

## Food Needs

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pickups with help from front-line staff and volunteers.

Lunch Break's accomplishments over the past year have been plentiful and include nutritional meal planning and grocery options for preventive health care and accommodations for health-related dietary restrictions; homebound delivery of meals provided six days a week; Thanksgiving grab-and-go meals as well as deliveries to homebound clients; and over 100 hot meals delivered to displaced individuals in a local motel.

"The demand was there," Love said. "People who never knew we existed came to us for help. We were taking care of people who lost their jobs or had them cut back. And we still are."

According to Love, the community is as important to Lunch Break as Lunch Break is to the community.

Throughout the pandemic, Love said donors delivered. "Even though people were afraid to go out and shop themselves, they found ways to donate."

Food deliveries arrived from Amazon, checks

poured in and support was there. "Regardless of what people were doing – the seniors afraid to come out – they found ways to help. Even people who lost their jobs gave money so Lunch Break could pay bills for other people."

A COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund was established with agency partners for the payment of utilities, car payments, cable bills and rent assistance. To date, Lunch Break has distributed more than \$800,000 directly to vendors to help clients keep these critical services.

Food insecurity refers to the USDA's measure of "lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods."

Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Instead, it may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally



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At the start of the pandemic, Lunch Break in Red Bank shifted from indoor dining to grab-and-go meal service resulting in a 22 percent rise over 2019.

adequate foods.

According to Community Foodbank of New Jersey, 13.5 percent of residents are projected to be food insecure because of COVID-19; 8.7 percent were food insecure before COVID-19. The numbers for children are even more disturbing: 19.7 percent projected because of COVID-19, compared to 11.3 of children prior to the pandemic.

Fulfill, formerly the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, has been providing food for families in Monmouth and Ocean counties for more

than 30 years. According to the nonprofit's website, it feeds children, seniors, veterans and the working poor. It serves pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens, provides hot meals for children after school, and sends food home for those same children over the weekend.

Pre-pandemic, Fulfill was feeding 136,000 people, including 50,000 children. Today, Fulfill is feeding 215,000 people, including 70,000 children. Fulfill has served 3.3 million more meals since the coronavirus crisis affected the Jersey Shore.

In addition to food pantries, shelters and places of worships, some restaurants are helping to feed the hungry. No Limits Cafe, a lunch eatery in Middletown that provides meaningful employment for adults with intellectual disabilities, is introducing "Help for Hunger," a program to provide meals.

The program was inspired by a \$30,000 grant the café received from Marcus Lemonis' Lemon-Aid Foundation aimed at keeping the café's employees working while helping to feed people dealing with food insecurity in Monmouth County. During the 10-week program, they were able to feed, twice each week, 86 homebound seniors, 20 residents of a homeless shelter, and 50 residents of a nearby motel. "We are seeing, firsthand, that despite the positive developments of the vaccine and the re-opening of the economy, the level of food insecurity is staggering," said No Limits Cafe co-founder Mark Cartier. Now the café is appealing to the community to help; donations will not only help keep the adults with intellectual disabilities employed at the restaurant, but will

also help feed people in the area who might otherwise go hungry.

As Lunch Break logs its 38th year caring for the well-being of hundreds of families and individuals living at or below the poverty line in Monmouth County and beyond, Love said, "People always rise to the occasion when there's a need, when someone is hurting."

"We saw this in (Super Storm) Sandy, in 2007 and 2008 with the big financial downturn and even now we're seeing people are still being very generous."

But it's not over. "We're still in the fight," she said. "There are thousands of people right here in Monmouth County who still don't have jobs."

"Food insecurity has been with us forever," she said. "This is not new. it's just dramatically increased in a short time." Whereas the issue was always a serious problem, she noted, the pandemic forced it to become an instant crisis.

"But," she said, "there's hope and opportunity coming out of this pandemic."

For more information or to contribute, visit [lunch-break.org](http://lunch-break.org), [fulfillnj.org](http://fulfillnj.org) or [no-limitscafe.org](http://no-limitscafe.org).

## Broadwalk

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that illuminate both Broadwalk and the streateries.

Small issues that arose last year were easily addressed, Kirkpatrick said, like picking up trash more often, and they are in the process of fine-tuning Broadwalk for its imminent opening.

Kirkpatrick said she tapped the county Division of Planning for exper-

ience in making the Broadwalk concept a reality last year and now Broadwalk is featured on the cover of the new outdoor dining guide.

"They certainly looked at what we're doing," she said.

Before the county introduced the guide, finding information on how to create safe, shared outdoor public spaces for dining on side-

walks and streets proved challenging, she said. She reached out to discuss those concerns with Dave Schmetterer, assistant director of the county planning division, and a Red Bank resident.

"We talked in late summer about some of the concerns we had here in Red Bank, not so much with the Broadwalk, but with the streateries, the shared outdoor public spaces for restaurant patrons dining on sidewalks and in the streets," she said. "We talk-

ed about ADA access, we had discussions about how we could do this safely."

She said while she found information, nothing "really fit Red Bank. I shared my frustration that there wasn't anything that dealt with the Monmouth County experience."

Kirkpatrick said the re-opening guidance document created by the planning board deals with "sidewalks, courtyards and alleys" among other areas and items relevant to Red Bank.

Kirkpatrick praised the

guide, produced by the planning board.

"The county document is really the best practices of creating streateries and other things. They give some great diagrams," she said. She also noted that the guide will be a great resource as Red Bank businesses apply for '20-'21 outdoor dining permits.

"So it's nice to have something that's home-grown that we can use."

The guide "was an ask from Red Bank," she said, and "they answered the call."

With the business alliance providing insight to county planners about what worked and what was frustrating, they were able to develop guidance on design for safety and access.

"All the credit goes to the county planning board."

The Spring Outdoor Re-opening Guide-2021 is an illustrated 33-page guide drawn from multiple locales with illustrations and a vision statement. It is available on the county website at [visitmonmouth.com](http://visitmonmouth.com).

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