

History of Center for Food Action in New Jersey

1976–2023

Before 1976

The prelude to the Center for Food Action in New Jersey began when the late singer Harry Chapin and radio host Bill Ayres, two long-time friends, initiated a grassroots movement to combat the root cause of hunger, poverty and injustice through an organization they called World Hunger Year, now known as WHY Hunger. They realized that to truly affect change takes a broad-based commitment to finding ways to help people break out of the cycle of poverty.

1976

In 1976, with a grant from Long Island-based World Hunger Year and with the leadership of Bill Ayres and a small group of Bergen County residents, World Hunger Year New Jersey (WHY/NJ) was born. It opened its doors in Fair Lawn, operating from a small office in the Church of Radburn and two rooms in a nearby empty school building. The mission was “to eliminate hunger through education.”

The organization’s first director, Bill Wildey, said, “You don’t have to travel to Bangladesh or the urban ghetto to find people who are hungry. Just look in your own backyard.” Within a few months, hundreds of people were flocking to the newly formed agency in order to put food on their tables. Bill, his eight-member staff and a growing number of area residents were committed to alleviating hunger and the newly formed agency began much of the work that continues today.

Using a five-prong approach, employees, hired with funding through a federally funded Comprehensive Employment and Training ACT (CETA), the fledgling organization undertook the important and arduous tasks of:

- providing emergency food to those in need
- offering nutrition education
- developing a hunger curriculum for schools
- creating a hunger hotline to provide information about welfare, food stamps and nutrition planning
- establishing a NJ food policy coalition to address the causes of hunger and find solutions to alleviate it

Leslie Smith, Coordinator of the Emergency Food Program, and later Director, promoted increased awareness of hunger and food issues and solicited food and funds from the community to keep the pantry operating. She, the board of directors and others spearheaded a move to change the group’s name.

Shortly after, the organization became Center for Food Action in New Jersey (CFA). CFA issued its first Hunger Report, which focused on preserving New Jersey’s farmlands and developing community gardens as a way to reduce hunger in our state. At the same time, thanks to support from the religious community and individuals, CFA was feeding hungry neighbors in Bergen and

Passaic counties. The hotline was connecting people to much-needed services and CFA's hunger curriculum was being taught in dozens of local schools while CFA's staff and volunteers offered nutrition education workshops.

1979

In September, 1979, a news story ran under the headline "The Working Poor – With Inflation Hitting Hard, The Working Poor Often Do Not Have Enough of the Most Important Energy of All – Food." Citing a 20% increase in food prices and escalating unemployment, the article focused on Bergen County and the work being done by our group. Leslie was quoted as saying, "The rationale for the food center was that if we could prove that a food center was needed in affluent Bergen County... then it could be used as a model for emergency assistance throughout the rest of New Jersey."

The next month, Adele LaTourette was hired as both pantry manager and advocate. Individual client advocacy became an important component of CFA's work. Both the need for CFA's services and community support continued to increase. Before long, CFA was receiving calls from groups across the state who wanted to mirror CFA's combination of food plus advocacy. Also, that year, thanks to an offer from Bergen County Community Action to share its Hackensack office, the agency opened its first satellite site.

1980

In 1980, a number of important events took place:

- CFA established the Statewide Emergency Food and Anti Hunger Network (SEFAN). Adele oversaw this important work and thirty emergency food providers came to the table. SEFAN served as New Jersey's clearinghouse on hunger and poverty and provided information training and technical assistance to other food providers while building county-wide coalitions to address hunger. Just eight years later, there were more than 700 food providers in the Network.
- CFA urged its supporters to contact their representatives to ensure that the Food Stamp Program would have sufficient funding to ensure that 559,216 New Jerseyans would receive needed benefits.
- Numerous groups accepted the Hunger Maze challenge and as more people took part in the simulation assuming the identity of someone trying to access services and find the help they needed, private support for CFA's work grew.

