

FOOD HARDSHIP IN HAMDEN

**A LOOK BACK
AND
A WAY FORWARD**

Five-Year Update: 2019–2024

Everyone in Hamden will have access to nutritious and affordable food regardless of income, race, culture, ethnicity, age, gender, or ZIP code through an informed, coordinated response to hunger in our community.

—Mission of Hamden Food Security Task Force

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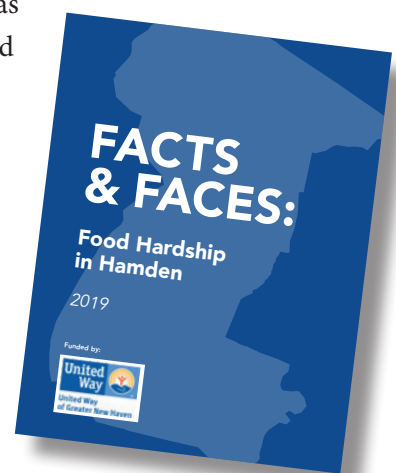
Children from the Sleeping Giant Day Care Center at the Keefe Community Center celebrate their harvest. (Used with permission).

INTRODUCTION

Renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” As dedicated public servants, working in education, philanthropy, and political leadership, the three of us have witnessed this type of grassroots change time and again in our careers.

Over the past few years, this powerful statement has quietly been reflected in Hamden with the workings of a widely representative volunteer task force that was convened in 2017 to begin the process of finding solutions to the increase in food hardship in our community and the lack of powerful and enduring solutions. Service providers had talked for years about food hardship throughout the Greater New Haven region, and chose Hamden as the town to begin the process of finding solutions because, as a suburban community, the data and provider experience in the region showed that the problem was much greater than most people understood. A Hamden Food Task Force of committed citizens formed to seek answers.

An initial group, led by United Way of Greater New Haven, the Town of Hamden, and Hamden Public Schools began meeting regularly to examine food security in Hamden and propose ways of mitigating the hardships that resulted from people not having access to food and good nutrition. The original task force, composed of school principals and those working with families in the schools, the superintendent, staff from United Way and Connecticut Food Bank, and other service providers in the community, kicked off a year-long process which realized several projects and issued a report at a summit held in April 2019. After the summit, an evolving task force continued to meet monthly to talk about boots-on-the-ground solutions to food insecurity that moved out of the world of data and into ensuring more people had access to food.



Five years later, the world is a different place. We weathered a global pandemic that affected every aspect of our lives. What did we learn about food distribution from COVID-19? What lessons have we realized from the data we gathered and did the recommendations from the original 2019 report come to fruition? Where are we now?

We are grateful to the members of the Hamden Food Security Task Force for persisting and flexing with the challenges they faced. One of the silver linings of the grim COVID cloud was when schools shut down overnight in March 2020 and people were told to stay home, task force members knew how to tap into their network to keep the food distribution alive. Those lessons are now part of the recommendations for this five-year report.

We welcome continuing the discussion around food security issues as we seek to improve our community for every citizen.



Jennifer Heath
President & CEO
United Way of Greater New Haven



Gary Highsmith
Superintendent
Hamden Public Schools



Lauren Garrett
Mayor
Town of Hamden

From the editors The data and updates in this report were woven together by an ordinary “ragtag group of Hamdenites” who have worked together on this Task Force for five years and thought it was time to reveal the hard work and consistent efforts that have increased access to food resources across the town. Growing community gardens, working to ensure our children have meals in school (and out), expanding the famous Dinner for a Dollar—we found the work quietly inspiring and wanted to let everyone know that we live in a community where we care about each other.

Our Task Force is focused on Food Security. We refer to food hardship rather than food insecurity in this report to more evocatively describe what people are facing when they struggle to put food on the table for themselves and their families. Food insecurity is defined in the U.S. government’s *Healthy People 2020* report as the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of lack of money and other resources. Food insecurity does not necessarily cause hunger, but hunger is a possible outcome of food insecurity.

This report is a work-in-progress. As we hear feedback and corrections, we will happily adjust this report online. Thank you for your interest and let us know if you would like to be part of the work that will build toward our ten-year report in 2029.

“I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.”
—The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

OVERVIEW

Lessons learned, new and old

Five years ago, with a bit of fanfare and pride in their hard work, the Hamden Food Security Task Force convened a Hunger Summit, a conference at Ireland’s Great Hunger Museum at Quinnipiac University to share the results of more than a year’s work on how food hardship and hunger affect many of our neighbors¹—from Connecticut Food Bank and Quinnipiac University, the Town of Hamden, Hamden Public Schools, research scholars from Yale University and Southern Connecticut State University—to residents of Hamden impacted by food hardship.

When the Hunger Summit shared its initial findings, the Task Force had been working under the guidance of the United Way of Greater New Haven to assess the nature of food insecurity in Hamden, and the report included some strategic goals to mitigate the situation. “The task force has worked ... [to take] prompt steps to make sure that more healthy food has been immediately available for children and families, while at the same time exploring long-term solutions and mobilizing additional resources to put food on the table for struggling community members.”

The members of the original Task Force convened initially when many local service providers grew increasingly concerned with the upsurge in food hardship and the lack of sustainable solutions in communities in the Greater New Haven area. Hamden was chosen as the town to begin the process of finding solutions because, as a suburban community, the data and provider experience revealed that the problem was much greater than most people understood.

It still is.



