J.D. Aylward, Transportation Coordinator at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, has had to stay on his toes to keep up with the changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our daily tasks have changed quite a bit," he said. "Everything from agencies being afraid and not wanting us to come to the schools, to adding new places that now need extra deliveries."

One of the biggest challenges he's faced is the numerous requests for extra food to keep up with demand.

"A lot of them are trying to get more stuff because they're having more frequent distributions. Plus, more people are coming to those sites because so many people are in such desperate need right now."

The safety precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus have also changed the way our delivery drivers work and interact with people along their routes.

"We don't go into buildings at all — we try to stay outside and in open areas as much as possible. We use social distancing to keep a safe distance from people, as well as wearing masks. We put on gloves when we get out of the trucks and take them off before we get back in our trucks. Just being common sense safe."

J.D. is thankful he can make a difference and help his hungry neighbors during the crisis. All it takes is thinking of his wife and kids at home to motivate him to get out of bed in the morning and serve his community.

"Knowing that I'm making a difference in this tough period of time — delivering food to people that are in desperate need — makes me glad to come in to work every day. People are now looking for work and didn't think they'd ever be in this position."

He is grateful for the incredible support from friends like you and hopes people will continue to lend a helping hand while we recover in the coming months.

"If you have the ability and the extra money, please donate. The distributions are getting so big and the amount of stuff we're handing out is just unbelievable. The need is so great right now. Every little bit helps. Thank you."
This has been a truly unprecedented time at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. In my 20 years with the organization, we have never been so busy.

More and more people are turning to us for help—particularly clients needing assistance for the first time. We have served nearly triple the number of new families in need compared to this time last year.

The challenge has been how to ensure we have the resources to serve everyone while keeping our team, our community, and our clients safe. That means that a lot of processes and procedures have been changed. You can read more about the ways we’ve had to modify our methods throughout this newsletter, as well as how so many supporters like you have come together to help during this time of crisis.

I had the opportunity to chat with a client named Christine at one of our early drive-through distributions in the Muni Lot. This single mom has four kids who were out of school and at home due to the school closures. She had never before needed help from either the Food Bank or any of our partner agencies. She was very proud of the fact that she had always been able to make ends meet and provide for her kids. Then her work simply dried up.

When I asked Christine why she came to the drive-through she said, “I came for my kids. I had no choice.” She was so grateful for the assistance she received. It’s a source of great pride at the Food Bank that we can be here for families in their time of need—thanks to the generosity of friends like you.

One of our current challenges is the thousands of kids we are serving this summer. More children than ever need healthy meals from the Food Bank, but fewer partners are open to serve them. Once again, our amazing team is getting creative to meet this need. We’re determined to keep getting those meals out to kids in need.

I have been so grateful to our community. The way you have responded during this pandemic has been inspiring. Even on difficult days, it gives us hope and confidence that we can continue to respond to the needs of our neighbors.

Frankly, this is a marathon and not a sprint. The economic impact of this pandemic is certainly going to last through this year and well into 2021—likely longer. Just as the need is going to continue into the future, we’re going to need community support as well to help everyone in our community who needs nutritious food.

Thank you for continuing to partner with us through your financial gifts, food donations, and time spent volunteering. You are the reason we will get through this crisis together and come out stronger in the months ahead.

With gratitude,

Food For Thought
Kristin Warzocha
President & CEO

We Need Your Help!

The Food Bank is happy to welcome back our volunteers—with even stronger protocols and procedures in place to keep everyone in our facility safe and healthy. With so many of our neighbors struggling to put food on the table, healthy and willing volunteers are invited to help. Whether it’s volunteering one-time for a few hours or even coming out a few times each week, any time you donate will make a big difference.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, please visit greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/volunteer. Thank you for so generously giving of your time and talents!
John and Janet Mitchell spend so much time volunteering at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, they’re more like part of the staff. Prior to the pandemic, on Monday and Wednesday mornings, you could find them in our warehouse sorting through donations, packing food, and moving pallets. Though the work can be demanding, they always have a smile for everyone they meet.

That's why it was hard for this retired couple to alter their daily routine and stop volunteering during the pandemic. After hearing the CFC guidelines for their age group, they knew they needed to stay home to protect their health.

Janet said, "We want to be there to volunteer, but we are grateful that the Food Bank is looking out for us since so many of us volunteers are considered high risk. I still keep in touch with quite a few of our other volunteer friends and they're all doing well."

John echoes his wife's sentiments. "The Food Bank's efforts are heroic ... I can't think of a better way to describe it," he said. "I saw the news clips of the distribution at the Muni Lot — the Food Bank and National Guard are like a well-oiled machine. And they do it with smiles on their faces."

Though the Mitchells are unable to volunteer during these difficult times, they continue to support the Food Bank with their financial gifts. Many years ago, they made the heartfelt decision to create a lasting legacy of support by including the Food Bank in their will.