As CETA funding began drying up, CFA's staff was reduced to three people and the heart of the work focused on providing food and advocacy, strengthening the statewide program, building awareness of the existence of hunger in our community and across the state, in part by holding Hunger Maze workshops and broadening the donor base.

1981

By 1981, CFA had provided 6,500 three-day food packages to people in need since it first opened its doors. Just before Thanksgiving of that year, CFA moved its headquarters to Englewood, thanks to a warm welcome by West Side Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery of the Palisades.

1982-1983

The next few years, saw the deep recession of 1982 - 1983, cuts in government social programs and rising unemployment, making it more difficult for people to get by and a rising number of people turned to CFA. The New York Times Magazine headline on January 2, 1983 read, "Once Again, Hunger Troubles America. Frank, a CFA client told of coming to the Center for Food Action after becoming seriously ill and losing his job and feeling both embarrassed to need help and grateful for the food CFA gave him on multiple occasions. CFA's Adele LaTourette was quoted in the article, describing the "new poor, people who were once able to provide for themselves.

1986

By 1986, CFA was feeding 5,000 people annually; half of them children. Jan Holt, Cynthia Libby (now Johnson-Barbato) and Harold Jones served respectively as President, Secretary and Treasurer. A new Executive Director, Penny Colman, oversaw a staff of six. Penny said, "Change, continuity and challenge sum up 1986. Clients were referred to CFA by 47 different private nonprofit agencies, churches and government bodies that year.

Mid to Late 1980s

Two major challenges faced CFA in the mid and late 1980's. The first was financial with several very dire periods however, thanks to a number of special appeals, good media coverage, hard work and the generosity of its donors, CFA was able to not only keep its doors open but to grow and expand.

The second was the formation of the New Jersey Commission on Hunger, something CFA worked hard to bring about. Senator Mathew Feldman and Assemblyman David Schwartz introduced legislation to create the Commission and Governor Thomas H. Kean established the Commission. CFA was appointed it and CFA's director was chosen to edit the 86 page report.

The Commission was specifically charged with the following duties.

- To study the extent of the incidence of hunger among the citizens in New Jersey
- To gather data about existing nutritional services and programs and the degree to which these programs and services are used by people in need
- To assess the need for additional nutritional programs and services and to propose ways in which these needs can be most effectively met.

A major finding of the Commission was

"600,000 people suffer from hunger in New Jersey, approximately 7.7% of the state's population. They are a diverse group who live throughout the state concentrated in the cities but also found in suburban and rural areas. They range in age from very young to very old. Although their circumstances vary, what hungry people have in common is a lack of resources – hunger and poverty are inextricably entangled."

The report also praised the nonprofit community for their efforts to help hungry people despite the fact that these organizations are underfunded, understaffed and overworked and highlighted CFA's program for providing direct relief, advocacy and education.

1987

Patricia Espy, CFA's current Executive Director replaced Penny in 1987. When Patricia was hired, CFA has three full-time and eight part-time staff members. One of her first undertakings was conducting a study to determine the unmet need for emergency food in the northwest portion of Bergen County. Based on the results, CFA opened a new site at the Immaculate Conception Church in Mahwah in 1988. CFA also began providing rental and utility assistance to clients, serving 36 households that year, which grew to 102 households the following year.

1989

In February 1989, CFA announced that it had provided its 50,000 emergency food package and had seen a 79% increase in the number of people receiving helps since the formation of the organization and to keep pace with the demand, CFA began a capital campaign with the intent of building a new office and pantry space on the property of West Side Presbyterian Church in order to better serve the residents of Bergen County.

SEFAN continued to serve as a voice for emergency food providers across the state while continuing to document the extent of hunger in New Jersey. It created the SEFAN Advisory Council, bringing together 21 representatives from all sectors to address hunger, homelessness and poverty issues in New Jersey in order to find solutions to these problems; a major emphasis was working to have the Food Stamp Program reauthorized. "The Source Book", a training manual to answer the need for training pantries, soup kitchens and social service agencies around the State was produced.