1. See complete list of original partnering organizations in Appendix.

The Task Force identified four key priorities to focus efforts going forward. Its work continued with a shifting membership; however, the priorities, to some extent, remain the same:

1. Improve access to healthy food.
2. Support families so they have enduring access to free, affordable, and sustainable healthy food for their children and households.
3. Grow the Hamden Food Security Task Force and develop a Food Policy Council.
4. Inform the Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ).

After the Hunger Summit in April 2019, the Task Force continued its work at regular meetings, at first monthly, then bi-monthly, focusing on the established goals. Convened by community coordinators from the United Way, the Task Force refocused its work after the Hunger Summit with subcommittees looking at distinct, yet related issues, in areas where progress might be measurable and critical. The subcommittees focused on Schools, Dinner for a Dollar, the Keefe Center and Community Gardens², and Communication. Progress reports from the subcommittees are summarized in this report.

In late 2023, The Task Force decided it was time to update overall progress and the recent data. What is the picture of food hardship in Hamden now? How did we handle a multi-year pandemic, when regular sources of food disappeared essentially overnight? What's changed and what hasn't? Where do we go now?

Five years later, a look back

Combined with the years during the height of the pandemic, and growing costs of food, housing and transportation, the landscape of food hardship today is different, and yet the same in some critical ways. We hope the updated report sheds light on how the landscape has changed and how we might reinvigorate the work of the Task Force to refocus efforts to affect systems-level change, while raising awareness of the state of hunger in our town.

Everyone in Hamden will have access to nutritious and affordable food regardless of income, race, culture, ethnicity, age, gender, or ZIP code through an informed, coordinated response to hunger in our community.

—Mission of Hamden Food Security Task Force

2. The Gardens subcommittee was originally intended to address “Southern Hamden and Community Gardens,” specifically the food desert created when the Putnam Avenue Stop & Shop shut down. In part, this focus was to encourage a grocery store with fresh foods to open up (which was a goal of the Opportunity Zone mentioned in the first report) and/or getting existing stores to carry healthier options through a regulatory and zoning approach.

In addition to updating the data from 2019, the Task Force identified four key themes for the 2024 report:

- ▶ How **geography** and transportation impact food insecurity in Hamden
- ▶ How **housing** costs impact food insecurity
- ▶ How **schools** are responding and shifting to needs
- ▶ What are the **demographic shifts** that might affect Hamden resources and the ways food insecurity impacts residents

Recommendations issued in the 2019 report were based on findings from 2016–17. We reviewed current data to reflect on changes in the environment and to renew our recommendations.

Food = community building

In the first few months of 2024, the Task Force spent time listening to people in the local community at different venues—those folks who have been utilizing local resources for food. While the Task Force has been operating for more than six years, we had no expectation that anyone was familiar with our work or recommendations. However, we needed the personal stories to see if the work we had been doing had made any impact on easing the reality of food insecurity and to direct the future work of the Task Force.

Our findings from these conversations are summarized throughout the report, but several overarching themes emerged:

Barriers to alleviating food hardship continue: the cost of food is “very expensive, especially the food that is good for you”; healthy options are harder to find because “junk food is easy to choose”; site/event promotion for food distribution is lacking; there is personal shame associated with attending a pantry; transportation is challenging, including having to show up in-person at an assigned time.

Options exist: Meals are more accessible with multiple locations along bus lines, urban areas; post-career, the ability to pay for food isn’t always certain, food pantries are a great resource; even with food insecurity, people “want to eat high quality food...monitoring what they place in their bodies” (desire for healthy options).

Community is critical: Guests at food events appreciate feeling welcome. Coordinating the food delivery with social activities makes it “feel less of a handout”; “community is everything”; the social aspect, especially after “lonely” COVID lockdowns is important.

Survey highlights from community respondents

In early 2024, the Task Force reached out to our neighbors to gather information on food issues. Surveys of our neighbors at food distribution sites provide important information on who they are, their need for assistance, and their satisfaction with the programs. The following information is based on 55 responses to surveys distributed at the Keefe Center Pantry, the Dinner for a Dollar Mobile Truck, Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers Services and the Hamden Mobile Pantry

- ▶ 82% were Food Insecure (of 49). (Based on Hunger Vital Signs 2 questions)

In the past year they:

- » worried their food would run out before they got money to buy more, or
- » the food they bought didn’t last and they didn’t have money to get more
- » About one-third (35%) are SNAP beneficiaries

The food programs improve diets and are easy to access:

- » It makes it easier to meet their food needs - 89% agreed or strongly agreed
- » It helps meet dietary needs - 78% agreed or strongly agreed
- » It helps to achieve a healthier diet - 72% agreed or strongly agreed
- » The location was convenient - 93% agreed or strongly agreed
- » The time was convenient - 87% agreed or strongly agreed

Many different people use these programs. The users are nearly equally divided into age groups

- ▶ Less than 45 (35%)
- ▶ 45 to 64 (36%)
- ▶ 65 and over (29%)

Most speak English (82%) with 18% Spanish speaking

- ▶ The average number of children is 2.8, ranging from 1 to 7
- ▶ Most work full or part time (39%)
- ▶ Others are retired (28%) or unable to work (13%) or with family (6%)



Snap peas were the first vegetable grown at the garden, followed by other nutritious items. Canned goods offered at the Keefe Center pantry proved to be too much for the tables.

