



# ISSAQUAH

## Food & Clothing Bank

S I N C E 1 9 7 1

Fall-Winter 2023

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## From the Director

by Stephanie Norton-Bredl, Executive Director

Reflecting on my first nine months with the Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank, I feel immense gratitude: Gratitude for the team of staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to offer quality services to our community, gratitude for those of you who choose to support our work, and gratitude for our many partners in the community. We truly could not do this work without all of you.

Throughout 2023, we have continued to see the need in our community grow. We are now

servicing an average of 742 unique households per month in our market compared to 2022, when our average was 559 (up 30%). In the 2022-23 school year, we delivered 12,242 Power Packs to schools, compared to the previous school year when we delivered 9,680 (up 26%). We are seeing similar growth in demand across all our programs: an 18% increase in clients for emergency services, such as

*Continued on page 2*



## Year-End Giving

by Bonnie DeCaro-Monahan, Development Director

Thank you for responding to a sharp rise in demand for our resources this year! We just hit a record 660 households served in our market in one week—a 35% increase over last year at this time. This increase in need, combined with inflation, has meant a whopping 70% increase in food costs over 2022.

We are so grateful for our generous community who makes it possible for us to continue to serve everyone who seeks our resources! Thank you to

those who have already included us in your year-end giving. *You are giving HOPE!*

*“Navigating social service systems can be a full-time job — it can be very isolating and can cause anyone to be hopeless. The Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank is the great equalizer. You are seen there, you are someone there, you are served there, and you matter there.”*

Michelle, IFCB participant

**To give a year-end gift, please visit**  
<https://bit.ly/IFCB-Year-End>

## From the Director (cont'd)

warm clothing, phones, benefit applications, and ID help; a 27% increase in individuals receiving delivery services; and a significant increase in people connecting with us for resource referrals and case management support.

Despite this growing need, you continue to show up for our community. The Issaquah Sammamish Food Project, for example, has grown to 91 Neighborhood Coordinators. This effort supplies a significant amount of our dry goods inventory, and we are so thankful for this community partnership.

From all sources, we have collected 745,790 pounds of donated food year through October and recorded 16,760 volunteer hours. We know that these numbers will grow, as we have not yet counted all our volunteer hours for Turkey Trot, our Holiday Gifts event, and all the food drives that ensure our neighbors have enough for the holiday season.

Although the rate of inflation is expected to slow down in 2024, we anticipate the high cost of living in this area will drive a continued growing need. Erin's article in this newsletter does a great job of explaining this and the other challenges our neighbors continue to face. We know that we can count on you, our partners in this work, to assist us in our mission of removing barriers to healthy food, vital resources, and connections to essential services.

Thank you again for your continued support, and on behalf of our team, we wish you the happiest of holiday seasons!

**I look forward to opportunities to connect with you. Please reach out if you'd like to learn more about our work, take a tour, or get involved through volunteerism.**

[stephanie@issaquahfoodbank.org](mailto:stephanie@issaquahfoodbank.org)



## The Early Results Are In!

The 2023 Issaquah Turkey Trot saw the biggest turnout ever, with almost 4,400 registered trotters! The weather cooperated, and a splendid time was had by all. Thanks to everyone who came out and all of our volunteers who made it possible! We'll have full results, including costume contest winners, in the winter e-newsletter.

## Return of the Legacy Society!

We are pleased to announce the return of the Legacy Society in early 2024!

The Legacy Society offers additional ways to give to and guarantee the future of the Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank through estate plans, appreciated stock, donor advised funds, and more.

We are looking for professional financial advisors and estate attorneys to help build the refreshed Legacy Society program.

If you or someone you know is interested in this exciting volunteer role, please reach out to Brooke Wiles, Donor Engagement Officer, at [brooke@issaquahfoodbank.org](mailto:brooke@issaquahfoodbank.org).

## Client Services Volunteers Make a Difference

Our Client Services volunteers were featured in a video presented at our Recipe for Hope fundraising event. The following are excerpts from that video, in their own words. You can watch the entire video by [following the QR code on page 7](#).