1990

The Record ran an article in May 1990, stating, "In north Jersey the homeless of the Nineties will have jobs, children and cars. What they will not have is an affordable place to live." Unfortunately, this prediction proved to be true and CFA's Homelessness Prevention and Utility Assistance program became a major part of CFA's mission.

The 1990s

The 1990's saw greater need by residents and the growth of CFA. With several dozen other organizations, CFA sponsored a forum in Trenton to listen and gain an understanding about how people with low incomes and limited resources manage the daily tasks necessary for survival and how to destroy stereotypes, establish dialogue and move toward implementing anti-poverty programs. The speakers were low-income people willing to share their stories with our legislators. Each story was unique and each provided a glimpse of the very real problems people face when they are trapped in poverty. Although there were many tragedies – being set on fire by an abusive spouse, losing your job due to an auto accident, followed by the loss of your home because you can't pay the rent, sending your child to bed hungry knowing the next morning you'll have to send her to school hungry – the speakers spoke just as movingly about their dreams and aspirations – learning to read, getting a GED, a college degree, finding a good job, being able to buy fresh milk and produce to adequately feed one's family.

CFA's Northwest Site Manager, Bea O'Rourke told the following, now famous, 'Orange Ball' story. Here, in her words:

*"Why do you have orange balls in the refrigerator?" I looked down at this wonderful little seven-year old with disbelief..." I remove several oranges from the fridge and sit the little ones down on the Center floor. *"Look at what I can do with these orange balls,"* I start peeling the skin from one orange and ask their mother if they can have a taste. We are waiting for the Food Stamp office to call back. The orange ball is leaking and running down my hand. I tell them not to worry and hand them each an orange. They peel the skin; the orange leaks. I show them you can taste the orange for a sweet surprise. They are leery but Mom says O.K. The children shiver from their first taste, lick their lips, giggle and continue eating the fruit. Their mother tells Bea she never had money to buy oranges.

The Record held its first annual food drive, the largest food drive in New Jersey and one that continues today, sponsored by The North Jersey Media Foundation. Other large annual drives included the Boy Scouts' Scouting for Food and the Postal Workers Drive helped fill CFA's shelves.

Another site opened at the First Presbyterian Church in Elmwood Park. Client numbers topped 20,000 emergency food packages a year and 250 plus households were being helped each year with rents and utility bills. And, after years of looking for space to house CFA's headquarters, the agency began accepting bids for a new facility and broke ground at thanks to the support of Englewood's West Side Presbyterian Church. CFA moved into its new headquarters in 1994.

CFA continued its expansion, moving into Passaic as a result of an invitation from the Community Presbyterian Church in Ringwood. This new site makes it much easier for our neighbors in the Upper Passaic Valley to access CFA's services. CFA also produced its first cookbook so clients could create delicious meals using basic food products.

1995

In 1995, The Food Research and Action Center, a national anti-hunger organization, reported that 22.7% of New Jersey's children were hungry or at risk of being hungry, citing the loss of well-paying manufacturing jobs, growth of low-paying retail and service jobs, stagnation of the minimum wage and the increase in single parent households. With drastic cuts underway in government welfare and nutrition programs, SEFAN coordinated its first Paper Plate Campaign, asking pantries and soup kitchens in New Jersey to ask their clients to write a two line message on paper plates, along with the names and ages of their family members and their town and SEFAN delivered the messages to Governor Whitman's office to bring attention to the needs of poor people living in our state.

Late 1990s

By the late 1990's, CFA was providing more nearly 30,000 three-day food packages. Twenty-nine percent of all households helped in 1996 had never needed to get emergency food before. Nearly one-half of those helped were children. By this point, CFA was also providing rental and utility assistance to nearly 600 families.

1998

In 1998, with a grant from the Food For All Foundation and in cooperation with the Episcopal Diocese of Newark and the Good Shepherd Church in Ringwood, CFA established a vocational training program to benefit members of the Ramapough Mountain Indians as they used traditional Indian designs to craft vestments for priests and ministers.