Cutting to the chase: recommendations

Over the six-year course of convening the Hamden Food Security Task Force, the group has morphed in terms of composition, attendance, activity, and retention. Yet a core team remains committed to collaborating in achieving the goals of mitigating food insecurity in Hamden. The team worked throughout the early years of the pandemic to try to ensure and enhance food resources for the town, and we saw significant activity to accomplish that.

As we reviewed our recommendations for the future of the Task Force, we suggest retaining some of the initial goals:

1. Support/improve access for all to healthy affordable food options.
2. Create opportunities to gather community feedback, increase buy-in.

In addition, based on our experience during and after the pandemic, we recommend:

3. **Grow the Task Force and seek new representatives (individual and organizational) for the Task Force to keep the work moving and determine new goals for the group.** Include community members with lived experience regarding food insecurity. Expand the network of collaborators to identify and include the many individual community and church-related pantries in Hamden.
4. **Work with the town to co-design an emergency response system for food delivery.** The inter-organization connections that were made in the early years of the Task Force were tapped at the beginning of COVID to develop ad hoc emergency responses to ensure food was provided to anyone in need (and beyond). This type of response needs to be codified and scalable at the town level to be prepared for future crises.
5. **Create regular community events for food distribution,** following the Dinner for a Dollar model. We need to talk to our neighbors who are experiencing food hardships and see how to help them feel part of the community.
6. **Explore ways to engage students and seniors,** both demographics often at high risk for food insecurity and challenging to communicate with.
7. **Seek new modes of effective advocacy.** How can we promote food insecurity as a priority at the municipal and state levels?

COVID: LIFE, AND FOOD SYSTEMS, INTERRUPTED

As the Task Force looked back, we realized the COVID pandemic taught us unanticipated lessons about food distribution we are still unraveling. The pandemic impacted every aspect of our daily lives, and those at risk of food insecurity were affected in familiar yet unique ways. Because of their jobs at schools and in the community, members of the Task Force were instrumental in ensuring that food continued to be distributed throughout Hamden, in spite of the shutdown of schools and regular life. The lessons learned are woven into our updated recommendations for the next five years.

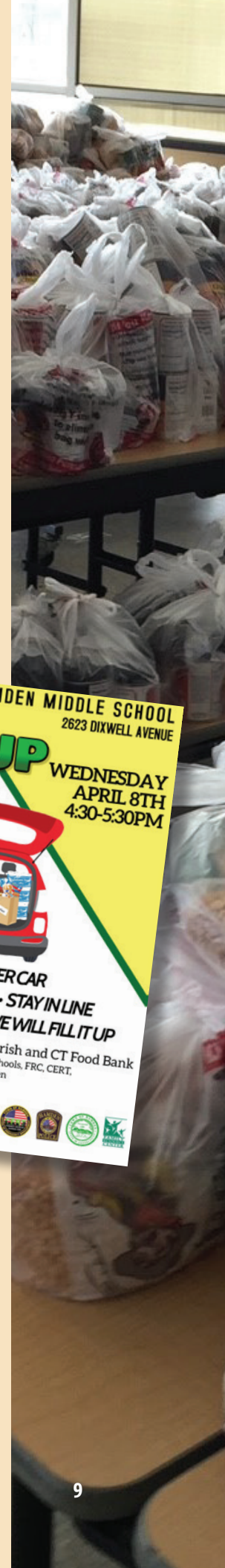
Capturing the moment and not letting the opportunity slip

Months before the pandemic closed the world down, Hector Velazquez intuited that there was going to be a need for a town-wide mobile food pantry, particularly in southern Hamden, because the Stop & Shop on Putnam Avenue was shuttering. He had just started a job at Church Street School as the Family Engagement Coordinator and when the CT Food Bank (now CT Foodshare) wanted to survey food insecurity in the area and possibly open a mobile food pantry, Hector stepped up. That's his style.

“I was able to say ‘I know about this.’ My wife and I had been running the CT Food Bank in East Haven for four years. [Former Superintendent of Hamden Schools] Jody Goeler asked me to set up a mobile food pantry. He asked me the standard, who, what, where, and when questions. I gave him all of my suggestions which pointed to Dunbar Hill School. I also suggested every school in the district host distribution on a monthly basis, so we began to rotate the locations. I connected with all the principals to get it organized: Wear your school shirts, recruit your volunteers for your food pantry. We communicated with parents and the PTAs. I would send out an email blast that we're about to run a pantry at such-and-such a school and folks would turn out.”

Then COVID hit and overnight food distribution was up in the air. CT Food Bank agreed to continue to ship food to Hamden, but due to a lot of constraints, we were now receiving the food on giant pallets delivered to a site.

There was no easy way for the community to quickly access the food without unloading it and getting it organized, which was a logistical nightmare. “I began to panic a bit,” Hector remembers today. “We had to scramble to figure out a way to distribute massive quantities of food quickly and in an appropriate location. I admit, I was worried we might





have to cancel the food distribution because we had to develop a whole new model of distribution on the fly.”

Adam Sendroff, who was then the town’s Community Development Manager responsible for the Keefe Community Center, stepped in to help quietly behind the scenes. He and Hector were both on the Task Force and Adam was instrumental in keeping the mobile pantry open. “Adam and I had more of a connection than we originally knew because we both loved old-era hip hop. He suggested we reach out to CERT. We knew it was more important to continue now than it had ever been. Everything had closed. Nobody knew what to do. Adam said, let’s figure out how to handle this. He talked to [former Fire Chief] Gary Merwede who dispatched Hamden CERT, the emergency team, to help us get organized. That helped me turn the corner.”