"The thing that surprised me most when I started working as a client service volunteer was just how complicated it is to find information. All organizations put their information online, but that doesn't mean people can find it. The crisis points I've seen are varied. As simple as if someone has recently been homeless, their crisis point is they have no shelter for the night. For some of our clients who have apartments or homes, their crisis point could be a utility bill, it could be a car that's not working, it could even be a prescription they can't afford."

— Christi Schumann



"The difference between people being able to stay afloat or to fall off the cliff and their life starts to spiral is very, very small. Every client that we deal with is a deserving human being who is literally just asking for help, and that little help can make a massive difference in their lives. The minute you come to that door, you're treated with absolute dignity by every single member of staff. If I know that something I've said or done has taken that little bit of stress away from somebody, maybe it gives them the emotional strength to deal with something else in their life."

— Nicola Davis



"The people we work with just want to be heard. They want to be listened to, they don't want judgement. It feels like we're making a difference. We see people that are smiling that weren't smiling before and weren't happy and you feel like you're giving back to your own community."

— Val Tinker



"I've met people who have traveled to the area and think they're in a pretty good situation, and money doesn't last very long in this economy. The flexibility that we can provide here makes a big difference in people's lives and we're here to listen and help them connect with other resources in the community, not just food. It makes me feel good to help when we can help because, let's face it, there's a lot of things that we can't change in people's lives, and sometimes it can be frustrating and discouraging when we don't have the answers and we don't have all the things they need. So to be able to help in the ways that we can does feel good."

— Mary Nassif

## Laura's Story

By Laura, Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank Participant

Laura shared her story in a video presented at our Recipe for Hope fundraising event. The following are her own words from that video. You can watch Laura's Story by [following the QR code on page 7](#).

One of the perceptions in American society is, work as hard as you can and pull yourself up by your bootstraps and you will succeed. It's not always the case for everyone. I've been laid off three times, it didn't matter how hard I was working or how well I was working.

My son is 16, and I've been a single parent since he was a year old. Finances have always been an issue simply for the fact that there is only one person who can earn money.

I have three jobs currently. I don't like feeling vulnerable, having only one source of income, because I've had too many experiences where that income suddenly disappears, and then I have nothing. So I prefer to have at least two, where even if one of them ends or goes away for whatever reason, at least I still have a little bit of income coming in.

So for my third position, managing my mother's apartment building — repairs, maintenance — those things crop up unexpectedly and I have to be flexible. I have to be able to jump up even in the middle of the night and go assist the resident if needed.

One of the most challenging parts of working so many positions is the commute. With three different jobs that I conduct at different locations, just commuting between them gets to be very time consuming and expensive.

Having gone through multiple layoffs, each time I end up using a significant chunk, if not all, of my savings to survive those in-between times until another full-time position is found. There's always these times of panic. Not knowing 'what am I going to do next? Where



and how am I going to pay the rent?' I might be OK for a couple of weeks, but what do I do when the rent comes due next month?

The Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank has been a huge lifesaver for me and for my son, for our family. When my work schedule allowed, I was able to go shop in person and specifically choose out foods that I knew a somewhat picky child and now teenager will eat.

The Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank has always been very welcoming. There was a gal there who remembered me and she just knew me by sight, and she would say my name, "Oh how are you today? What can I help you find this week?" It was just very personal and very welcoming.

I work beforehand and I work later than the food bank is open. And they offer a home delivery service, so I have been able to have food delivered to my home. I can still choose ahead of time what types of things I need. It's flexible in that way, trying to accommodate the different needs of different families.

One of the most impactful pieces for my son from the clothing bank and from the Holiday Gift Barn, was occasionally being able to



provide him with something brand new — clothing that was new, had never been worn, that still had the tags on it. And he was like, “Are these for me? Are they really new?” And he was just in awe that he actually had brand new clothing that was his; it wasn’t anybody else’s before. So that was a huge morale boost for a kid who always kind of felt like everything he had was secondhand, used.

Those services that provide the basics of life — that are known expenses, that are going to be regularly occurring — those are the services

that can allow a family to then save up a little bit, so that allows them to continue working and then to maintain their housing and everything else in life.

If it weren’t for the Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank, I don’t know where I would turn for assistance. I’m really grateful to the supporters, that they support an organization who provides families the ability to be autonomous and provide for their families in a respectful and independent way.

