Charlene often visits the Baptist Center in Knoxville, one of our agency partners, because “I need food,” she said. “I only get about $45 worth of food stamps a month. I just can’t live on that.” She tries to get food at the Baptist Center “about every other week if I get gas in my car,” she admits. Charlene often times can’t afford the gas and will miss out on the food she desperately needs.

“I’m disabled and on disability,” she explains. Through injuries at work, Charlene severely hurt her back and also had to have knee surgery. A hard worker throughout her career, she said, “I worked at the airport as a security guard; I’ve also worked cleaning up houses and hotels.”

Seniors trying to survive on a very limited income can jeopardize their fragile lives. According to Feeding America, “Hunger takes a severe toll on seniors’ health and nutrition – putting them at risk for chronic health conditions like depression, asthma and diabetes.” Charlene is no stranger to hunger or its consequences.

Charlene chuckled when she answers, “Yes, I miss meals, but I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do.” So many seniors suffer from food insecurity simply because they can’t afford to live. In fact, 63% of seniors who visit food banks and their agency partners say they have to choose between food and medical care. Charlene agrees, “I do have to choose, but I pay my bills because I don’t want to get put out.”

Please remember, it’s a noble act when you support Second Harvest to help good people who struggle with hunger and physical disabilities like Charlene. “I appreciate what they do for us,” she said. Your sacrifice is truly changing lives every day.
Words of Hope

2021 was an incredible year. It was a journey of rising out of pandemic darkness to the light of a hopeful future. At Second Harvest, we’re always pursuing improvement and trying to learn from our experiences. 2021 taught us a lot.

The pandemic gave us so many new experiences that we’d never encountered before, and it’s driving us to improve. We rewrote all the rules and changed the way we’ve looked at things for so many years. We assessed everything and restructured programs. Now I believe we’re so much more powerful because we’re getting food to people quicker and better, not to mention in places we couldn’t reach before.

In 2020, we distributed an incredible 21 million pounds of food. Because of better efficiencies and more donations, we hit 22 million pounds in 2021. That is amazing. Here are some more highlights:

• 1,437 more children were recipients of Food for Kids program during the summer.
• 242 additional seniors received boxes of food scattered across 10 counties.
• More than 13,000 emergency food boxes were given to seniors and families, including two weeks of food vs. three days.
• Four million additional pounds of fresh produce was distributed across the 8,000 square miles we cover in 18 counties.

All our positions have changed at Second Harvest because of the greater trust donors have given to us, and we’re more positive because of the hope we share. What can I say, knowing we have a compassionate community behind us that will do whatever it takes to ensure their neighbors won’t go hungry is so encouraging for the team and volunteers at Second Harvest.

To me, 2021 is defined in one word – Grateful. Giving has been historical. My job has always been, “Oh my gosh, are we going to make it this year?” Now it’s planning for the years ahead.

It has been an incredible year because of everyone who sacrificially supports Second Harvest with their time, talents and treasures. Because of you, we’re defeating hunger in so many new and better ways. I am so grateful for your unending compassion and devotion. You’re making a world of difference, and I’m looking forward to the years ahead through the eyes of hope.

Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely,

Elaine Streno
Executive Director

Special Thanks
THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING SECOND HARVEST
Forced into a Life of Disability

Felicia tries to breathe deeply, but only gasps in short, painful breaths. Her lungs are failing, and the doctors can’t figure out why. In the process, she was forced into the difficult life of disability – she can’t work anymore, receives little government income and has no food security. “I live by myself on about $83.00 a month, and I’m 100% disabled because of my lungs, sugar, everything else,” she admits.

Felicia used to drive trucks across the state. “Oh, man,” she says with a laugh, “I’m telling you, there are a lot of winding roads throughout Tennessee.” Now she struggles to keep food in her cabinets and meals on the table.

“I try to make sure that I cook foods and stuff like that. A lot of people don’t realize that if you mix it together, add more water, and spread the food out a little bit, it will last longer,” Felicia explains.

Even when being creative with the little food she has, Felicia says she “often has to choose between buying food or paying the bills or paying for medicine. It’s not an easy decision, but I just do what I have to do.”