*“Actions have reactions, don’t be quick to judge,
You may not know the hardships people don’t speak of,
It’s best to step back and observe with couth,
For we all must meet our moment of truth”*

—GURU from Gangstarr

Hector, Adam, Jody, and the CERT team began distribution from the Dunbar Hill School and quickly realized that the location wouldn’t work because of massive traffic jams. “I looked at satellite maps of the town and realized the middle school would work—and then I figured out logistically how to organize it. We could wrap around the middle school. We had so many cars, we had to put them out into the field. CERT went to work to get cars in/out. If not for them—this would not have been possible. They had the manpower, the equipment, the safety procedures in their heads. They were trained.”

Hector notes that the “only” thing he oversaw was the coordination of the massive amount of food CT Foodbank delivered. “We were given pallets and pallets of food. We had to guesstimate what we’d hand out and try to make it last for the demand. We gave out two to three bags of food per car, with a mix of protein, carbs, and produce.”



Hector and Adam unloading a food delivery at Hamden Middle School.

Hector and his volunteer crew ran the pantry for two years at the Hamden Middle School, always looking to make the food distribution fun and community-inspired, rather than a vital community resource. “Adam once got the Hamden High School Jazz Band to come play during the food distribution. That really pumped us up. We also had the National Guard show its support, and the Hamden police department were there regularly to monitor traffic and safety.” So many people contributed to the food distribution being a lively event in spite of its serious nature. “From the custodians at the middle school, the traffic controllers, police department, to the food baggers, and those who shared the word to the community, this was a wide-range collaboration, and every person was vital to the success of the distribution,” Hector says.

The Hamden mobile pantry lives on, now as a walk-up unit based on Circular Avenue. Drop by—you will probably see Hector directing the visitors, chatting with volunteers, and ensuring the community is fed.

One of the lessons learned from the pandemic food pantry is the need for a town-wide crisis plan for food distribution. Hamden, like other towns, wasn’t ready for a pandemic that prevented people from accessing their regular sources of food—but we may be better prepared in the future.

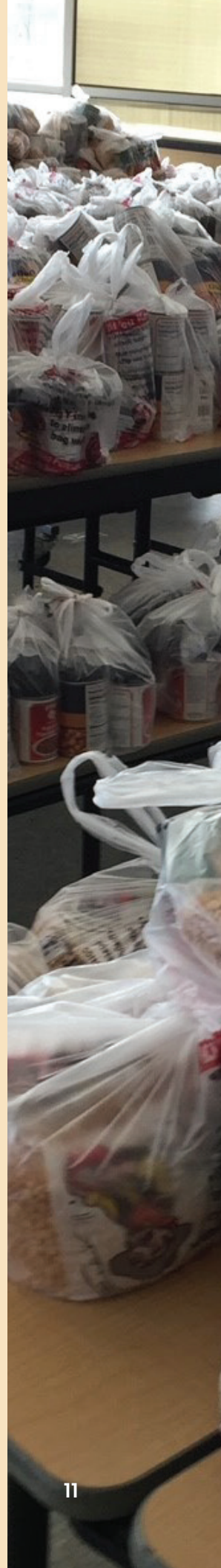
Sendroff says that the existence of the Task Force allowed the town of Hamden to “spring into action to deal with food challenges when COVID hit. The Task Force provided a foundation and a framework—we all knew each other and what our functions were—and that fostered a wide-ranging collaboration quickly.”

The research supports what Sendroff observed. Communities with food task forces (more commonly known as food policy councils) were able to meet local needs more efficiently during the pandemic crisis than those without.³ Hamden’s success in best practices with food distribution was lauded by the CT Secretary of Agriculture, Bryan Hurlburt, and the organization End Hunger CT! at a conference in November 2020. “Randall Mel from Whitson’s School Nutrition, on behalf of Hamden Public Schools, and I, representing the town, were cited for cross-sector collaboration,” Sendroff says. “I credited the existence of the Task Force for any success we had.”

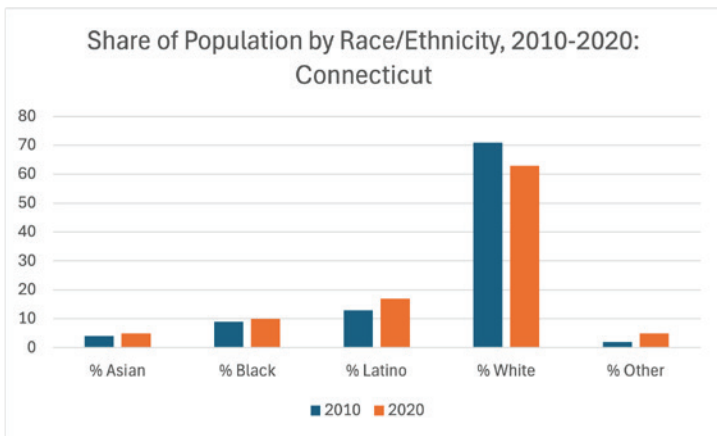
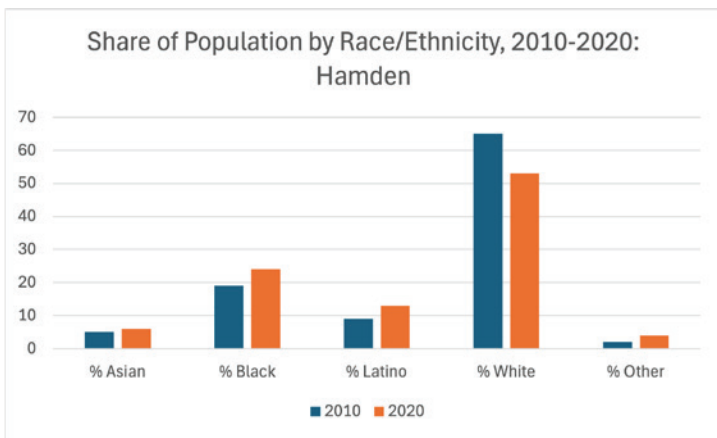
3. Santo, Raychel & Misiaszek, Caitlin & Bassarab, Karen & Harris, Darriel & Palmer, Anne. (2021). Pivoting policy, programs, and partnerships: Food policy councils’ responses to the crises of 2020. 10.13140/RG.2.2.34436.45449. https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/FPC%202020%20Census%20Report_updated.pdf

