

## The Littlest Lives You've Changed...

by Roxanne Underwood, Case Manager

We first met Destiny\* in the summer of 2022. She was 19 or 20. My assistant, Alyssa James, and I were delivering box lunches and snack bags to the homeless population often found near Ridge and Broadway in Gary.

Destiny was expecting a baby. She and her boyfriend had no housing and little means to support themselves. Destiny couldn't return to her family's home because everyone living there suffered with addiction — she knew it wasn't a healthy place to be.

We offered the couple some food and shared some information and resources that could help them with longer-term needs.

Some months passed before I saw Destiny again. It was mid-winter ... she turned up in the same area holding all her belongings in one arm and her baby boy in the other. She asked for a ride, so Alyssa and I dropped her where she needed to go. We used some of our own money to purchase some basics and took them to her and the baby. Destiny said she'd been staying "here and there," but was hoping we might be able to help her find someplace more stable where she could work toward getting herself and Liam\* off the streets for good.

Because of generous donors like you, the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana was able to step in with ongoing aid. We helped Destiny connect with the Sojourner Truth House in Gary. That organization and the Missionaries of Charity were able to accommodate mom and baby seven nights a week. The Food Bank also provided two months' worth of



formula, diapers, and wipes. Food Bank personnel chipped in for a stroller.

Destiny knew it was going to take hard work on her part to get to a place of self-sufficiency. I didn't see her again for some weeks. Then one day she came by, beaming with joy. "I want to thank you guys SO MUCH," she said. "I'm not on the streets anymore. I have a job, and Liam and I are in an apartment."

It is a story that keeps us going. I hope it keeps you going, too, because good people like YOU MADE IT POSSIBLE. Many more neighbors need our help this spring. Thousands of hardworking parents struggle to make ends meet. Neighbors lose their job or their health insurance and can no longer afford to feed themselves. Seniors are isolated and can't get to the grocery store. Many veterans with mental illness and other disabilities live in poverty.

♥

**Thank you for all you've done, and will do,  
to ease hunger across our Region.**

*Roxanne Underwood has served as Case Manager for Gary's homeless population since 2022. She and her teammate, Alyssa James, spend several hours every weekday finding people who might not otherwise eat that day. In addition to delivering about 40 lunches and snack bags daily, Food Bank personnel work to assist the neighbors with other needs, providing information and referrals for housing, job training sites, clothing/furniture, medical assistance, and more. ♥*

*\*Names and picture changed for privacy*

Names and photos may have been changed to respect privacy.

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MEMBER OF  
**FEEDING  
AMERICA**

## Spring Into Health!

Spring is always a busy and exciting time around the Food Bank, and this year is no exception.

Thanks to the steady generosity of good people like YOU, we continue to grow our traditional programs that rush food to neighbors facing food insecurity day in and day out. Mobile Markets, school pantries, meal site distributions, and more reached new heights in 2023.

But as you'll read in these pages, **new initiatives are also spreading**, with an ever-greater impact across the communities we serve. Our pioneering "Food Is Medicine" program aims to not merely prevent hunger, but ensure that the right foods are reaching the right people. That is, for neighbors with chronic illness and special dietary needs, we are doing more than ever to make sure they receive the nutrition that can best serve their overall health, not just today's hunger.

**So every dollar of your support this year will do more than just feed. It will advocate, educate, research, heal, and strengthen vulnerable children and adults across the whole Region.**

Did you know that the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana has earned a perfect score from the nation's largest charity evaluator? That's something fewer than one-tenth of one percent of the more than 225,000 rated charities (about 220) can claim. So, you can rest assured that the hard-earned dollars you give are doing the great good that you intend.

We are deeply grateful for every way you are helping end hunger across NWI. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.



Victor A. Garcia  
President & CEO

## Promoting Food Equity & Justice

On February 29, Food Bank of Northwest Indiana President & CEO Victor Garcia served as a panelist at the third annual Health Equity Summit hosted by Purdue University. The appearance was part of the Food Bank's growing commitment to serve our community in innovative ways. Beyond providing emergency food relief, we are working in more places and more ways than ever to develop longer-term solutions to prevent food insecurity.

The summit was hosted by Dr. Jerome Adams & Purdue's Health Equity Initiatives Team with Indiana CTSI, a research institute that aims to achieve better health for all people. The panel led a discussion centered on ways that increasing research and community partnerships can bring about greater health equity. Joining Garcia were panelists from Vanderburgh County Health Department, Millennial Beacon, and Food Finders Food Bank.



