



Manna Works

Uplifting News About A Caring Community

Spring/Summer 2021

Dear Friends of Manna,



Looking back on the last 16 months to when the pandemic began in March 2020, I see many lessons learned at Manna. We learned that when the goal is to feed people, obstacles are overcome and a way is found to do so safely and with dignity. We witnessed firsthand the courage and resiliency of people facing a sudden drop in income and learning there is no shame in asking for help. The power of our strong partnerships formed to serve the community beyond what we could do alone was tested and proven true. And once again, but never so evident, we learned that it is the generosity of our community that sustains Manna and allows us to serve our neighbors in need.

COVID-19 and the movement for justice for black and brown lives brought another lesson to light: the economic hardships brought on by the pandemic disproportionately affected the diverse races and ethnicities that make our community such a vibrant place to live. Manna on Main Street has always welcomed all members of our diverse North Penn population to serve with us and to be served. However, we knew we could do more to serve, with equity and inclusion, all those who turn to us for help. Initial steps included providing more food choices to meet cultural preferences and increasing, from five to seven, the number of languages in which client information was translated.

These steps, while important, have been followed by a greater commitment to organizational change. Such an endeavor must begin by looking inward and taking stock of programs and operations. A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team (DEIT) has formed with board and executive leadership, staff representation and individuals from the diverse North Penn community. DEIT will start its work with a DEI assessment and then prioritize and plan what steps to take for truly impactful change.

We look forward to sharing with you lessons learned and changes made. This community has stood with Manna for 40 years making all that we do possible. We owe the North Penn region a promise: Manna's vision "that everyone might be fed" will mean that we will fully meet the food needs of a diverse community, ensuring that services and programs are impartial and fair, and welcoming all so that each person knows that they are part of this caring community.

With deep gratitude,

Suzan

Suzan Neiger Gould
Executive Director

A Year-to-Year Comparison

June 1, 2019 -
May 31, 2020



52,726
Meals Served



586,479
Pounds of
Food Distributed



11,274
Market Visits

June 1, 2020 -
May 31, 2021



103,845
Meals Served



912,652
Pounds of
Food Distributed



17,896
Market Visits

For translated
versions of this
newsletter...



Manna on Main Street is committed to ending hunger in the North Penn region by providing food, fulfilling social service and education needs, and conducting community outreach. Through a food pantry and soup kitchen, emergency financial aid, counseling and referrals, and education opportunities, we serve those in need with the hope "that everyone might be fed."

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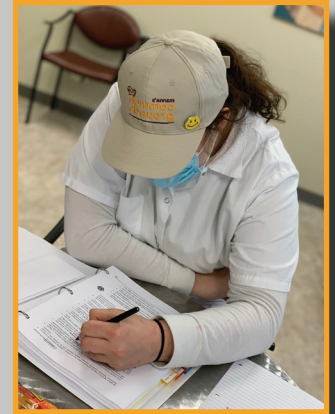


A Cornerstone of a Successful Workforce Development Program

Our Common Grounds Food Service Training to Employment Program has been in existence for five years. We have seen 20 cohorts come through our doors, and each group has taken Life Skills and Work Skills—two classes integral to the program's curriculum. We spoke with Nadja Mummery, our Community Education Director, about what Life Skills and Work Skills is and how it shapes the Common Grounds program.

What is Life Skills and Works Skills?

Most simply speaking, Life Skills and Work Skills are the soft skills portion of our Common Grounds program. There is a study out of Stanford University that asks employers how important technical skills are versus soft skills when considering potential employees. Most are surprised to find out that employers say that soft skills are weighted at 87.5% while technical skills are weighted at 12.5%, and we have found the same results when surveying the employers we work with. Why? Because technical skills can be more easily taught, and you want a candidate to walk in with the soft skills.



In Life Skills, we cover effective communication, conflict resolution, and how to curb negative automatic reactions that cause escalations in the workplace. Toward the end of the program, we also use Life Skills to help our trainees set SMART goals that will help them build the future they want with the tools the program has provided them. Many goals surround employment and financial resource building.

Work Skills focuses more on professional polishing. We teach trainees how to write a cover letter and resume, how to interview most effectively, and understanding the hidden rules and culture of the professional workplace. We don't just want our trainees to find a job, we want them to move up within their job to build a career and earn a living wage.

How has Life Skills and Works Skills changed over the years?

