The program focuses on growing food that does not have to be cooked. As a result, participants can always take their harvest with them for later use or give their produce away. Zelle keeps bags and bottles available for clients to take herbs, flowers and food with them.

Once a year, First Presbyterian Church holds a market for the harvest produced by the participants of the program. Flowers, herbs and other produce are traded in exchange for donations to the clients. Participants in the program can also bring their excess harvest to the Dallas Farmers Market, says Zelle, where a local vendor helps

sell their produce.

Before the pandemic, Zelle and The Stewpot gardening club had a regular group of clients each week helping them care for the 15 raised beds used by The Stewpot in Encore Park. The Texas heat often curtailed involvement; limited access to showers and places to cool down after gardening could make clients reconsider their participation. Lack of transportation also made participation more inconsistent, but the program had maintained a steady group of 10 to 12 clients.

Since the implementation of social distancing measures, Zelle has had to rely on a small number of volunteers to keep the garden from dying. Zelle has hopes that the program will be back in full swing by the summer, and, thanks to her volunteers, the clients, and the rest of the community, will find the garden ready and waiting for them.

*Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.*

[inspiring journalism]

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