1999

By 1999, CFA had outgrown its Mahwah site, located in the basement of Immaculate Conception Church. A building fund was established thanks to the Bergen Highlands Rotary Club, under the leadership of Brent Edmonds, the Saddle River Valley Task force, spearheaded by George Vargish, and CFA's board of directors.

After years of holding food drives for CFA and donating funds, Oritani Bank held its first annual golf outing to benefit the Center for Food Action. As the sun shone brightly on the greens 112 golfers played and the event raised \$18,000, thanks to Kevin Lynch, Oritani Bank's President, and Rosanne Buscemi (then Jarrell), Oritani's Vice President and a CFA board member. This successful event became an annual one, raising much needed funds.

Unfortunately, that same year, New Jersey was hit by Hurricane Floyd, which felled numerous trees while the rain came down in sheets leaving flooded homes and streets and downed power lines. Many of our neighbors were left stranded, homeless, jobless and hungry. CFA immediately began providing food and other types of assistance to those hardest hit by this disaster.

1999–2000

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute, the top 20% of wage earners in New Jersey saw their salaries grow by 9% from the late 1980's to the late 1990's while income for the bottom 20% fell by 7.1% during the same period. What this meant for CFA was more low income families than ever before were turning to CFA in order to put food on their tables and keep a roof over their heads. After years of rising client numbers, CFA saw an 28% increase between 1998 and 2000.

2001

By 2001, CFA was distributing more than \$1,000,000 worth of food and spending nearly \$250,000 to help people with their housing and utility bills. CFA relocated its Hackensack site to a new facility on the grounds of New Hope Baptist Church; a kick-off grant from Oritani Bank helped make the move possible. Still not having a permanent home for our Mahwah site, CFA found a temporary one in trailers located on the grounds of the Bergen County Police and Fire Academy.

CFA celebrated its Silver Anniversary with a hugely successful fundraising event, chaired by Cynthia Johnson-Barbato and Barbara Liebmann, Journal Chairperson Richard S. Wolfman and Raffle Chairperson, Lauren McGovern. Food was provided by dozens of restaurants and music by Bud Maltin Music and Mark Gross Quartet. Wine was provided by Wine Ventures of Tenafly.

Then on September 11th, life changed for all of us. CFA became part of a number of nonprofits in the area responding to the horror. CFA provided food, rental and utility assistance to more than 100 families who worked in or near the World Trade Center and who lost their jobs or had their hours cut as a result of the disaster. It was a privilege to assist those affected by the tragedy.

The 2000s

That decade saw rising numbers of people needing help. CFA's director said, "The Center for Food Action is committed to do what it does best – helping people through difficult times and working with them to build a brighter future one person at a time and one family at a time." CFA welcomed new staff including Jim James and Irwin Vogelmann, Robb Roberts and Lisa Pitz and many others.

The gifted entertainer Tom Chapin, brother of CFA's founder, Harry Chapin performed to a sold out group to raise money for CFA's programs and year after year, Bill O'Shea Florist and Gifts hosted Good Neighbor Day to benefit CFA, giving a thousand dozen roses away, asking people to make a donation to CFA and to keep one rose and give 11 away while telling people about the work of CFA.

More changes came to CFA as the needs of an increasing caseload made us aware that CFA was, for many, providing supplemental food, 'not just' emergency food. A growing number of people needed more than three days worth of food and needed to come more than three times a year. It was now necessary for CFA to buy eggs and produce to supplement food donations and to let people come monthly, if needed. To help us better access USDA commodities and pick up large donation from companies and religious congregations, we applied for and received a grant from UBS Financial Services, which we used to buy our first box truck.

Food, heat, lights – which would you choose? While everyone was talking about how to stay warm while dashing about, CFA's clients were worrying how to stay warm in their own homes. As our area became a frigid zone with single digit temperatures and high winds for much of a winter, CFA stayed open late to process heating and utility requests.

A large grant from the UPS Foundation underwrote 'Building a Healthy Base', which supported two important parts of CFA's work: providing nutritious food to people in crisis and offering nutrition education and budget counseling to those coming to CFA.