Since we started Common Grounds, Life Skills has evolved to better serve our trainees and meet them where they are at. We've come to realize that having a program that recruits trainees with unstable or vulnerable life situations means that we're serving folks who have very likely experienced acute trauma or trauma caused by prolonged stress, or allostatic loads. We changed our curriculum to address what trauma does to the brain and how it can interfere with learning, progressing in a career, and even being able to regulate and control emotional responses. Taking a trauma-informed approach to education while also teaching the effects of trauma on the brain and body have helped our trainees excel and begin to heal. This creates more sustainable outcomes in the long term.



Similarly to Life Skills, our Work Skills curriculum has had to change to reflect the reality of our trainees. It has also changed to reflect the realities of the world, both pre-COVID and now. We have streamlined the classes to focus on the skills and tools our trainees need to find employment. With a wide range of ages and abilities among our trainees, we need to make sure all of them can operate in the modern world, whether that means logging on to Zoom from home or communicating with potential employers through email rather than text.

Our biggest change has been because of the pandemic. Restructuring to provide virtual and physically distanced instruction has been a challenge. For classes that rely on discussion, building teams and relationship, and feeling safe, it is often necessary to be close, and that just isn't possible! Through smaller class sizes and research on best practices, we've done our best to create warm, safe environments even when we have to hold class over Zoom. For virtual classes, we make sure that everyone has equitable, functioning equipment (providing computers, headphones with microphone attachments), and a safe place from which to join in. Additionally, we like to provide fidgets which help, even adult learners, focus and channel excess energy and anxiety.

How does Life Skills and Work Skills shape the Common Grounds program?

Besides supporting our outcomes by helping individuals enter professional environments with knowledge of the hidden rules, these sit-down "break from the hectic kitchen" classes create teams of our trainees. They bond through their discussions and are given the space to process their learning experiences. We use the situations and conflict that naturally arise in a busy kitchen to workshop the best ways to react and problem solve. It really emerges as a cornerstone of a successful workforce development program.

A Reflection on 40 Years



In 1981, in the basement of St. John's United Church of Christ, a group of parishioners gathered to craft a plan to feed those in need in the community. Forty years later, Manna continues the work of ending hunger in the North Penn region. As we celebrate our 40th Anniversary, we will share reflections from board members, staff and volunteers. Our current Board Chair, Bruce Michelson, reflects below on what Manna and this milestone anniversary means to him.



My first encounter with Manna on Main Street was many years ago, when my two daughters volunteered to serve meals with a youth group in which we participated. The setting was Manna's second location in the house next to St. John's Church on Main Street. A small, humble and welcoming location.

So much has changed since those days gone by: a move to 713 W. Main Street and now to our current home at North Penn Commons; expansion of Manna's Kitchen and Market, and an expanding emergency financial aid program; the establishment and growth of the Common Grounds Food Service Training to Employment Program and development of an amazing staff and volunteer corps; and now, with the economic and social impacts of COVID-19, greatly increased demand and participation in the Your Way Home Emergency Rent and Utility Coalition program.

As Manna commemorates its 40th Anniversary, I reflect on the humble organization that my daughters served during those years past. Today, Manna remains a humble organization, steadfastly committed to Reverend Touchberry's founding vision "that everyone might be fed."

As I reflect on Manna's past 40 years, I consider that Manna has faced many challenges during that time and this past year has presented challenges that no one ever would have imagined. Through it all, Manna's amazing staff and volunteers have continually adapted, sacrificed and persevered to serve an increasing need in the community.

I am deeply grateful to serve the community in a meaningful way through my service on Manna's board of directors. The extreme generosity of the community, through financial support, in-kind donations, volunteerism and so much more has been absolutely overwhelming.

I have been given so much as a result of my affiliation with Manna, and it's hard to capture in words how much Manna means to me. So many words come to mind and the one that seems to rise to the surface is inspiration.

I am inspired by the perseverance of the families and individuals whom Manna serves.

I am inspired by the courage and determination of the Common Grounds Training Program trainees.

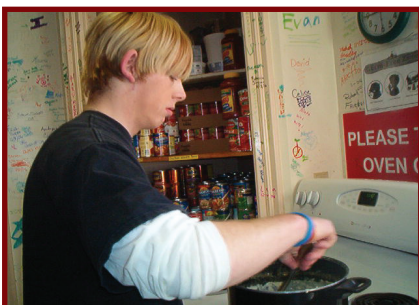
I am inspired by the focus, leadership, hard work, dedication and sacrifice of Manna's staff and volunteers.

