

Hunger Action Month: The Golden Harvest Food Pantry



Julia W.'s day starts just after sunrise, and after a short walk from her home on Lafayette Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy), Brooklyn, she chooses to begin her day at the [Golden Harvest Food](#) pantry.

"A day is a day. I started because I love to cook and I love to feed people. I get here at 6:30 in the morning to pack bags...Working in this pantry is my love, it is my joy. I'm here four days a week."

Julia has maintained this schedule for the past 25 years, remaining fiercely dedicated to civic engagement. Her neighborhood experiences many of the social and systemic issues facing New York today, exacerbated by COVID-19. Golden Harvest is working tirelessly to maintain a safe atmosphere for hundreds of families to access supplemental groceries, at a time when they need them most.

Julia has lived in Bed-Stuy for over fifty years. She has seen it grow into a cultural hub for African American life in New York City, saying *"The neighborhood has changed over the years. It used to be all black folks. Now we have mixed neighbors. I knew almost everybody between Throop and Tompkins on Lafayette Avenue. We all can get along, because we are all still human and we need to find a place to stay."*

Alexa Coppola MSW is a New York Cares volunteer based in Bed-Stuy. She explains, *"A social and racial issue facing Bed-Stuy today is gentrification, and the pushing out of people who have lived here for generations to make space for mostly white families with higher incomes who can pay higher rent."*

As neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy become more attractive to a new generation of renters and real estate developers, needs like housing affordability and equitable access to groceries must be addressed in the face of rising prices. Without empathetic New Yorkers willing to make a difference, communities like Bed-Stuy will continue to face structural barriers for generations. Alexa continues, *"Gentrification can go either pretty well or badly. People who have an interest in helping and uniting their community have an imperative to mobilize."*

In June 2014, the Golden Harvest food pantry opened its doors to a brand-new facility in the Bed-Stuy community. This "client choice" pantry allows families to select their own healthy selection of groceries once a month. In a city in which many of its residents must decide between paying bills and purchasing groceries, this is a welcome option. The team also hosts cooking classes. The pandemic, which resulted in unparalleled unemployment in Brooklyn, has escalated the



[Davin Turkewitz](#)

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need to address hunger-and as of September, over 800,000 New Yorkers have lost their federal unemployment benefits.

Alexa explains, *"Food pantries are incredibly important and play a huge role in a community, both in providing food for those who cannot afford it, and saving food which might not be consumed from grocery stores and restaurants."*

Julia has watched the pantry grow in her thirty years of volunteer service. *"We used to have file cabinets in the basement with the name and address of every family. Then we moved to computers. The essentials of civic engagement remain the same. You should know how to treat people when they come. Give them a smile or a hug. Some people can be smiling on the outside and hurting on the inside. Don't rush them, take your time with everyone,"* she said.

Julia has seen families grow with the pantryher doctor's family was a pantry client, and the resulting bond provided by access to healthy, nutritious food has lasted generations. *"My favorite part is serving the people,"* she adds *"I like to see my coworkers and have people leave happy and laughing. If they don't see me outside, they will ask for me. We hug, we talk to each other, we ask each other how we're doing."*

New York Cares volunteers at the Golden Harvest pantry are welcomed by a familiar face, Team Leader Cheryl K. Jones, a Bed-Stuy native, recalls *"I've helped people all my life, I don't know anything else. Everybody looks out for each other, that's what you do."*

On any given Wednesday morning, the pantry will be bustling with a diverse group of motivated volunteers eager to help the community survive a hard pandemic. Volunteers may find themselves creating balanced meal prep kits, bundling fresh produce, or stocking gallons of milk for the busy Thursday client shopping day. The pantry serves hundreds of families in the neighborhood, and more sign up each week. Given the challenges of the pandemic, there is always something to do. When food is made available to these families, an essential financial burden is lifted, and members of the community, new and old, can see the impact their work has firsthand.

Cheryl has worked with New York Cares for four years, and she describes her experience as life changing. *"The diversity of the projects is what makes them stand out. Whatever the city's needs are, we're there. New York Cares has given my life a new purpose."*

Cheryl has completed over 3,000 hours of volunteer work, and currently leads three projects across the city. She explains, *"New York Cares helps me become a part of something greater than myself, and to meet so many incredible people at the same time. I thrive on helping, and to have the opportunity to help on this level is massive to my spirit."*

New York Cares recruits, trains, and places volunteers where they are most needed to address hunger, homelessness, educational inequality, and the environment. New York Cares volunteers can educate children or adults, connect with the Senior community, revitalize a green space, and serve the hungry or unsheltered: whatever your strengths, New York Cares can help you apply them to a pressing need in our community.

By volunteering at the Golden Harvest food pantry you play a key role in alleviating hunger, bringing members of the community together, and fighting for a more equitable city.

During the pandemic, food distributors have doubled their efforts, and with more families coming every week, there is crucial work to be done. Join us this Hunger Action month in leading the fight for access to nutritious groceries, community connection, and equity.