Palmer, A., Atoloye, A., Bassarab, K., Calancie, L., Santo, R., & Cooksey Stowers, K. (2020). COVID-19 responses: Food policy councils are “stepping in, stepping up, and stepping back”. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 10(1), 223–226. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2020.101.013>

Mui, Y., Adam, A., Santo, R., Bassarab, K., Wolfson, J. A., & Palmer, A. (2024). Characterizing Food Policy Councils’ Network Partnerships and COVID-19 Responses. *Nutrients*, 16(7), 915. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu16070915>



DATA UPDATES: THEN AND NOW



In our 2019 report, we used Census Tract (subdivisions of counties in the census) information to illustrate the nature of regional inequality in Hamden. The area of Hamden with the lowest income, highest poverty rates, and likely highest incidence of food insecurity, is centered around Census Tracts 1654 and 1655, with incomes about half the Hamden average, and poverty rates near 10% or higher of the population. Situated in the southern reaches of Hamden, these neighborhoods are also characterized by higher numbers of non-White residents and immigrants, and a scarcity of options for purchasing high-quality food at an affordable rate. The recommendations made in the 2019 report centered primarily around these neighborhoods with their focus on expanding opportunities for obtaining high-quality food, including the development of a Qualified Opportunity Zone in a way that would encourage the opening of a market in this area. We have made progress on many of these objectives, but challenges still remain.

Hamden's increasing diversity was also noted in the 2019 report; the continuation of this trend has been confirmed by the release of 2020 census data. Where in 2019 we reported the most recent (2010) census data showing the Hamden population to be roughly 19%

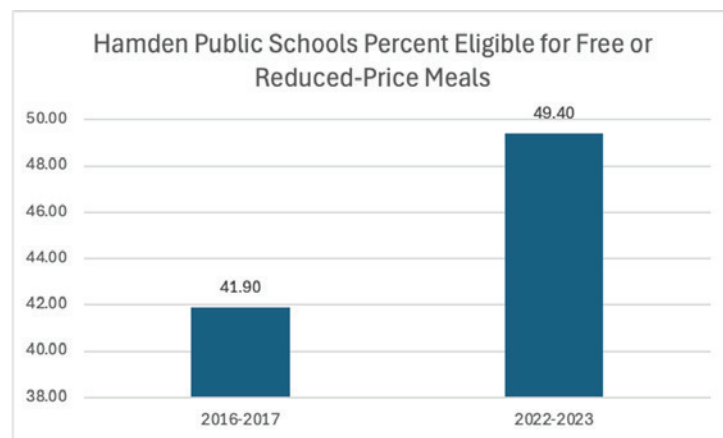
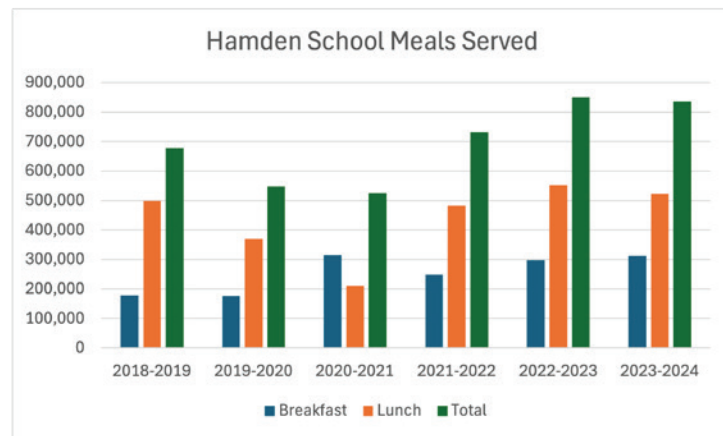
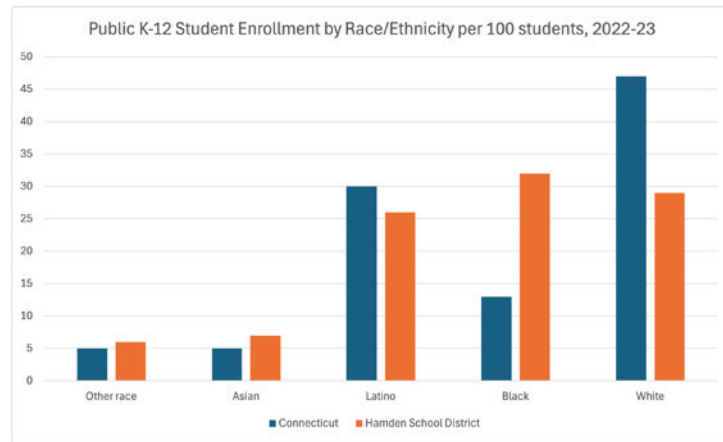
Black, 9% Latino, and 69% White, 2020 census data show the proportions had shifted to 24%, 13% and 53% respectively. The increase in the proportions of Black and Latino is important because these racial and ethnic groups are more likely to be living at lower income levels, have higher levels of housing insecurity, and a greater likelihood of food