John says, "I am a firm believer that you get back what you give. We've been blessed with a lot of things over the years and feel it's only right to share."

"When someone hits a rough patch, the Food Bank is always there to provide for their most basic needs. Like this pandemic has shown us, you never know when it could be you. They've been there for our community for years, and we want to help ensure they'll continue to be here for many more years."

For John and Janet, the bottom line is that no one should ever go hungry, and their dedication is an inspiration. By including the Food Bank in their estate plans, their legacy and promise to give back will continue to make a meaningful difference and feed our community.

A Simple Way to Help End Hunger

1. Retirement Plan Assets
   Pass these assets to us tax-free.

2. Life Insurance Policies
   Make a large gift at a low cost.

3. Donor Advised Funds
   Allow all or a portion of this investment to serve Northeast Ohioans.

If making sure that no one goes to bed hungry is also a mission of yours, but you can't part with the funds today, we have a simple solution for you: Designate the Greater Cleveland Food Bank as the beneficiary of one of these three assets. It’s as easy as filling out a form.

This information is not professional tax or legal advice. Please consult an advisor about your specific situation. If you or your advisor have any questions, please contact our Senior Manager of Donor Relations, Kristen Glazer, at kglazer@clevelandfoodbank.org or 216.738.2056. Thank you.
COVID-19 Response: Your Support At Work

Local heroes to the rescue.
On March 18th, in response to a request from the Ohio Association of Food Banks, the Governor announced that the Ohio National Guard & Ohio Military Reserve would be helping food banks across the state. They have been assisting in our warehouse, and helping make home meal deliveries as well as handing out emergency boxes at our drive-through distributions.

Loading cars with care.
Protecting the health of our community has changed the way we are distributing food. Mobile distributions have popped up all over so people can drive up, stay in their cars, and drive away with fresh produce and shelf-stable emergency food boxes. Thanks to the City of Cleveland, the Food Bank has hosted many emergency distributions at the the Muni Lot, where people usually tailgate before Browns games.

Delivering smiles.
With the help of the National Guard and Ohio Military Reserve, Cleveland Police, and Amazon, we’ve worked to deliver thousands of emergency food boxes to homebound individuals. In addition, our Food Truck has been parked near our main entrance to serve anyone who walks up seeking food assistance, and visiting schools this summer with nutritious meals for children.

Trucking along to fight hunger.
Our fleet of trucks has been driving thousands of miles to ensure our open program partners continue to receive the food they need to serve their communities. As of early May, we had already distributed 670,000 more pounds of food than during the same time last year with over 290 less partners.
Answering the call for help.
Calls to our Help Center skyrocketed as the need for emergency food assistance suddenly increased dramatically — from about 1,400 calls a month to an average of more than 1,500 calls a week this spring. We extended our hours and brought in more volunteers to answer phones from their homes.

Big help for our littlest neighbors.
After schools closed in March, we increased our Backpacks for Kids program to get more food to local families. Many schools have stepped up to hand out backpacks at their ‘Grab and Go’ programs where parents can pick up breakfasts or lunches. We also handed out school supplies in partnership with Shoes and Clothes for Kids, and prepackaged hygiene kits to meet basic needs.

Cooking up compassion.
The Food Bank kitchen continues to prepare bagged lunches for kids who are out of school and frozen meals for our Meals on Wheels partners. More neighbors are in need and turning to the Food Bank and our partners for help, many for the first time. From the beginning of the pandemic to most of Ohio re-opening, we served nearly three times as many new families than the same time frame in a typical year.

thank you!

A Community That Cares

None of this work would be possible without the tremendous outpouring of support from so many kind, caring friends. From our hardworking staff and volunteers to community partners and supporters who have given so generously, YOU are the reason we are able to respond during this unexpected time of crisis. As demand for our services has increased, you have been there every step of the way to ensure our hungry neighbors get the food they need.
Thank you, Northeast Ohio!
When the pandemic began to affect our communities and neighborhoods, in response to our request, Governor Mike DeWine announced that each Ohio food bank would receive helping hands from the Ohio National Guard & Ohio Military Reserve, along with other emergency responders. Having these additional team members has been a tremendous help as we have had to drastically adjust the way we serve our hungry neighbors throughout Northeast Ohio.

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank had more than 60 service members join us this spring — helping us sort and repack food, working in the warehouse, and handing out food at distribution sites. We are so grateful for their assistance during this time of need!

Here are some stories from service members who have been on the frontlines ...

I’ve been in the Ohio Military Reserves since 2009, so it’s a big deal for me to be able to contribute personally. This is what we’re trained for — points of distribution and helping the community. Everyone is upset and things are in disarray, but if we can offer a little bit of comfort bringing food to the community, that’s what counts. To see the people we help with a smile on their face, giving us a thumb up, or saying thank you and blowing a kiss is a humbling experience. It’s really awesome what the Food Bank does.”