## Drivers Wanted!



Get your motor running, and help local families who face barriers to accessing our resources.

Our Groceries to Go drivers are currently delivering to 153 households across 20 routes, up from 107 households across 15 routes last year. Not only are we serving more households, but also each route is larger, and many of our current drivers are at capacity.

To address this need, we have several new slots for Groceries to Go drivers and substitutes starting

in January. Shifts are 9:00 a.m.– 11:00 a.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and/or Thursdays, every other week on our non-shopping weeks. Drivers need to be able to carry bags and boxes up and down stairs.

We’re also looking for more Grocery Rescue drivers to pick up food and other goods from local markets!

If you are interested or have any questions, please email [michelle@issaquahfoodbank.org](mailto:michelle@issaquahfoodbank.org).



“Being a Grocery Rescue and Groceries to Go driver not only fulfills me physically but also emotionally, knowing I’m helping my community.”  
— Ed Tinker

## Donation Drives

### Food & Toiletries

Bring items from [our priority needs list](#) to our warehouse (930 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NW, Issaquah) on these days/times:

- Thurs., Dec. 21: 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Thurs., Jan. 4: 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Mon., Jan. 8: 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Thurs., Jan. 18: 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Mon., Jan. 22: 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

### Issaquah-Sammamish Food Project

Start a bi-monthly collection in your neighborhood or join an existing one! Email [foodproject@issaquahfoodbank.org](mailto:foodproject@issaquahfoodbank.org) or visit [issaquahsammamishfoodproject.org](http://issaquahsammamishfoodproject.org).

### Plan a Food or Toiletries Drive

Contact [operations@issaquahfoodbank.org](mailto:operations@issaquahfoodbank.org) for details and to ensure we are able to accept your collected donations.

# A Deep Dive into a Disappearing Safety Net

By Erin Longchari, Director of Operations & Programs

A longer version of this article appeared in our [Fall e-Newsletter](#), but the issues are so key to understanding where we are now that we wanted to make sure all our subscribers had a chance to gain insights from it.

For many in our community, there has been no return to life before the COVID pandemic. Rising food insecurity, increased poverty, and the end of pandemic assistance combine with newly troubling signs that instability and economic insecurity are on the rise.

## Rising food insecurity

A recent USDA report\* shows a rise in food insecurity in 2022 from 2021 — an alarming indicator of a growing public health crisis around equitable access to nutritious food. The report notes nearly 13% of US households were food insecure in 2022 — a marked increase from 10–10.5% in 2021 and 2020. One in eight US households (17 million families) struggled to meet their family's nutritional needs last year, and nearly 6.8 million households experienced “very low food security,” up from 5.1 million households in 2020 — a dramatic 33.3% increase, and one that reflects similar growth trends seen at IFCB.

Food insecurity and inequity continues to be substantially higher for American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, or other multiracial households, and for all families with children. Food insecurity rates were significantly higher than the national average for the following:

- Families with children (17.3%) and children under the age of 6 (16.7%)
- Single-mother households (33.1%) and single-father households (22.4%)
- Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Person of Color/ multiracial households (22%)

## Increasing poverty

There are other worrying signs of a further downturn for many vulnerable households. 2022 census data shows the largest one-year increase in overall poverty and child poverty,\* likely due to

sustained high inflation and the end of pandemic relief funding. For the first time since 2010, the supplemental poverty rate (a more accurate, comprehensive view of poverty accounting for geographic variation, expenses, and in-kind benefits) grew to 12.4% (up 4.6% from 2021).\* Child poverty more than doubled, at 12.4% in 2022 vs 5.2% in 2021, in part due to the ending of pandemic-era expansions to the child tax credit.\*

## Ending of pandemic-era benefits

Some essential pandemic safety net benefits providing much-needed assistance to low-income households expired in late 2021-2022. These include enhanced unemployment benefits, expansions to the child tax credit, and the rent/eviction

moratorium in Washington state. Other benefit losses this year through 2024 include:

- The end of enhanced monthly benefits for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients in March 2023, meaning a loss, on average, of \$108 per person per month in Washington state, or a 39% decrease.\*
- The unravelling of continuous enrollment for Medicaid starting in March of this year.\* Estimates put approximately 400,000 people in Washington state at risk of losing (or facing substantial barriers to re-enrollment eligibility for) Medicaid coverage through May of 2024.
- The end of a three-year pause on student loan repayments starting in October 2023.\*
- The end of essential childcare stabilization funding in September of this year that had reduced childcare costs for millions.\* Potentially resulting in the closure of 70,000 childcare centers and programs, and higher costs for working parents, this could have enormous impacts on economic stability for lower income families.