If it wasn’t for the food Second Harvest provides our agency partner, Sunset Gap Community Center, located deep in the Appalachian Mountains, Felicia would not have enough food to survive.

Felicia is so thankful to those who support Second Harvest. “I really appreciate the help y’all give us. Second Harvest has helped a lot of people out here,” she said. Thanks to you, folks like Felicia can get the food they so desperately need.

Hungry College Students are Less Likely to Succeed

The pandemic has pulled back the curtain on student hunger. Yes, we’re well aware of the ravages hunger takes on children, but what about college students who also suffer from food insecurity – and for the most part, alone?

There’s a flawed assumption that when students earn scholarships, everything is paid for. A recent study found that one in three students in the southeastern and Appalachian regions are food-insecure, which is higher than the national average.

Imagine being a student from out of state, or even out of the country. You’re alone. You don’t know anyone personally, just on an academic basis. You’re the first in your family or village to study in college. You do your very best, but struggle to stay sharp, stay alert and learn because you’re weak from lack of food. What chance do you have to succeed like this?

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, students who struggle with food insecurity:

» Were very hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food.
» Ate less than they felt they should because there wasn’t enough money for food.
» Worried whether their food would run out before getting money to buy more.

Obviously, the cost of college enrollment is more than just tuition and books, and the students’ success is more than just having a high I.Q. Food-insecure students often get lower grades than their counterparts and tend to withdraw before completing their degree or certificate.

To combat student hunger, Second Harvest partners with a number of area colleges, including the Big Orange Pantry on the U.T. campus. Their mission: To provide emergency food assistance for students, faculty and staff attending or employed by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The Big Orange Pantry opened in the fall of 2020 to help meet the increasing needs of food-insecure students. Thanks to your generosity, students in East Tennessee are re-discovering hope for today and gaining new confidence to achieve their dreams for tomorrow. We are so grateful for all the good you do.
From Luxury to Purpose

Tina laughs, with a big smile, when asked what kind of work she did before becoming the Director of a country food pantry. “Luxury. I worked for a company that provided decorative products to boat manufacturers, anywhere from little bass boats to cruise ships,” she said. Tina’s life and career completely changed when she went to work at one of our partners, Good Shepherd Center just outside of Madisonville.

“It wasn’t my choice; it was health-related,” she said. “I was told by my doctor to go on disability, that I couldn’t work, and I said no!” Her pastor told her she needed to work at Good Shepherd Center. “I had no clue what this place was, but they were needing somebody,” she said.

“I wasn’t working anywhere and was really, really depressed because I was on medical leave and couldn’t go back to work. I wasn’t happy because I was used to working a lot and traveling everywhere from Florida to Tennessee to Minnesota.” Over time, Tina’s health kept deteriorating, which led to three heart attacks, “But I’m doing great. I really am,” she said.

“I was just going to come here for a little while, get my health back, then go back into sales,” Tina admitted. Something clicked because Tina has been with Good Shepherd since 2006. “This job has been more rewarding to me than anything I’ve ever done,” she said.

“It saved me,” she explained. “I really think this job saved my life. Before it was all about money and having things. I went from a job that was a six-figure salary to, she laughs, a $1,000 a month job. That’s very humbling,” she admits.

Good Shepherd Center supports Monroe County where nearly one-fourth (10,000 people) live at or below the poverty line. They serve about 1200 people a month, distributing over 30,000 pounds of food to those who need it most. “A lot of the people we see have tremendous health issues and have gone from working to not working and doing without, trying to restructure their whole life. I’ve been there. I relate to them in so many more ways than I ever imagined possible. I’m just one of them,” Tina said.

Because of faithful donors like you, “People come to get food and are so excited because they’re having a meal,” she said. “If we didn’t have Second Harvest, we would not be able to give out food and help a lot of people survive. Without Second Harvest, we’d be out of business. Absolutely,” Tina said. Thanks to you, hope is real through the food you help us provide.

We are so excited to share with you the tremendous success of DYD Day 2021! Thanks to all our generous individual and corporate donors, Second Harvest will be able to provide 4.5 million meals to our neighbors experiencing hunger. Thank you for supporting the food bank and joining us in our fight against hunger.