



In early March 2021, the Maricopa County Public Health Department reached out to the Arizona Food Bank Network to ensure that people who work at food banks and the volunteers that support these organizations — many of whom had stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 — were included in a prioritized group of workers in the 1B group of COVID-19 vaccine eligibility.

After discussions with St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance and United Food Bank, it became clear that **the path to more vaccinations was to hold events at each food bank**. This ensured that the staff members had easy access to being vaccinated, and that agency partners (workers at smaller food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and other organizations that partner with food banks) could get vaccinated at familiar locations.

Our staff got to work planning the vaccination events. The first call was to Native Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center, to see if they could provide vaccination teams.

On March 22 and March 23, just two-and-a-half weeks after that initial phone call, **655 members of the Maricopa county food bank family**, representing 97 different hunger-fighting organizations from across Maricopa county, **received vaccinations** at St. Mary's and United. Native Health provided the medical personnel, food bank staff helped coordinate at each site, and AzFBN staff managed the event overall.

We like to refer to this effort as a "group hug" for a food bank family that had endured and served during the darkest days of the pandemic, helping prevent countless people from suffering from hunger and ensuring that these critical workers remain healthy to serve during what is likely to be a long recovery.

As a result, AzFBN received a "Hot Shot" award from The Arizona Partnership for Immunization (TAPI) for the COVID-19 vaccination events. We are honored to have been chosen, and give big thanks to our partner Native Health and our member food banks for their tireless work during the two-day event.

Our Members



COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK
OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA





Free Meals Extended Through June 2022

It's hard to learn when you're hungry. For many of the **nearly one in every four kids in Arizona who struggle with hunger**, school breakfast and lunch are the only meals they get regularly. Like many other groups, including hunger advocacy organizations, schools and families struggling with hunger, we were ecstatic to hear that the United States Department of Agriculture extended FREE school meals for all children through the 2021–2022 school year! This program was instituted during the pandemic (along with flexibility for picking up meals for schools using distance learning) and we're thrilled to see this critical support to families continue for at least another year. These meals will provide relief to many food-insecure families and will allow the children to focus on what is most important at their age — learning!

Pandemic EBT

For families struggling with hunger during these tough times, Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) has been a lifeline to healthy and nutritious food. P-EBT provides families with an EBT (debit) card for the value of the meals kids aren't getting at school because of virtual learning during COVID-19. It's an effective way to feed kids and has been shown to reduce food hardship for kids by 30 percent within the first week their families receive it.

In Arizona, there is no application process for P-EBT, which means fewer hoops for families to jump through when they're already struggling with so much during the pandemic. Children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals are eligible for P-EBT. In the 2019–20 school year, 787,000 children received P-EBT in Arizona!

And the even greater news is that P-EBT has been extended through the summer months! This is a major win for families facing food insecurity. **Summer is one of the most challenging times for children who struggle to get enough nutrition when schools are closed.** According to Feeding America, only 20 percent of children who are eligible for summer meals access them. P-EBT helps families purchase the food they need directly while they can continue to access free grab-and-go meals provided by participating schools and sites over the summer.

AzFBN works closely with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) and Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to ensure all eligible children receive this benefit. We're also doing outreach to schools, food banks and other partners that help feed kids, to ensure that families in need know about P-EBT, especially in hard-to-reach areas like tribal communities and foster care homes.

P-EBT is currently being issued retroactively for the previous school year, so we're talking about **families getting up to \$1,235 per child**. That's a lot of groceries to fill hungry tummies!

See our webpage for more information on how to access P-EBT: <https://azfoodbanks.org/what-is-pandemic-ebt/>. If you think your child is eligible for P-EBT, but you have not received it, please contact the P-EBT Hotline at **1-844-841-3802**.