## *More challenges ahead*

A look ahead reveals more troubling signs that families in our community and across the nation may be forced closer to ongoing instability.

### *Federal funding uncertainty*

Much work remains to be done at the federal level. A key potential indicator of escalated need for families next year is that critical remaining safety net programs – SNAP, WIC, TANF, the National School Lunch program, among others – are at risk for reduced funding or more barriers to access. These programs are essential to keeping people out of poverty.

### *Housing affordability*

In Washington state and King County, a longtime lack of affordable housing access, combined with the “housing livable wage” needed in our area to keep housing costs at a sustainable 30% of total household income level, remains a critical issue. A new analysis from the National Low Income Housing Institute found a Washington renter needs to make \$30.33 an hour to afford a standard one-bedroom apartment without spending more than 30% of their income on housing.\* In the Seattle and Bellevue area, a renter needs to earn \$40.38 an hour, or \$84,000 a year, to maintain that 30%.

### *Rising homelessness*

The number of people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity is growing in Washington and King County, but data varies across sources. A recent federal HUD report cites 10% more people in Washington living outside, in temporary shelter, or in vehicles over 2020-2022.\* Much of HUD’s data originates from the nation’s “Point in Time” count, conducted over one night annually in January by in person volunteers – imperfect at best and universally considered an undercount. King County’s Department of Community and Human Services ran a cross-system analysis across several homelessness data sets to estimate a minimum 31% increase over that same time (40,800 people in 2020 and at least 53,500 in 2022, estimated by King County Regional Homelessness Authority).\*

### *Cumulative inflation*

While costs for food and gas are not currently at the peak levels seen in recent months, food costs at home are, on average, 24% higher today than February of 2020 and continue to consume a higher percentage of household income.\* Food prices will not be returning to pre-pandemic levels,

yet income levels are not rising to match these costs. The average price for a gallon of regular gas in September of this year was \$5.04, compared to \$2.80 in September of 2020.\*

As families strive to balance higher costs for food, gas, rent, healthcare, and childcare, their budgets are often stretched thin. People in our community are constantly faced with difficult and potentially life-altering choices about paying rent, accessing medical care, working or staying home to care for their children, and making compromises with less expensive, less nutritious food, among others.

## *Local impact*

At IFCB, we have a frontline view of the increased need many of our neighbors are experiencing – and the stress caused by such instability. We saw a record 651 households shop in our grocery market during the week of October 23, and all signs point to larger demand for all programs and services next year. As of September this year, we are seeing:

- **A 35% increase** in grocery market food service to date over last year.
- **A 24% increase** in Summer Lunch visits.
- **An 18% increase** in the number of unhoused services provided (warm clothing, emergency supplies, help with phones, IDs).
- **A 35% increase** in the number of weekend Power Packs distributed in the first two months of the school year.

The Issaquah Food & Clothing plays a pivotal role in creating long-term stability and resiliency in our community. By providing free, healthy food, essential clothing and hygiene supplies, and specialized programs for children, families, and seniors, we help mitigate the tough choices between healthy food, medical care, bills, and paying rent. Our strong partnerships, robust resource referrals, and case management support create a more connected, supportive community where everyone has an opportunity to thrive.

\* All links for this issue, including sources in this article:



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Food & Clothing Bank  
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## *Holiday Closures*



*Happy Holidays*  
*and a happy new year!*

**Christmas**

Fri., Dec. 22  
Mon., Dec. 25  
Tues.–Fri., Dec. 26–29

**New Year's**

Mon., Jan. 1

**Martin Luther King Day**

Monday, January 15

### Our Mission

Unite our community in nourishing and nurturing individuals by removing barriers to healthy food, vital resources, and connections to essential services.