



Innovation, Growth, and Sustainability: Looking Ahead Into 2022

A lot of 2021 was spent planning around a pandemic still, with some months of respite between COVID-19 waves. Even then, our sights were set on recovery and what lay ahead. How do we reach those who are still unreachable and how do we work toward preventing more Arizonans from falling into full-blown pandemic food scarcity — if that is even possible?

According to Feeding America, older adults are the “fastest-growing food-insecure population” in the United States. Just in Arizona, 10,000 adults turn 65 every day! Not only is this cohort the fastest-growing in our state, but it is often the most overlooked. Older adults suffering from food insecurity are also more prone to health issues stemming from their food insecurity. Quite the hunger paradox, isn't it? Many older adults skip meals and much-needed medications in order to keep the water running, while others may resort to eating highly processed foods instead of healthier and perhaps less affordable food in order to take care of others in their household. For many eligible people, the solution could come in the form of SNAP benefits, which many qualify for but don't know they do. **Only 29% of eligible seniors in Arizona participate in the SNAP program** (Source: FRAC). That is where our work comes in.

There is a lot of work to be done in this arena and while there are numerous amazing local nonprofits supporting older adults in many other ways, we are focusing on the problem of hunger and connecting our older Arizonans to resources that could greatly impact their health and well-being in a positive way. AzFBN recently hired an Older Adults Programs Coordinator and AmeriCorps VISTA to focus on connecting older adults to programs like SNAP and others they may be eligible for. March 22 marks the 50th anniversary of the nutrition programs addition to the Older Americans Act; there's no better time to welcome Yohana (our new Older Adults Program VISTA) to the team as she also gears up to reach people during Older Americans Month in May.

Recently, members of our team along with our Native American Programs Coordinator and Communications and Outreach Manager had a chance to **visit with our friends from the Native American Advancement Foundation (NAAF) at GuVo District, the Tohono O'dham Nation in southern Arizona**. The team took a tour of their programs and got to meet some of the amazing people running these outreach programs. The tour started at **Ruth's oidag** (garden), where kids learn to grow their own vegetables and traditional staples. Next, they met some of the new

(and adorable!) additions to the chicken coop. The AzFBN team also got to tour the communities of GuVo and Ali Chugk to learn more about their work in achieving food sovereignty. They also ate a delicious lunch of Indian tacos while they listened to the rich history of the Tohono O'dham peoples, their work in preserving their language and culture for future generations, and elder efforts to maintain food access for families during the pandemic, which was a very challenging time for the community.

Through the combined efforts of our Native American Programs Coordinator and our tribal partners, they successfully launched the tribal food sovereignty newsletter to aid everyone who is working together toward tribal food sovereignty. The next issue is due out at the end of March. Several tribal committees have been hard at work gathering key information on the drivers of child food insecurity in their communities. The Hualapai Food Security Committee, the White Mountain Apache Children Food Security Committee, and the San Carlos Apache Child Food Security Committee have all held, as COVID-19 restrictions permitted, virtual or in-person meetings with community members to improve food security outcomes for kids in their respective communities.

As we head into the summer months, we were excited to find out our partner No Kid Hungry granted the Arizona Food Bank Network with a **Summer Ambassador program that aims to spread the word about summer feeding sites to families with school-aged children**. This is incredibly important as we get closer to the end of the school year, with summer being the time of the year that families and children miss out on meals the most. The end of the pandemic era also signals the end of USDA waivers that allowed many food-insecure children to access free meals regardless of parental income limits, making these awareness efforts even more critical. Waiver extension is still very much needed as families recover through this phase of the pandemic. Stay tuned on our social media channels for updates on the waiver extension.

AzFBN – Working to Improve Access to School Meals for All Kids

Kids who are food insecure experience everything from really dire physical impacts, like altered brain structures, to impaired academic performance and (according to a report by Children's HealthWatch) such poor health that it leads to more frequent hospitalizations.

Of course, the way to address this is to get more kids fed. But tragically, **21% fewer meals were served at schools after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic compared with pre-pandemic numbers**. This is despite efforts like Breakfast After the Bell and grab-and-go meals during virtual learning.

School meals are now free for all kids, thanks to a pandemic-prompted change in the program. So why is it that fewer meals are being served? While we don't know all of the reasons, we do know that part of the way to address this is to make sure that every school possible serves more meals to all students.