Garcia noted, "It's exciting to share a forum with other leaders in the health industry committed to putting nutrition in the center of health interventions. The Food Bank continues to identify ways to partner with healthcare

organizations and research institutions to create meaningful change in the health of our community by leveraging the food supports we provide to our most vulnerable populations in Lake and Porter counties." ♥

## THREE THINGS WE'RE DOING WITH YOUR DOLLARS TO BETTER ADDRESS HUNGER IN 2024:

- 1 STOCK 4 "ORDERAHEAD" REFRIGERATED SMART LOCKERS** providing 24/7 access to emergency foods throughout Lake and Porter counties
- 2 EXPAND "FOOD IS MEDICINE" PARTNERSHIPS** to provide medically tailored groceries to vulnerable patients with special dietary needs due to heart disease, diabetes, and at-risk pregnancies
- 3 EXPAND ON-SITE JOB TRAINING** to benefit neighbors seeking greater self-sufficiency through warehouse and logistics training they can use to earn a living wage

# Your Support Advances “Food Is Medicine” Partnerships

Feeding America is the umbrella organization of the country’s largest network of food banks, including the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana. In January, Feeding America announced a new partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure everyone has access to the nutritious food and resources needed to improve health.

Increasingly, public and private hunger relief organizations are understanding that for many neighbors experiencing food insecurity, “Food Is Medicine.” That is, nourishment isn’t just necessary to sustain life, it can be an important pathway to preventing chronic disease, and can be beneficial in managing, or even reversing, disease already present.

“With this partnership, HHS is recognizing the work that Feeding America network food banks are doing in communities around the country to help improve health through food and nutrition,” said Vince Hall, Feeding America chief government relations officer.

—❤—

**An overwhelming majority of neighbors facing hunger agree that ending hunger must focus on improving access to nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and help manage diet-related diseases.**

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In addition to food distribution, the **Food Is Medicine** program assists neighbors who qualify to enroll in public benefits programs including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



(SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Here at the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, local partnerships are underway to improve neighbors’ health around the Region. We are working closely with HealthLinc in Valparaiso to help close to 200 individuals enrolled in a **Food Is Medicine** initiative.

HealthLinc’s **Food Is Medicine** Program Director Vanessa Fernandez recently reported: “We have tracked and monitored enrolled patients and have seen significant improvements. We have had many patients lose weight, improve blood pressure readings, and lower their blood glucose. Currently the data is showing an overall average of 30% improvement, with the first group of patients enrolled showing an average of 60% improvement.”

In the last year alone, 650+ patients across the Valparaiso community expressed having a food insecurity, with more than 500 enrolling in **Food Is Medicine**. “These collaborations are innovative and allow for community partners to identify solutions to barriers and challenges residents are facing,” Fernandez added, “while also helping to improve chronic conditions.”

The Food Bank will continue to collect and track data to better understand the needs of people facing hunger and to deliver more effective solutions.

**In addition to HealthLinc, the Food Bank is now teamed up with: Franciscan Health, HealthLinc-East Chicago, HealthLinc-Valpo, Regional Health, St. Mary Medical Center, Methodist Nutrition Station and Community Health Net.**

Join Us!

The **soirée**  
 An Event To End Hunger  
**MONDAY, APRIL 29 | 6P-9P**  
 FOOD BANK of NORTHWEST INDIANA (6490 Broadway, Merrillville)  
**FOODBANKNWI.ORG/SOIREE**

### 2024 SOIRÉE

Don't miss our signature annual fundraising event! This year's theme will highlight **Food Is Medicine**, with special recognition extended to the Food Bank's healthcare partnerships. Enjoy an evening filled with delicious tastes from local chefs, restaurants, and breweries; auctions; raffles; and live entertainment! Reserve your ticket or table today!

## Mark Your Calendar

# 1/2 MILLION MEAL CHALLENGE

This special campaign will run from April 1 – May 15. The Food Bank has set a goal to raise \$167,000 from our friends and donors to feed the need in 2024.

MY DONATION

**YES!** I support the growing ways in which the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana is easing hunger across Lake and Porter counties! Use my spring gift to feed the need:

\$1,000  \$500  \$250  \$100  \$50  \$\_\_\_\_\_

For more information about donating, visit [foodbanknwi.org](http://foodbanknwi.org)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

I would like more information about:

- Volunteering  Donating food or hosting a food drive
- Giving a gift to Food Bank of Northwest Indiana through my will

Receiving occasional email updates

My email is \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to pledge a monthly gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_. My first **Three Square Society** gift is enclosed.



245

Charge my gift to:  VISA  MC  Discover  AMEX

CARD NO. \_\_\_\_\_

EXP. DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to:

**Food Bank of Northwest Indiana**  
6490 Broadway, Merrillville, IN 46410

Please call 219.980.1777, ext. 311, to charge your gift by phone, or visit [foodbanknwi.org/give](http://foodbanknwi.org/give) to make a gift online.



Your gift is tax-deductible as allowed by law.