On the statewide level, CFA held statewide conferences inviting emergency food providers to discuss innovative ways to deliver services to clients, share information about the extent of need in their communities and ways to increase resources on the local and state levels. It was determined that one way to lessen hunger in the Garden State was through a "Throw A Line to The Hungry Campaign" which, resulted in a \$4,000,000 line item in Governor Jon Corzine's 2006 budget, which enabled pantries to purchase healthy foods for their clients. The following year, the state budget included an additional \$1,000,000 for infrastructure improvements in feeding programs throughout the State.

2006

As CFA celebrated thirty years of providing nourishment and hope to neighbors in need, Bergen County had a population of 890,000 and according to the Division of Community Development for Bergen County there were 90,311 residents living in poverty

Highlights of CFA's 30th year include:

- Coordinating a photo exhibit called "The Other New Jersey, Images of Hunger." This unusual exhibit was unveiled at the State House to highlight New Jersey's epidemic of hunger using photographs taken by low-income people with disposable cameras, provided to them by CFA
- Providing training and technical assistance to more than 100 organizations
- Producing a "Best Resource-Raising Practices guide for emergency food providers
- Conducting a statewide hunger survey
- Waging the successful campaign to add a line item to the State budget for the purchase of \$4 million in food to allow food providers to purchase healthy foods
- Distributing \$1.4 million dollars worth of food, - 39,000 food packages were given to 15,500 people
- Paying \$500,000 to keep 900 households in their apartments and keep their utilities on.
- Providing Thanksgiving packages to 2,800 families
- Giving 110 frail elderly seniors monthly food packages
- Opening a new site at the Korean-American Senior Citizens Association of New Jersey, located in Palisades Park, which offered our Korean-speaking familiar foods such as kimchi, canned mackerel, bottles of sesame oil and soybean paste, in addition to other basics.
- Being recognized by the County of Bergen as "Best Performer" and being inducted into the Community Hall of Fame by Thirteen/WNET and WLIW21.

Late 2000s to Early 2010s

In the next few year, CFA formed a Consumer Speakers Bureau, thanks to a grant from the Presbyterian Hunger Program, comprised of low-income New Jersey residents who gave voice to the issue of hunger and food insecurity in our state, held a "Congressional Roundtable on Hunger", an educational forum on hunger and broke ground for its Mahwah site; a long-awaited one story, 5,200 square foot building thanks to support from the Township of Mahwah, the Mahwah Board of Education, the Bergen-Highlands/Ramsey Rotary Club, Saddle River Valley Task Force, Edmonds Contracting, Inc. OritaniSavings Bank Charitable Foundation, The Richard S. Wolfman Family Foundation, Advent Lutheran Church, Inserra Supermarkets Inc. and the Frederick, Ilse Grunwald Legacy Fund, Bergen County Community Development and a thousand donors.

CFA received a grant from Partnership in Philanthropy, which allowed us to hire a consultant to help structure CFA strategic plan and strengthen its donor base. CFA opened two sites; one in Fairview, at the invitation of the Franciscan Community Development Corporation and thanks to a grant from OritaniSavings Bank Charitable Foundation and the second in Carlstadt, thanks to Boiling Springs Savings Bank.

Many of CFA's friends gathered at the organization's Englewood headquarters for the unveiling of a plaque honoring Richard S. Wolfman for his eighteen years of garnering support for CFA and his generosity in supporting the Center, including funds to sustain the Englewood building.

CFA moved from Elmwood Park to Saddle Brook, thanks to a grant from Columbia Bank that made renovation of the building, consisting of both office and warehouse, possible. When the Korean American Senior Citizens' Association moved from Palisades Park to Ridgefield, CFA relocated with them to the new, larger facility.

2012

When Super Storm Sandy struck New Jersey with its brutal impact much of Little Ferry and Moonachie were under water. Homes and lives were destroyed. Within a few days, CFA's staff and dozens of volunteers were distributing emergency food, supermarket gift cards, water, coats, blankets and other necessities to residents. For the next year, CFA made regular trips to the two towns, delivering food and financially assisting clients with expenses not covered from other sources.

