



newsletter

Hello Friends of Shepherd's Table,

In 2023, we served more meals than ever before in the 40-year history of the organization. In total we served 180,442 meals which was 32% more than we served in 2022. The record demand for more meals is a stark reminder that food insecurity is still pervasive in our area. To meet this increased need, we focused on the giving power of our donor community and making sure our neighbors in need had their necessities met through our Social Services Program. We fully stocked our Resource Center with hygiene kits, blankets, thermal sets, and care bags. We made sure our pantry was filled with nutritious food and plenty of proteins. We are still evolving and growing as an organization, knowing that aiding an individual on their journey requires a collaborative effort from our staff, volunteers, partners, and donors.

Last year we witnessed a few inspiring success

stories that give us hope. Individuals who initially came to Progress Place for daily meals and shelter found employment and housing in less than a year's time. Rochelle, who came to Progress Place experiencing homelessness

and without any of her vital records found gainful employment working at a local hospital and was housed within six months. She epitomizes the importance of



wrap-around support services for everyone who walks through our doors so that we can walk alongside them toward a path of self-sufficiency.

As we step into the new year, it's evident that food insecurity in our area is not slowing down. Our daily meal service now serves nearly 500 meals, with our lunch and dinner meal services going well over their usual time to accommodate the growing numbers. With the increase in meals served daily, the need for more space became apparent. We've expanded cooking capacity by collaborating with Silver Spring United Methodist Church to use their kitchen to prepare meals for our new Beyond the Table Program which now provides nutritious meals to other nonprofits and government agencies for a fee. Our hope is that over time Beyond the Table will be fully self-sustaining.

We are also launching a Culinary Skills Training Program to prepare our client community for careers in the food service industry. This program integrates culinary and life skills taught by our Lead Chef and Director of Social Services. We're excited to announce that this program will start next month! With many of our clients asking and seeking employment opportunities, this program is the key to unlocking new doors of opportunity for them to start on a path toward self-sufficiency. At Shepherd's Table, we know how to cook and we're looking forward to sharing our expertise with those who stand to benefit from it the most.

Since this is a Leap Year, we hope you'll use the extra calendar day to join us in accomplishing our goals.

Sincerely,

Manny Hidalgo, Executive Director

Leap Year: Here's What You Can Do With an Extra Day!

On average, we're serving about 200 people daily with meals and basic necessities. Help us continue to serve our community. You can...

- Donate pantry staples to our kitchen (check out our Evergreen Donation list on our website or scan QR code on back)
- Purchase an item from our Amazon Wish List (check out our list on our website or scan QR code on back)
- Volunteer for a Meal Service shift by signing up via Volunteer Hub
- Donate money to fund our programs by giving online or sending a check
- Donate new and/or gently used clothing to the Clothing Closet
- Volunteer at the Clothing Closet to help with distribution or sorting of clothing
- Volunteer at the Resource Center by signing up via Volunteer Hub

Program Updates: Culinary Skills Training

We're thrilled to share our latest initiative: the Culinary Skills Training pilot program.

After hearing feedback from many of our clients expressing a desire for job training opportunities, we knew this was an area where we could further evolve. Spurred on by our Director of Meal Services, Christina Moore, we are excited to start our first cohort of classes in mid-March. Christina, an Army Reserve veteran, experienced homelessness for several months after several unfortunate circumstances. After overcoming this difficult time, she decided to become a chef, "If I worked in a kitchen, there would never be another day that I do not have access to food." Christina believes this new program reflects how opportunities and a support network can change someone's life. Our goal is to equip students with the skills and confidence needed to thrive in the food service industry, empowering them on the journey towards self-sufficiency. They will train for a career while helping hungry Marylanders in need!

The program offers 12 weeks of immersive, hands-on training in a professional kitchen and a 4-week internship in a restaurant culinary environment. In addition to culinary skills, students will also undergo life skills and job readiness training. Throughout the program, students will explore culinary and life lessons such as kitchen safety, food classification and preparation, budgeting, healthy habits, goal setting, and more.

Shepherd's Table has partnered with a local church to expand kitchen capacity to accommodate the increased demand for daily meals and this new program. We will be utilizing its beautiful, industrial-grade kitchen for the classes.



We would also like to give a big shoutout to Adventist Healthcare for their financial support in getting this program's first year off the ground.

To learn more, visit our website or contact

Culinary Skills
Training Program
Coordinator, Arvid
Muller at muller.
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Volunteer Highlight: Nancy Traver

When Nancy Traver's son graduated from high school in 2019, she recognized the importance of finding a nurturing environment where he could continue to learn and thrive within the community. Considering his disability, she understood the significance of seeking a worthwhile program they could partake in together. A quick Google search led Nancy to Shepherd's Table and after volunteering with her son, she discovered a sense of fulfillment here. She soon became a regular in our kitchen, helping with various weekly tasks.

For Nancy, volunteering at Shepherd's Table is not even a question. "You are serving people who really need help, which makes it easy. You are standing across the counter from people who may have spent the night sleeping outside in the cold", she remarks. She says the clients never hesitate to express their gratitude, thanking volunteers often. "They are just really thankful, and that's what sticks with me." Nancy also enjoys interacting with the staff, particularly Chef Willie and Chef Paola, and has gotten to know some other regular volunteers.

In addition to volunteering, Nancy shares her 25 years of journalism experience as an educator at a school in Montgomery County for non-native English speakers, focusing on American media. Nancy has brought in some of her students to volunteer with her at Shepherd's Table, and many have shown interest and plan on returning.

Nancy also works at the pre-release center, helping inmates transition back into society by providing computer literacy training, resume building, and job search support. She's identified individuals nearing release who may benefit from our upcoming culinary skills training program.

Nancy also has a great passion for gardening. Last year, she experimented by growing tomatoes in her basement under a grow light and ended up raising 150 plants. She then had the idea to sell them and donate the money to Shepherd's Table. What she thought would be a three-day sale with \$2 tomatoes ended up with her selling all her tomatoes in a day plus receiving donations. She made about \$465 and donated it all to Shepherd's Table! Look out for her tomato sale this year!

We're grateful to have a volunteer like Nancy. Her message to future volunteers... "The chefs are very friendly, and you walk in the door and are part of a team. Right away, you're put to work. There's plenty to do. It's very rewarding. You leave here and know you have helped over 100 people find a good, warm, nourishing meal. And their day is better for it, and so is yours when you volunteer!"



Interested in Sponsoring a Bright Meal?

Looking for a fun team building activity to do with your colleagues? Join us and volunteer at Shepherd's Table!

With the change of seasons around the corner, why not grab a group of coworkers or friends and organize a BrightMeal event? You'll have the opportunity to customize every aspect of the meal service, from the music and decor to the menu itself. It's a chance to showcase your creativity while making a positive impact on our community.

To learn more, contact our Volunteer Coordinator Marcy Merti at MarcyM@shepherdstable.org or call 301-585-4718 X 217



Shepherd's Table

TOGETHER MEETING NEEDS. CHANGING LIVES.

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Teshema Nelson
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