

APRIL 2020

Claremont-Elmwood

SOCIAL

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Cover photo by
Tue Nam Ton, TNT Pictures

Feeding Berkeley's **HUNGRY**

Meet the People Behind
Berkeley Food Network

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FEEDING BERKELEY'S HUNGRY

With Berkeley Food Network



Berkeley Food Network co-founders (L to R) Dona Boatright, Chuck Fanning, Kate Campbell, and Sara Webber

Volunteers preparing food bags for distribute to Berkeley Unified School District families in need

By Julie Nachtwey
BFN photos by Tue Nam Ton, TNT Pictures

On the cover, L to R: Two of BFN's four co-founders, Sarah Webber and Chuck Fanning, with BFN Board Chair, Deb Lewis. Photo by Tue Nam Ton.

Claremont-Elmwood resident Chuck Fanning's initial interest in food insecurity came from volunteering at the Alameda County Community Food Bank. His involvement in that cause increased exponentially due to a chance encounter at a Berkeley High baseball game. There, he met Sara Webber, then director of the Berke-

ley Food Pantry, who asked Chuck to join her and two other community members (Kate Campbell and Dona Boatright) on a "strategic planning committee" being formed to study and identify solutions to the problem of hunger in Berkeley. The rest, as they say, is history, as that seemingly minor commitment grew into the four of them co-founding The Berkeley Food Network (BFN) in 2016. Sara Webber became the executive director with the other co-founders taking positions on the board. In a recent interview, Chuck said about Sara, "I

got to know her as a food professional and just found her totally inspiring. It sort of seems in some ways that it would be simple — getting people fed. It's anything but, and Sara just had such an appreciation and understanding of the nuances and complexity of it all."

Food Scarcity in our own Backyard

Can you imagine a hunger-free Berkeley? Currently, some 24,000 Berkeleyans — one in five of our fellow citizens — need help putting food on their tables according to a

study done by students in the Haas Business School's Social Sector Solutions program. The Berkeley Food Network (BFN) now provides 6,500 adults, children, seniors, students and the unhoused in Berkeley with regular access to healthy meals and groceries. By year's end, BFN hopes to double its distributions to feed 13,000 recipients a month. Their ultimate goal is to **end** food insecurity in our city. So, what is BFN, and how does it plan to achieve this seemingly audacious goal?

Get the right food to the right people.

The Berkeley Food Network started in 2016 with a two-pronged strategy. First, embrace and amplify the work of the 20-plus organizations in Berkeley (the "Network Members") that were already providing food. (Data collected by BFN indicated that this group was collectively serving approximately 25 percent of the 24,000 in need.) Second, recognize the capacity limits of the existing organizations, and establish new programs to fill the gaps and scale to feed **all** those experiencing food insecurity. Here's how BFN is executing this strategy to end hunger in Berkeley.

1. The BFN Food Sourcing and Distribution Hub Warehouse

will be a game-changer for Berkeley's pre-existing food-distribution organizations. BFN will source more food from the Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) and local food business donors and those organizations will be able to pick it up directly from BFN's newly renovated 9,500-square-foot warehouse at Ninth Street and University Avenue in Berkeley.

A volunteer at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church reports: "Instead of having to drive out to ACCFB to pick up our food, now we are able to pick it up at BFN's new hub. We save time, gas, and wear and tear on our volunteers' cars. It allows us to use our time and money to help others get the food they need."

2. The BFN Food Recovery Program

gathers and redistributes thousands of pounds of healthy surplus food from Cal Dining, local restaurants (via "Chefs to End Hunger"), food producers, and grocery stores. This alleviates hunger at the same time it reduces food waste and associated environmental impacts.

3. BFN's innovative **Hub Kitchen** takes much of that recovered food and turns it into individually packaged meals. BFN distributes more than 500 of these prepared meals weekly and expects to **quadruple** that number by year's end. Kai, a resident of Strawberry Creek Lodge Senior Housing, said: "We look forward to the meals from BFN because we know they will be healthy and taste good, making it easier for those of us

••• who find it difficult to cook every day and eat regularly. This helps residents supplement their monthly budget and maintain and improve their health.”

4. The BFN **Mobile Pantry Program**

distributes food at places and times that work for the people who need it. Among those served are seniors, students, and working families. Mobile pantries are located at Berkeley High School, Berkeley Technical Academy, South Berkeley Senior Centers, University Village, Lifelong Medical Clinics and Head Start programs.

Julie Lefko, Nutrition Specialist, Berkeley Head Start, said: “BFN is here on Nutrition Day providing our Head Start families with access to healthy food. Food is available during the children’s main pick-up time, in order to reach as many families as

possible. By partnering with BFN, we are able to make healthy habits at home a reality for the children and families we serve.”

5. The BFN **Berkeley Public Schools Grocery Program**

drops off bags of healthy groceries for pickup at schools twice a month. This helps meet the needs of 450 Berkeley Unified School District families. As one BUSD parent reports, “I was a single mom going through a really difficult time, but I didn’t want to let my kids know that. Because of BFN’s Public Schools Grocery Program, I was able to keep putting food on the table, and my kids never had to worry. I am very grateful for that help.”

6. BFN’s **Onsite Pantry** allows those not able to attend mobile distributions, such as many working families, to pick up healthy groceries at BFN’s



Volunteers prepare fresh produce for distribution.



Volunteers package strawberries.

Hub, including during some evening and weekend hours.

How You Can Help

This article was written before the shelter-in-place Coronavirus mandate. BFN (as an “essential service” provider) continues to serve BUSD families and others in need via grocery bag distributions and through its onsite pantry. For the most up-to-date information, or to donate or volunteer, visit www.berkeleyfoodnetwork.org and thank you.



Do you know someone in the community who is making a difference in people’s lives? Email ClaremontElmwoodSocial@n2pub.com to start a story conversation.



BFN’s innovative Hub Kitchen takes much of that recovered food and turns it into individually packaged meals.



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Food Scarcity in Berkeley is Real 1 in 5 Residents Go Hungry

You’re invited to a reception and talk
Wednesday evening April 22 from 6 to 7:30pm
at a private residence in Claremont-Elmwood.

Learn what is being done and how you can help.
RSVP to Sara@berkeleyfoodnetwork.org



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