That year, CFA received a \$200,000 per year grant for five years from the OritaniBank Charitable Foundation to help ensure that our neighbors have a place to turn when times are hard. This, along with the generosity of so many people in our community permits CFA to allocate more than \$1.3 million annually to help the poorest and most vulnerable members of our community.

CFA began its Weekend Snack Pack Program, delivering packages to children at two Englewood schools and involving countless parents, children, schools, civic groups and corporations in putting the food packs together. The children were and are delighted, parents were grateful and teachers and school officials appreciate that their students are not going hungry on weekends. With that success, CFA added two additional schools, thanks to the Rotary of the Palisades and two more are being planned. CFA was invited to open a site at Bergen Community College to benefit the BCC community and CFA's board fully supported this effort.

2013

In 2013, CFA held a Soul of Hunger event in conjunction with the Jon Bon Jovi Soul Foundation to look at hunger in New Jersey through the eyes and words of those living in poverty. In addition to those telling their own stories, panel members consisted of Governor Chris Christie and Chef Tom Colicchio and the director and producer of the video, "A Place at the Table." Following this event, CFA coordinated a press conference at the State House, once again exhibiting the photos of dozens of client-photographers. And, the following year, the Jon Bon Jovi Soul Foundation gave CFA a grant to further the work of witnessing hunger through those most impacted by it.

CFA's New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition (formerly SEFAN) continues to educate members of congress and the assembly about the extent of hunger in their districts and to make the public aware of the scope of hunger in their neighborhoods and to advocate against cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly called Food Stamps and advocates for improving access to School Breakfast, along with other vital programs that reduce hunger.

Many of those coming to CFA are children, many are senior citizens; many are living with serious health problems and many work and still live in poverty. We continue to strive to improve the nutrition, health and well-being of our clients.

Some of the ways that we're doing this are:

- Providing seven-day food packages to 4,700 people each month, distributing more than \$4,000,000 worth of food annually to residents living in 100 northern New Jersey towns
- Helping 1,500 families a year with their housing and utility expenses, providing nearly \$1,300,000 in financial assistance to cover these critical expenses.
- Offering case management to thousands of households
- Providing nearly 2,000 weekend snack packs to low-income children each month
- Rescuing food from area supermarkets
- Growing fresh produce in our community garden
- Distributing smile packs to aid our youngest clients in maintaining good dental health
- Offering healthy cooking demonstrations for parents and their children.

From the very beginning, CFA has relied on volunteers to do much of the work needed and today volunteers play a key role in CFA's mission to end hunger and homelessness in our community.

2014-2015

CFA was founded on the value of neighbors helping neighbors. This continuing generosity means children don't go to bed hungry, struggling parents have one less thing to worry about, the most vulnerable in our community get a variety of services. In both 2014 and 2015, CFA distributed more than \$5,000,000 worth of food and \$1,500,000 in financial assistance covering rents, security deposits, heating oil and utility payments for our poorest neighbors. On-site volunteers contributed 32,000 hours each year while many others organized food and diaper drives and made Snackpacks.

2016

As CFA celebrated its 40th Anniversary, it was a time of reflection as CFA set goals for its next decade. It also presented an opportunity to express thanks to long-term supporters including Deborah and Jeff Klein, Bergen Highlands Rotary, WHY Hunger and CFA's NJ AntiHunger Coalition director, Adele LaTourette and to publicly thank OritaniBank Charitable Foundation, North Jersey Public Adjusters and The Konort Family. Singer and songwriter Tom Chapin performed at the Gala.

2017

In 2017 the focus was on Action Beyond the Bag, moving CFA closer to its goal of expanding its programs including its garden, which tripled in size and the coordination of community gardens. Its Smile Program reached thousands of children and 1,174 households received homelessness prevention services, which prevented evictions and helped people to move to more affordable and safer housing and prevented the disconnection of utility services. CFA distributed 64,000 emergency food packages., rescuing nearly 500,000 pounds of food from area supermarkets, in large part thanks to Inserra ShopRite.

