



NEIGHBORS.  
EMPOWERED.



# GREATER CHICAGOLAND HUNGER REPORT

Communities are healthier and stronger when every person has the food they need to thrive. But in recent months, an estimated 1 in 5 area households with children experienced food insecurity. The rising need is driven by an increased cost of living and a too-small safety net. Amid this reality, the charitable food system is striving to keep up with sustained high demand for assistance.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository, Northern Illinois Food Bank and Food Bank of Northwest Indiana are members of the Feeding America network of food banks. Together, these three organizations serve 16 counties throughout the area.

According to United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), an estimated 1.36 million households (35.3%) in the area cannot afford the basic cost of living in their county. We estimate at least 400,000 of these households have incomes that disqualify them from participation in federal nutrition programs.

Compounding the hunger challenge is a sizable gap between the living wage and the maximum income that allows a household to qualify for federal benefits such as SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator<sup>3</sup>, a local family of four with two children and two full-time working adults under the age of 60 and without disabilities needs to earn \$8,762 per month to cover their basic needs. This same family wouldn't qualify for safety net programs if they earned more than \$4,290 per month in Illinois. For those that do qualify, SNAP plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity, but it is often not enough to cover a household's food needs for an entire month.

## 35%

of households in the Greater Chicagoland area cannot afford the basic cost of living in their county.<sup>1</sup>

## 57%

more household visits to local food pantries and free grocery programs in FY24 compared to FY20.

## 21%

of households with children in the Chicago Metro area were food insecure during the second quarter of this year<sup>2</sup> – similar to levels seen during the first few months of the pandemic.



Two full-time working parents with two children need to earn \$29.20/hour each to reach a living wage in the Chicago area.<sup>3</sup> This is significantly higher than minimum wage in Illinois (\$14/hour) and Indiana (\$7.25/hour).

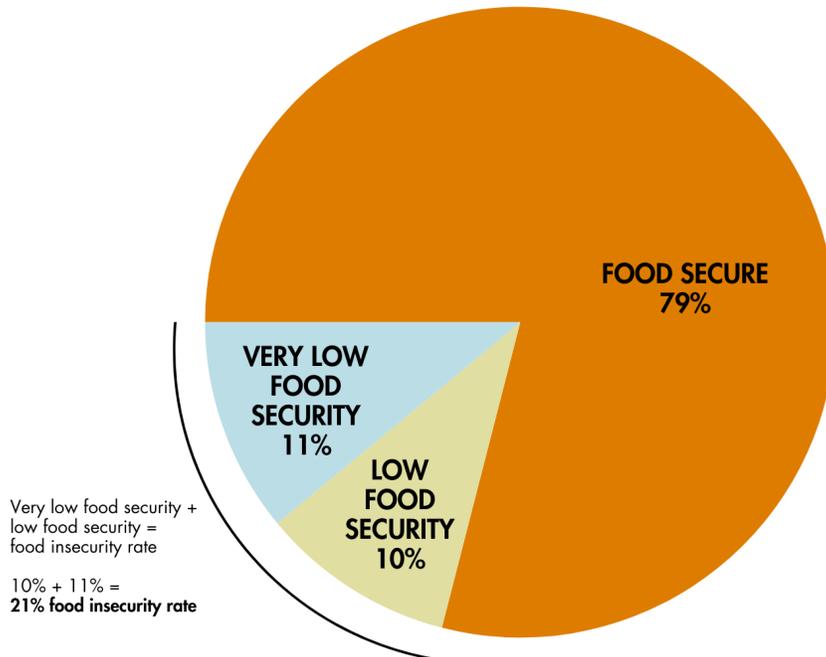
This **Hunger Action Month**, the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Northern Illinois Food Bank and the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana are working together to make sure that families at risk of food insecurity know that help is available.

If you need help accessing food, or are in a position to help, visit the website of the food bank serving your community to get started.