Sergeant First Class Samantha Kelley

I saw the pandemic spreading around the world and felt like I had to do something, and that’s why I’m here. It feels really good to help out the community, especially with all this stuff going on. I feel like everybody should help out — not only now, but in the future. It’s a great thing to do.”

Private First Class Mazen Solh

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to be able to help our community. I had so many people — especially kids — telling me, ‘You guys are awesome.’ People were just so thankful that we were giving them food. When I was a young girl, coming from poverty, I had trouble figuring out what was going to be my next meal, so I’ve been through this. If you are hungry and need help, don’t be afraid or ashamed. It’s okay. Everybody is going through hard times right now. If you need help to feed your family, go ahead and ask.”

Specialist Tanyia Hughes

Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to every member of the Ohio National Guard & Ohio Military Reserve who has selflessly given countless hours of assistance during this crisis. Thank you for standing in as the helping hands and friendly faces of the Food Bank during this time!
Though they have had to adjust their daily routines, as essential workers, our staff at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank have been busier than ever during the pandemic. To show you how your support has been hard at work, some of our staff members shared their experiences with you ...

"I take inbound calls from people who need benefits and resources. Working from home, I'm not able to be around my coworkers. That would not have happened if it wasn't for COVID-19. The number of calls we receive has quadrupled, so I'm not only helping past clients, but new people who have lost jobs and such. It's unfortunate that we get so many more calls, but I'm glad we are here to help."

Isiah Thomas, Client Help Specialist

"Though some of our partners have had to cancel their distributions during these difficult times, I have been amazed at how many wanted to give out monthly produce. Some sites have had to change their location or even increase the amount of food to meet the increased need. The compassion and concern for the community that has been shown by our partners has truly made me proud to work at the Food Bank."

Kallie Guciardo, Produce Coordinator

"What hit home for me is the number of seniors who need home delivery. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew the time was coming to bolster up support due to the increase in the senior population nationwide. But this pandemic has shed light on just how desperately we need more programming for homebound seniors and those with limited access to food, grocery stores, pantries, and transportation."

Lisa Laditka, Help Center Manager

"You see the stats about the many new clients, but it's hard seeing how long people are willing to wait in line for one box of food when it's their only option. It's just a glimpse of what folks who are food insecure experience on a daily basis — they are essentially in crisis every day. While a sense of normalcy may return for us, the crisis will extend for many of our neighbors as they continue to be food insecure once the immediate threat is gone. But I know that Cleveland will rally for its neighbors, as we've seen throughout this scary time."

Liz Mazur, Corporate Relations Manager

Nothing Can Stop Our Hardworking Staff!

A great big thank you to our dedicated staff and volunteers who have rolled up their sleeves, made many sacrifices and done whatever it takes to get through this crisis. YOU are the Food Bank!
Even before the summer began, schools across the state were closed due to the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges this has caused for parents is trying to keep food on the table due to these cumulative months of kids being out of school and eating all their meals and snacks at home.

Paul Glazer, an Assistant Principal of Garfield Heights City Schools (GHCS), saw the demand and stepped up his efforts to feed local students — many of whom were already food insecure. School closures prevented them from hosting their typical School Markets, where students and neighbors could pick up fresh produce and other food. So GHCS got creative in the way they served up help —

"We modeled off the Food Bank’s drive-through distribution," Paul said. "To practice social distancing, people stay in their cars and we put food directly into their trunks. We served more than 150 families in less than an hour. When we realized we were going to run out of food, we handed out flyers for the Food Bank's distribution taking place the following day in the Muni Lot."

Paul's school also became one of our newest schools to participate in the Food Bank's Backpack for Kids program. "On a weekly basis, we now distribute 600 backpacks filled with weekend meals."

In addition to food, Paul hands out much-needed supplies to families who are struggling. "The Food Bank also provides school supplies and prepackaged hygiene kits to us. You could visibly see the shock and gratitude on our families’ faces for these additional resources. It was definitely a welcome surprise during a tough time."

The Garfield Heights community is grateful for friends like you who continue to give generously to help feed kids throughout Northeast Ohio. "When school was in session, kids were getting breakfast, lunch, and sometimes a snack from us. Now parents have to figure out how to provide those additional meals each week. Many of our families don't have the resources or luxury to find other means for food. While the need is greater than ever, I have never heard ‘thank you so much’ more than I have now."

By now, we’ve all realized that the effects of the pandemic aren't going away any time soon. Even when people can find work and start earning money again, it will take months for them to recover from this time of hardship and lost income. School is also out for the summer, adding to the hardships of parents trying to feed their families.

But you can help! Your continued support will provide healthy, nourishing food to local children, families, and seniors. Now would be a great time to consider becoming a monthly donor to provide the dependable support the Food Bank needs to keep food on the shelves and on our neighbors’ tables during these unprecendented times.

To learn more about how you can help local people get the food they need to rebuild their lives, visit us at greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/summer today. Thank you for caring!