insecurity. According to the 2023 Hamden Equity Profile (DataHaven), median income for Whites in Hamden in 2021 was \$92,000. For Blacks, it was \$68,000, and for Latino \$75,000. Across the board, median income in Connecticut has declined since 2000, in inflation-adjusted numbers. Much of this demographic shift is also driven by an increase in immigrants to the Greater New Haven area, increasingly from non-European countries of origin.

“Between 2000 and 2020, the share of foreign born residents in Greater New Haven increased from 9 percent to 14 percent of the total population. Communities from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, and China saw the largest population increases. There was also a notable increase in the number of residents born in African nations.” (DataHaven “Community Wellbeing Index” 2023, p. 16.)⁴

The importance of racial and ethnic disparities is more pronounced in the public schools, where 2023 data show proportions among the student body of 32% Black, 26% Latino, and 29% White, an additional shift from the 2016 data we reported in 2019. In general, the younger the population, the more likely it is non-White. This is true across the state and region, but the effect is particularly pronounced in Hamden. For this reason, ensuring that school-aged populations are well supported and food secure has implications for the health of our community.

In Hamden, we have addressed some of this need with increased school meal participation, assisted by a patchwork of federal and state programs that have expanded access to free meals at times since 2020. Between the 2018–19 and 2023–24 school years, the number of meals served in Hamden Public Schools increased by 23%. The difference was most noticeable in the near doubling of breakfast meals served (75% increase). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA offered waivers to make school meals available at no cost to all public school students. When the waivers



4. <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/reports/greater-new-haven-community-wellbeing-index>

Go ask ALICE (and other data sources)

In addition to census data, we utilized two main data sources in compiling our report: recent United Way ALICE reports and DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey (CWS), as well as DataHaven's Hamden Equity Profile (Hamden Equity Profile).

ALICE is a United Way-coined acronym standing for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE families earn income above the Federal Poverty Level but less than what's needed to survive in today's economy. ALICE families are often overlooked and undercounted by traditional poverty measures. In 2023, 37% of Hamden's 22,403 households fell below the ALICE threshold; this was down from the previous 2020 ALICE report, where 38% of households fell below. The changes in household survival budgets from 2020 to 2023, however, reinforce the continued need for support in the food system. These data indicate the minimum hourly wage necessary for a single adult or a family of four to live comfortably. In 2023, the minimum full-time hourly wage for a single adult to work and live comfortably in New Haven was \$17.41, compared to \$14.57 in 2020 (increase of \$2.84). For a family of four (2 adults, 1 infant and 1 preschooler), the minimum full-time hourly wage was \$55.09 in 2023 compared to \$45.37 in 2020 (increase of \$12.11).

Since 1992, DataHaven's mission is to empower people to create thriving communities by collecting and ensuring access to data on well-being, equity, and quality of life. The organization works with many partners to develop reports, tools, and technical assistance programs that make information more useful to local communities. Two DataHaven reports are referenced here: the Community Wellness Survey (CWS) and the Hamden Equity Profile (HEP).

expired in the spring of 2022, the State of Connecticut allocated funding to keep meals free for an additional year. However, beginning in the 2023–24 school year, households returned to paying for school meals if their children had paid meal status. Nevertheless, Hamden has more students with free or reduced-price meal status now than in 2019. Districtwide, in 2022–23, nearly half of Hamden Public School students were eligible for free and reduced-price meals. The number of schools participating in the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision (where free meals are provided to all students in the school) has increased from zero to five between 2018–19 and 2022–23.

Changes in structure: housing, food, transportation, cost of living

When we talk about food hardship, we have to try to understand the rising and shifting costs of living in America. People with low-to-middle income struggle in every arena in their lives to make ends meet. Housing and transportation are key barriers to affording and locating food, not to mention nutritious food. As one of our members commented: "It's time-consuming to be poor."

The onset of COVID-19 in March of 2020 brought about useful policy changes and funding at the federal and state levels that helped to address the incidence of food insecurity in younger populations, particularly in children and families with children. Economic Impact Payments (EIP), an expansion in the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC), pandemic-specific unemployment insurance, and emergency rental assistance programs all helped to close the gap for families struggling with food insecurity. ALICE (see sidebar) data show that the EIP, and expansion in the CTC, and CDCTC programs all made a significant contribution to a low-income family's budget during the pandemic; these programs all sunsetted in 2022 and 2023.⁵ The impact of both the federal programs and their discontinuation can be observed in the data reported in the Connecticut Community Wellness Index of 2023. During 2021, when the Federal programs were fully implemented, food insecurity for all populations dropped. More significantly, the disparities between racial and ethnic groups, and between families with children and those without all narrowed during that year.

5. See "ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Connecticut." United Way of CT, 2023. <https://alice.ctunitedway.org/downloadreport/>

As these programs ended, rates rebounded and the disparities between groups increased to levels higher than before the pandemic.