AmeriCorps Members Support Arizona Anti-Hunger Efforts

AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers serve a one-year term in non-profit organizations that are working to end poverty. This year, AzFBN VISTAs are serving in food pantries, food banks and other anti-hunger organizations in the state. Check out just some of what our VISTAs are doing:

Lyndon, a Marketing Specialist VISTA stationed at Nalwoodi Denzhone Community/San Carlos Apache Reservation, has been giving out food boxes and participated in food deliveries, one of which delivered 215 food boxes to the San Carlos community. These community members are often not able to drive to obtain food, making food deliveries a key hunger-fighting program.

The Orchard Community Learning Center teamed up with Healthy Roots and Sana Sana Foods to provide "ready to eat" meals to groups in need — where **Joy, the Youth Engagement Facilitator** VISTA serves. Through a grant with Local First Arizona, the Orchard Community Learning center also distributed approximately 1,000 nutritious, plant-based meals to various non-profit organizations throughout the Phoenix area.

Lily, Agency Training Coordinator at AzFBN, has been developing a year-long schedule of upcoming trainings to support food pantries as they increase their capacity through volunteer recruitment, online donations and website development.

Tristan, the AzFBN Native American Programs Coordinator, distributed surveys to members of the White Mountain Apache Tribe to enhance understanding of local needs for childhood nutrition. His main focus is leading collaborative efforts with tribal community leaders on how to best address childhood hunger in rural and hard-to-reach areas of our state.

Thanks to the growth of our statewide network of VISTAs, AzFBN was eligible to bring on a VISTA leader to focus on the support and resources needed by each VISTA in order to ensure they have success bringing their ideas to life. Bobbi has been working one on one to ensure everyone's success!

These are just a few of the projects that are in progress. We're thankful for all VISTAs who are serving and the support they can offer to Arizonans at risk of hunger.



Hunger Relief License Plate

Have you seen this license plate when driving around Arizona, or do you even have one yourself? The Hunger Relief license plate costs \$25 (plus postage and handling) and benefits AzFBN. **Get yours when you renew your Arizona license plate** and help end hunger one "plate" at a time. A big thanks to everyone who has this special plate. See you on the road!



AzFBN and Hunger Relief Community Mourn the Loss of David Schwake

David Schwake, **former AzFBN board member and fierce advocate for people suffering from hunger in Arizona**, passed away earlier this year.

Every once in a while, David would pop in to the AzFBN office unannounced to have a chat about what he was doing in Litchfield Park to help hungry kids or to drop off a donation to help our work. If we were lucky, he'd also bring along some extra goodies from the kitchen, usually given out with a classic David bear hug. The cookies were legendary, if not the kind of healthy food he was trying to make sure kids got through his work as the Food Service Director at the Litchfield Elementary School District.

Not content with his day job, he was also a volunteer board member at AzFBN for years, among several other nonprofit and community-based activities. When it was time for David to leave the AzFBN board in order to invest more in his other charitable responsibilities, it was a sad day. David was always the bright spot in a meeting, bringing levity to our very serious work and ensuring we got things done when it was most needed.

There are people in the world who only approach philanthropy as a means to an end — that end being notoriety, accolades, or even awards. Not David. His "love of humankind" was exactly that. Spend five minutes with him and you knew, in the best Mr. Rogers way, that you were a unique human being who was loved and worthy of health, happiness and, most of all, a full belly.

At a time when the world is experiencing so much tragedy and loss, it isn't fair to compare the depths of grief that we're all feeling. But we have to say that the breadth of this loss could span the Grand Canyon. David was unique, dedicated and so unsatisfied with the inequalities of the world that he worked every day to make things better. A life well lived? Unquestionably, and it's so devastating that he wasn't afforded more time with us.

To all who knew and loved him, we share your grief; we will remember him always and will do everything we can to honor his memory by fighting for the change he wanted to see — a community where all children have enough to eat every day, even on Saturdays, since David used to joke that he did not know kids were only hungry Monday-Friday. Rest well, dear friend.

Want to Help?

Visit our website and subscribe to our email list. We'll send you legislative action opportunities so that our elected officials and policymakers will hear your voice!

Contact Us

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