AzFBN has been doing just that by working with school districts and providing technical assistance, connections to new partners, and grants to child nutrition programs to expand services, especially to at-risk students.

In October 2021, **we received a grant from Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry to reach out specifically to charter schools who don't participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)**. Of course, that meant we needed the expertise to do this work, and thankfully, we found it! Kathy and Debbie have more than 30 years of experience in child nutrition. Kathy has served on national committees for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and School Nutrition Association, while Debbie has been part of the American School Food Service Association and was responsible for managing a multimillion-dollar nutrition program for a local school district.



Kathy and Debbie will be helping charter schools that haven't been participating in NSLP. Some want to feed their students but lack kitchens. Other lack staff with expertise to manage the program. We've been working to connect these schools with other K-12 child nutrition programs in their area to form catering partnerships that could benefit both school budgets and kids in need of breakfast and lunch at charter schools.

Every child, regardless of where they attend school, deserves access to the food they need to thrive. Kathy and Debbie are working to make this a reality!



SNAP Helped Tina Turn Her Life Around – and It Can Help Others, Too.

In our last newsletter, you met **Tina Phalen**, who left home at the age of 15 due to her stepfather's abuse. Tina ended up in prison later in life after what she told us were a string of "bad decisions" due to drug abuse.

She is sharing her story these days in order to help others like her get easier access to SNAP (what used to be called "food stamps") for people who have paid their dues to society and are ready for a clean start.

While serving her time, Tina got clean and made the decision to turn her life around. She started on this path while she was still incarcerated by mentoring other women to help them get clean, too. Upon re-entry to society, Tina knew she never wanted to go back. "When you have [freedom] taken from you, you learn to appreciate the little things. Like right now, I have a little apartment. It's not much, but it is better than what I had, which was ... nothing."

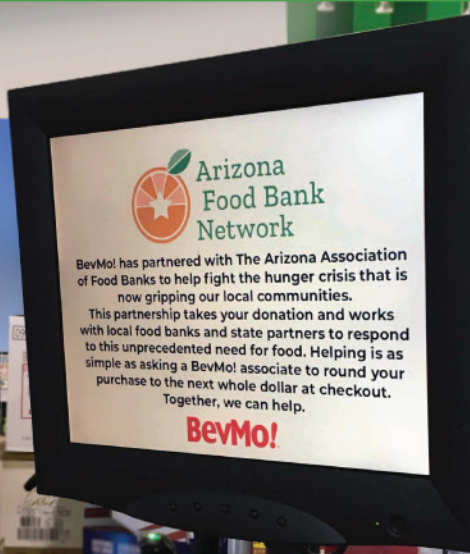
We are so happy to give you the update that, in addition to her little apartment, Tina is working at a job giving newly released women (who are also battling addiction) a dose of hope and reality, very similar to the work she did in prison. "It is hard. I am a mentor helping other women. You have to be patient and tenacious." She knows from personal experience that lack of support and not knowing how to connect with programs that can help can be frustrating, and it's easy to want to give up. When asked why she does this work, she responds, "My story is what it is and makes me the person I am. But if I can help a person not make the same mistakes that I made, then I did something of value."

Tina tells us, "It's all up from here. I hope to move up in my job and I want to own my own home. Live life like I am supposed to. Not just exist."

Programs like SNAP help people like Tina get a little help, so they can go from hungry for food to hungry for change, shifting focus to rebuilding their careers and families. Thank you, Tina, for sharing your story!

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!



BevMo!

BevMo! Check Out AzFBN at Checkout!

If you have found yourself at BevMo! recently purchasing a bottle of wine, we don't blame you! It's been rough these past 18 months. Next time you drop in, BevMo! has partnered with AzFBN for "Round Up at the Register." All you have to do next time you are there is to **ask to round up a few cents and the proceeds will be donated to support the vision of a hunger-free Arizona!**



AmeriCorps

Our AmeriCorps Program Is Recruiting!

AmeriCorps VISTA positions are a great way to serve the food bank network and fight food insecurity. **AzFBN has AmeriCorps opportunities in partnership with great hunger-fighting nonprofits throughout the state.** Don't know what an AmeriCorps VISTA is? AmeriCorps (the "ps" is silent!) are members of the team they are placed in that work a 12-month term and receive benefits, such as a living stipend, health coverage, student loan forbearance, and PTO and sick leave, among others.

Head to azfoodbanks.org/jobs for more info and to apply.

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!

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