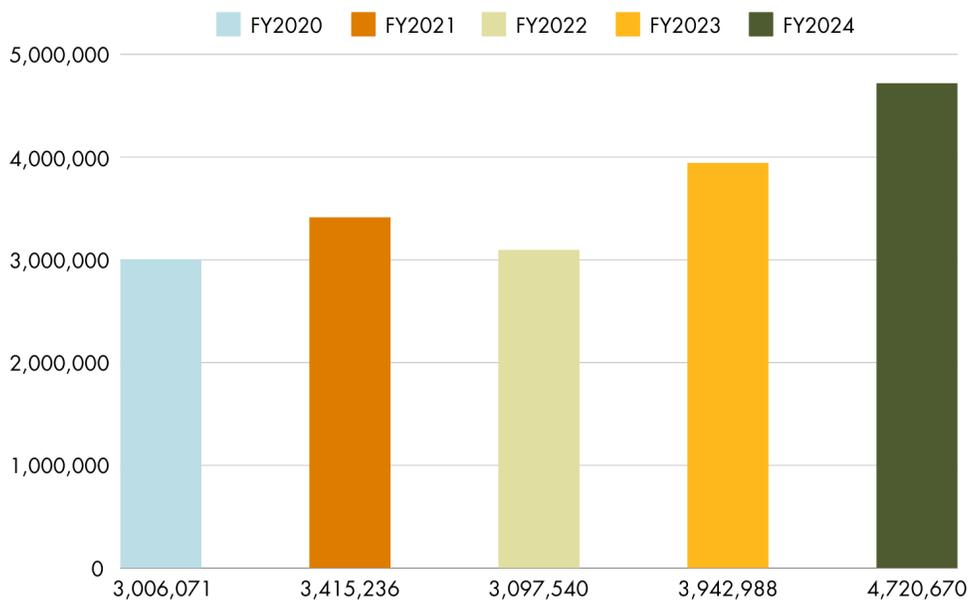
# HUNGER IN THE GREATER CHICAGOLAND AREA

## Food insecurity in Greater Chicagoland

(Households with children)



## Household visits to food pantries and free grocery programs



<sup>1</sup> 2022 numbers (latest available), United for ALICE, data reports for Illinois and Indiana by county.

<sup>2</sup> (April, May, June 2024), Dr. Diane Schanzenbach analysis of U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey and Current Population Survey for the Chicago Metro Area, April 2020 to June 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Based off 2 full-time working adults and 2 dependent children in the Greater Chicagoland area; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Living Wage Calculator, [livingwage.mit.edu/metros/16980](https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/16980)

Source for pie chart: (April, May, June 2024), Dr. Diane Schanzenbach analysis of U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey and Current Population Survey for the Chicago Metro Area, April 2020 to June 2024.

Source for bar chart: Aggregated numbers from the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Northern IL Food Bank and Food Bank of Northwest Indiana

# NEIGHBOR IMPACT STORIES



## SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN CHICAGO

Every month, Wendy Garcia, 51, visits Common Pantry in Chicago's North Center neighborhood to pick up food to feed herself, her daughter and three grandchildren who live with her. Common Pantry is a longtime partner in the Greater Chicago Food Depository's network. Wendy has been visiting the pantry for about five years, after a hand injury ended her ability to continue working.

She receives \$250 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits each month, which she describes as "not enough."

"I can go shopping two times only with this. It's really hard," Wendy says. The items she picks up at the pantry help her make ends meet – something that has become more difficult due to the cumulative effects of inflation and elevated food and housing costs. Despite hearing from news reports that prices have stabilized, Wendy says groceries still feel unaffordable.



## PROVIDING PEACE OF MIND TO A SUBURBAN SENIOR

At 75, Northern Illinois Food Bank neighbor Fran, along with her husband, finds herself navigating the challenges of retirement on a fixed income. Living with the high costs of critical medications, like her husband's insulin, Fran knows the difficult choices many seniors face between paying for food or other essentials.

Fran attends a Senior Grocery Mobile program and enjoys having access to fresh produce, dairy, and meat that help stretch her budget and ensure she and her husband can maintain a balanced diet. "We're on a tight budget. With medical and other recurring expenses, this program really helps."

The impact of the program goes beyond filling the fridge. It provides peace of mind. "Now, I have less to worry about and have greater food security. I don't have to worry about not having enough money to go to the grocery store or making difficult choices," Fran explained.



## PAYING IT FORWARD IN NORTHWEST INDIANA

LaToya Collins, a single mom of four who just moved to Northwest Indiana, recently visited one of the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana's Mobile Markets in Portage. It was her first time attending a market.

"I missed yesterday's market in Gary, so I made sure to make it to this one. It's a very thought-out process, it's very organized, and the people are very friendly. I appreciate the people who can help the community because people like me who move twelve hours away... I still need help. We still need to get ourselves settled, so this experience has been calming. No stress."

During her progress of getting acquainted with the area and establishing her family's new home, LaToya heard about the Food Bank's Mobile Markets from another community member, and stated she too will help spread the word, "because somebody helped me, so why not push that forward?"