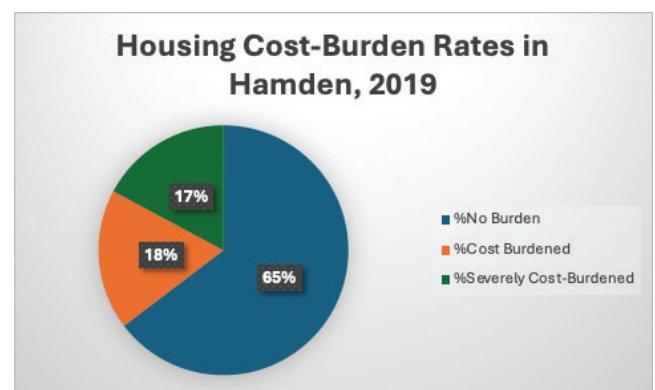
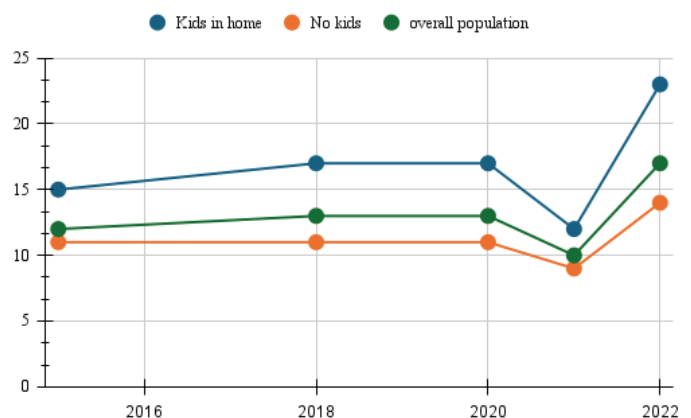
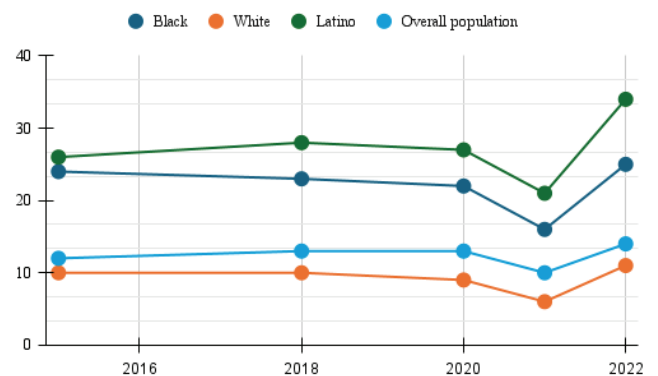
Changes in housing cost and availability as well as structural inequality in transportation availability are two other factors that contribute to food insecurity in the most vulnerable households in Hamden.

One way of measuring housing affordability is to compare the cost of housing to income: a household is considered “cost-burdened” when 30% or more of their income is spent on housing, and “severely cost-burdened” when half or more of income goes to the cost of housing. In Connecticut, housing costs continue to rise, due in part to municipal zoning measures that limit new construction. Meanwhile, wages have largely stagnated, especially among lower-income workers who are more likely to rent. Cost burden generally affects renters, who are disproportionately likely to be Black or Latino householders, more than homeowners. In Hamden, 45% of renter households are cost-burdened, compared to 30% of owner households. Home prices, rents, and evictions have spiked in the months since the end of the pandemic. The cost to rent an apartment or house in New Haven County increased 21% from June 2020 to June 2022.

According to the Hamden Equity Profile (HEP), “Thirty-six percent of Hamden’s households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend at least 30 percent of their total income on housing costs.”⁶ In the greater area including Hamden, rates increase to 50% for Black and Latino families. According to the 2023 Community Wellness Survey (p. 32) for New Haven County, “nine percent of respondents in Connecticut and 11 percent of those in Greater New Haven reported not having enough money to provide adequate shelter for themselves or their family.”

The housing affordability crisis has led to an increase in evictions in the region since the pandemic-era moratorium was lifted: “Compared to the 2017 to 2019 pre-pandemic

Share of adults reporting food insecurity in Connecticut



6. Hamden 2023 Equity Profile, Data Haven, p.2. <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/data-resources/hamden-town-equity-report-2023>

average for October, the number of filings from October 2022 was 4 percent higher. From January to October 2022, there were 2,929 eviction filings in Greater New Haven, or 411 for every 10,000 renter households. By these measures, renters in New Haven, East Haven, West Haven, and Hamden were about twice as likely to face eviction as renters living in outer suburbs” (Community Wellness Survey for New Haven County, p. 35). In late 2021, the Survey found that 3 percent of Black and Latina women and 2 percent of Black and Latino men in Connecticut said that they would have to leave their home in

the next two months because they were behind on their rent or mortgages, compared to 0.5 percent of white women and 0.5 percent of white men.” (p. 35)