The Weekend Backpack program provided 35,000 food packages to local children at risk of going hungry on weekends and during the summer months, thanks in large measure to its coordinator and key supporter Jen Maxfield Ostfeld. That year, CFA honored Oritani Bank for being an Outstanding Corporate Philanthropic Partner, long-time volunteer Pete Shanno, and its executive director, Patricia Espy.

2018

By 2018 CFA was establishing its goals for the coming years, which included optimizing its operations and systems and refining its measuring tools and mobilizing the public to strengthen and encourage community-based and government responses to ending hunger. While continuing to provide essential help to those in need, CFA focused on upgrading its infrastructure by upgrading its facilities and technology and using environmentally sustainable practices across the organization.

2019

Autumn Years and Northwest Bergen magazines along with The Record highlighted CFA's work in 2019. They highlighted that although CFA started as an emergency food center it now provides longer-term help for those living in poverty. Many of CFA's families have two incomes, but, at or close to minimum wage providing sufficient food and meeting other basic expenses are impossible in an area as costly as northern New Jersey. Patricia Espy said, "For many, it is hard to ask for help. We work to make our clients feel welcome and give them encouragement to come back again whether it is to get over a hurdle of long-term if they have nowhere else to go."

CFA strengthen its efforts to reach the growing senior population, which by 2019 made up 21% of those assisted; a third of those coming were children. The Neighbor Helping Neighbor concept continued to fuel CFA's work. Corporations, small businesses, houses of worship, civic groups and individuals make CFA's work possible as does Bergen County, Passaic County, Community Food Bank, State of New Jersey and FEMA.

2020

The COVID pandemic came to New Jersey in March 2020 with the first confirmed Bergen County resident testing positive. Very shortly after that, CFA restructured its food distribution process to a drive-through one and utilized not only its sites but college and university campuses, local schools and houses of worship to reach as many people as possible providing weekend hours.

2021

The pandemic brought acute awareness to the persistent hunger problem that existed long before the arrival of COVID-19. Even with something approaching normal by 2021, parents and seniors were still forced to make tough decision whether to buy food, pay rent or keep their utilities on. One in seven children in our State were at risk of hunger, along with many seniors.

2021-2022

In 2021, CFA provided \$7,000,000 worth of food and more than \$1,000,000 in financial assistance and that number increased to more than \$8,000,000 in food and \$1,200,000 in financial assistance in 2022. CFA expanded its mobile operation, expanded its home delivery program, grew its dinner4seniors program, strengthened its relationship with the Diabetic Foundation and provided wellness and hygiene packs for those leaving shelters and jails.

2022-2023

As CFA developed its Strategic Plan for 2022 – 2025 it focused on Access, Engagement and Infrastructure. The plan builds upon the challenges, lessons, resilience and strength of its past as CFA continues to aid those who need help to put food on their tables and keep a roof over their heads and to actively pursue eradicating hunger in New Jersey. Its core values are:

- Justice – the belief that food and housing are rights and all people should be treated with respect and dignity
- Collaboration – to build food-secure communities we are stronger when we work together
- Action – strive to be a leader in ending hunger and promoting household stability by caring for those in need of immediate help and by raising awareness and engaging stakeholders in advocating for policies that create long-term solutions
- Diversity and Inclusiveness – as reflected in our organizational structure and by commitment of being sensitive to, respectful and of cultural differences and by building an inclusive organization
- Accountability – as we remain stewards of those supporting our mission and holding ourselves to being responsible for conducting our work efficiently, effectively with excellence, integrity and transparency.

CFA's 2022 Gala honored Cynthia Johnson Barbato, CFA's immediate past president with its Public Service Award and its Humanitarian Award went to Oritani Charitable Foundation. CFA welcomed Menen Mathias Fredericks, MD as its president. Patricia Espy tendered her resignation after 36 years serving as executive director to be effective in March 2023. Nicole Davis was selected as executive director.