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One year later, Manna Food Bank highlights impact and changes due to COVID-19

Pensacola, FL (April 1, 2021) - One year ago today, Manna's administrative team packed up and went home to work. Just two warehouse staff members and fewer than a dozen volunteers remained on-site to ensure Manna's food distributions continued as the need for assistance grew in our community.

A lot has changed at Manna in the past 12 months, but we never stopped providing food to our neighbors in need; we just did it a little differently. We took a careful and comprehensive look at food assistance in Northwest Florida and adapted our services in a way that best served our community. Manna's food distribution model has shifted to incorporate more community partners with a special focus on agencies and organizations that case-manage the individuals and families who utilize their services. Through it all, we never wavered on our commitment to provide food assistance free of charge, to reduce duplication of services, to reach those in our community who needed us most, and to always provide the healthiest food possible.

Manna's service footprint began to grow drastically in March 2020 and hasn't stopped. In the last year, Manna provided food to 76 community agencies and organizations to ensure our neighbors in need affected by the COVID-19 crisis were fed. Through our partners, Manna's resources were distributed at more than 130 distribution points across the two-county area.

The full list of agencies/organizations can be found at www.mannahelps.org.

While our country and community were forced to slow, and in some cases, shut down, Manna HAD to expand and grow. We developed partnerships and programs that will continue well beyond the days of coronavirus. The following organizations support children, seniors, and everyone in between in need of assistance with healthcare, education, housing, food and so much more. We look forward to our combined impact with our friends at Covenant Care, Cantonment Improvement Committee, Children's Home Society, and Volunteers of America.

We, of course, never stopped supporting our 10 community partners who we collaborate with on our nine specialty programs in *normal* times, including:

- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast and United Way of West Florida (UWWF) for the Tummy Bundles program
- Pensacola Police Department and Escambia County Sheriff's Office for the School Resource Officer Food Program
- Santa Rosa County School District for the Backpacks4Teens program
- Ministry Village at Olive for the Tender Hearts Caring Hands program
- Westminster Village for the Healthy Seniors Food Program
- UWWF for the AmeriCorps VISTA program
- Gulf Coast Kid's House
- Santa Rosa Kid's House
- OASIS Florida

You've heard us say it before, and it's never been truer than now: we could NOT do what we do without our volunteers. Due to many circumstances associated with COVID-19, our operational volunteer workforce was suddenly reduced by 87% in March 2020. It was devastating – both for Manna's staff and operations, as well as our volunteers who so generously give of their time and love. We were and are still very fortunate, though, for a small but mighty team of volunteers who keep us going, and, somehow, made it possible for Manna to distribute 32% more food (in pounds) and serve 61% more individuals than in the year before.

Our most sincere thanks go to our essential crew: Gene, Kitty, Becky, Hilda, Shruti, Michelle, Loren, Merida, Evan, Liana, Gretchen, Katia, Gunnar, and Bill.

Volunteers also helped us in 2020 with something we don't ordinarily do: home delivery. Volunteers at Cokesbury United Methodist Church, Frank Giammaria of Gulf Winds Credit Union, Ed Carson of Carson Construction, Susan Clark of Emerald Coast Hospice, and Rachel Smith of Brunch League ensured seniors in our Monthly Seniors Food Program, as well as clients of Center for Independent Living, received healthy food boxes. Our friends at Cokesbury UMC are still doing home delivery of Manna food boxes. This is a logistical feat, and we cannot thank our delivery volunteers enough for the kind work they do to ensure seniors can stay home and stay safe, while receiving the nutritious groceries they need.

None of Manna's work from March 2020 through March 2021 would've been possible without our supporters, our Hunger Heroes. The Northwest Florida community and beyond has shown Manna and those we serve overwhelming kindness, compassion, and generosity. We are filled with gratitude for your generous support of families facing hunger and uncertainty. Your contributions of time, talent and treasure have made it possible for them to begin rebuilding.

The COVID-19 crisis has given us the opportunity – just as we had following the devastating floods of 2014 – to reflect and examine our work, and then make certain we're doing what's right for our community. We promise to keep you updated and informed about our progress post-COVID 19. You can expect from us more collaborations with outstanding community partners working to ensure Escambia and Santa Rosa counties are a better place to live, work and play! Together, our impact will be greater and more meaningful.

For more information, please visit MannaHelps.org or call (850) 432-2053.

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About Manna

Manna's mission is to offer emergency food assistance, service the food-related needs of vulnerable populations, and engage the entire community in the fight against hunger. A local grassroots organization with no national affiliation or government funding, Manna provided food to 35,417 people last year. Manna operates a network of three emergency food distribution pantries and nine specialty programs with 10 community partners in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.