



The Nashville Food Project brings people together to grow, cook, and share nourishing food with the goals of cultivating community and alleviating hunger. We use healthy food as a tool to disrupt cycles of poverty, working toward a vision of community food security where everyone in Nashville has access to the food they want and need.

By aligning our nutritious meals and urban agricultural programs with anti-poverty partner organizations, The Nashville Food Project supports the reduction of poverty-induced burdens, like homelessness, violence and abuse, incarceration and more, all of which are social determinants linked to health outcomes. Our programs support people facing either health, social, economic or cultural barriers to healthy food access, including people experiencing poverty, older adults, immigrants and refugees, children and youth, and other individuals faced with food insecurity.

With the generous support of funders like the West End Home Foundation, The Nashville Food Project cooked and shared a record-setting 325,502 meals for 47 partners at 67 sites in 2023. Of those meals, 55,200 were shared with over 2,600 older Nashvillians (65+) alongside the programming of 20 nonprofit and community-based organizations. In 2024, we project the number of meals shared with senior-serving partners to increase by approximately 10%, totaling over 60,000 meals. Anywhere between 33% and 100% of the cost of those meals are subsidized for partners based on a sliding scale cost recovery model.

The Nashville Food Project's model also relies on daily volunteer teams who prepare ingredients and cook meals that support this partnership model. A large portion of these volunteers are older adults, and they often tell us that our kitchen is a place they come to experience community and purpose.



"I started volunteering in the kitchen twelve years ago," Mary Dionne, a longtime volunteer, recently told us. "I enjoy it a lot — it's good for me, and I feel like I'm doing something to help people. I come back because it's a way to give back, and it's great to be around people who are trying to make a difference in other people's lives through food, through community, and bringing people together."

In 2013, Rob Stein, a retired orthopedic surgeon, began regularly volunteering in the small church kitchen that The Nashville Food Project was renting at the time. He came with a unique ability: making from-scratch bread and pasta. Over time, he invited friends from the hospital and from his synagogue to join him, and eventually, they became a trusted cook team and essential addition to the kitchen. In the last decade, their group has grown to a roster of about 10 volunteers who come in once a week to knead and twist dough into buttery rolls, filling the kitchen with chatter and laughter.



The bread this team of older adults makes is baked and, often, delivered directly to other older adults. Partnerships with organizations that provide senior services, including FiftyForward, The Ark Community Resource Center, St. Luke's Community House and more, prevent isolation for these older adults by bringing people together over a scratch-made meal.



“Our group, consisting almost exclusively of retirees, is thankful for the opportunity to give back,” said Rob. “The fact that so many people contribute to the mission of The Nashville Food Project gives us hope that many in our community will continue to fight against hunger at all levels of society.”

Thanks to funding from the West End Home Foundation, groups of older adults that might otherwise be isolated are instead gathering each week to cook and share food. In this way, food isn't just a necessity — it's a powerful tool for cultivating community.