I am inspired by a community that gives so generously to help Manna fulfill its mission.

I am inspired by the leadership and stewardship of a talented and dedicated board of directors.

I am inspired by community partners that support Manna in every way possible.

I fondly and proudly reflect on Manna's humble beginnings, those days when my daughters volunteered and all that Manna has accomplished over the years. Yet, there is so much more that we all can do to help end hunger in the North Penn community. I look forward, with hope, to the possibilities for Manna's next 40 years.



Celebrating Our 2020 Manna Champions

In 2019, our Board of Directors created The Manna Champion Award to honor individuals who went above and beyond in support of our vision “that everyone might be fed.” The inaugural recipient was Lance Davidson—a former Board Member, current Race to End Hunger committee member, and local business owner. As our board made plans to select a recipient for the 2020 award, the choice was obvious: our COVID-19 volunteers.

In the six months between March and September 2020, 382 individuals volunteered 9,629 hours. These volunteers stepped up and showed up when the world was filled with uncertainty and fear. They made meals and packed groceries and distributed both while promoting the dignity of those we serve and the safety of all who entered our lobby. “Any stress or trauma they had in their own lives was put aside while they served others,” noted Manna Volunteer Director, Meg Currie Teoh. “Their compassion and selflessness cannot be overstated!”

This group of dedicated volunteers was honored at our An Evening of Gratitude event earlier this month. Kelly Schmitt, one of the recipients, was grateful to be honored, saying, “Manna gave *me* purpose during a crazy, stressful time. Thank you for all you do!”



More Than Food

When we began renting warehouse space at Lansdale Business Center, the goal was—and still is—to house our non-perishable donated items. We successfully moved and organized thousands of products and will start receiving donations there this summer. However, these temperature-controlled warehouses, totaling 2,080 sq. ft. in size, contain more than just donated food and other household items.

We have received or have been notified that we will receive equipment from Montgomery County and Philabundance. Montgomery County gifted us a pallet jack, a freezer, a flatbed cart and utility carts, while Philabundance will donate a ramp scale (a scale allowing our team to weigh a cart of food all at once), basket cart bins and tables later this year. Both Philabundance and Montgomery County know and understand our commitment to ending hunger in the North Penn region and made these donations to help us efficiently and safely move items within the warehouse. We are excited to utilize this equipment to provide food to those in need in our community!



Missing Community

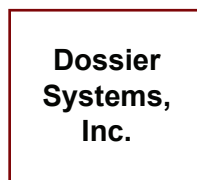
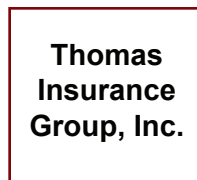
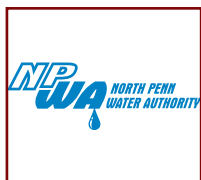
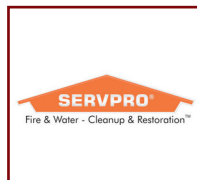
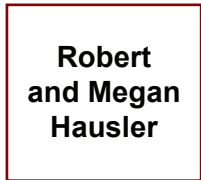
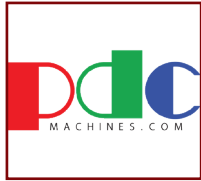
Manna's Kitchen has always been a welcoming and inclusive space for anyone in need of a warm meal. Serving our meals restaurant-style provides dignity to our guests and builds community among all who enter. At the start of the pandemic, we transitioned from sit-down meals in the dining room to to-go meals in our lobby, but it has not been lost on us how this change has affected those we serve.



Colleen* lives upstairs in the Advanced Living Communities' apartments. Before COVID-19, she was frequently a guest in our dining room, and our meals were a way for Colleen to socialize with her upstairs neighbors, as well as with the other guests in the dining room. When we transitioned to to-go meals, this socialization disappeared. “I had no reason to be [downstairs],” Colleen said. “And the isolation of COVID was a really negative experience.” Our team began delivering to-go meals to the residents' Community Room so they could receive meals safely and have some brief interaction. While Colleen and her neighbors have come down to pick up meals, they will be glad when the dining room reopens. “We are all looking forward to things returning to normal.”

*Name changed for privacy

Thank You to Our 10th Race to End Hunger Sponsors





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Thank You to Our Grant Funders!

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