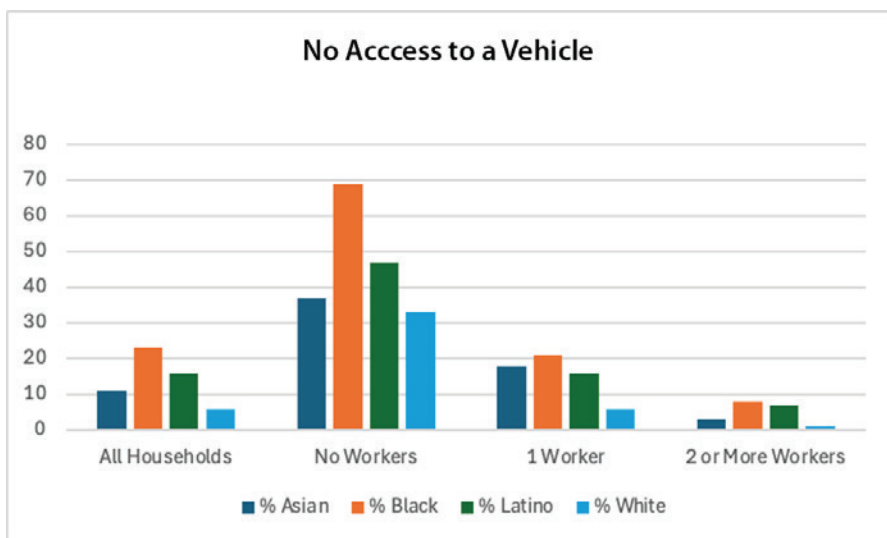
These structural challenges with housing costs in our region can only have heightened the ongoing crisis around food security in our region, particularly among the households and populations most vulnerable, who are concentrated in a few census tracts in the southern reaches of Hamden. Is access to transportation worth con-

sidering along with the location of sources of healthy, affordable food? Regardless of the number of workers in a household, Black and Latino households are much more likely to lack access to a vehicle, making them more reliant on public transportation or living within a reasonable walking distance from a food source.

Food hardship among college and university students

Hamden hosts two university student populations, from Southern Connecticut State University and Quinnipiac University. At Southern, where there’s been a food pantry on campus for years, university-wide surveys done in 2018 and 2020 found that roughly 30% of students had experienced food insecurity in the prior year. At Quinnipiac, surveys of the student population in 2019 and 2022 demonstrate increases both in reported food insecurity and interest in different solutions to the lack of affordable food on campus. In 2019, 9.5% of student respondents indicated they went without food “more than once a week,” whereas in 2022, 23% of student respondents endorsed this response. Of those who said they skipped meals because of lack of funds, 79% said they’d utilize an on-campus food pantry in 2022, versus 70% in 2019. Thirty-one percent of students in 2022 (versus 8.8% in 2019) indicated that they would be interested in participating in a discussion on food access. In both surveys, more than 60% of student respondents were calling for an increase in availability of fresh produce.

No Access to a Vehicle



The 18–25-year-old demographic demonstrates among the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity nationwide. It is increasingly evident that those in this demographic attending colleges and universities are not exempt from this statistic—particularly as the profile of students seeking postsecondary degrees is rapidly changing. Across the United States, students who identify with races or ethnicities other than White, older students, students who are caregivers, lower-income, financially independent, and first-generation students all make up a larger portion of enrolled university students. All these groups are at a disproportionate risk for food insecurity which, when added to the increased costs of tuition and the eroded purchasing power of financial assistance programs (e.g. Pell Grants) means that nationwide food insecurity rates on college campuses range from 30% to 70%.⁷ In 2020, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) reported the first nationally representative data on food insecurity and homelessness among undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in postsecondary education in the United States. Their statistics confirmed that colleges and universities of all types serve undergraduate and graduate students experiencing food insecurity and homelessness. Overall, 23% of undergraduates, and 12% of graduate students, were experiencing food insecurity, meaning that more than 4 million students were food insecure. Eight percent of undergraduate and five percent of graduate students were experiencing homelessness, translating to more than 1.5 million students.⁸

Increasingly, emergency and supplemental food distribution programs are targeting college and university campuses. The Feeding America Network reports that 86% of the 150 food banks responding to a 2019 survey of the 200 banks in their network are now serving college and university populations with distributions, a majority of them distributing food assistance directly to students.⁹

-
7. One representative source that backs up some of these generalizations is: Matthew J. Landry, Craig Gundersen and Heather A. Eicher-Miller, “Food Insecurity on College and University Campuses: A Context and Rationale for Solutions,” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, October 27, 2021. [https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(21\)01430-1/fulltext](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(21)01430-1/fulltext)
 8. Zigmont, V. A., Linsmeier, A., & Gallup, P. (2020). Food insecurity and associated health and academic measures among college students in Connecticut. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 35(4). Original study: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023466>
 9. See “College Student Hunger Statistics and Research,” Feeding America. Accessed 26 June 2024. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/college-hunger-research>

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The bulk of the work of the Task Force took place in subcommittees, featuring a revolving cast of members. These reports depict highlights from their work over the years.

I: Schools—where food hardship may be most visible

Since 2019, the Schools subcommittee of the Hamden Food Security Task Force has worked on several projects to advance food security in Hamden.

Perhaps the initiative with the biggest long-term impact was Hamden Public Schools' (HPS) implementation of the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision at five elementary schools, a program that allows all enrolled students to receive free school meals. COVID interrupted in-person school and posed many challenges to the food security of students and their families. HPS, with the help of many partners, was able to spring into action to help feed the community. Other notable new programs have included participation in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and running the Cooking Matters course for Church Street School families.

MEALS FOR STUDENTS

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a USDA cost-sharing program that allows schools and districts with low-income populations to offer breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students. Schools can participate in CEP if the percentage of students directly certified for free meals reaches a certain threshold. Direct certification is a process in which students are automatically eligible for free meals because their household participates in another means-tested program, such as SNAP or HUSKY Health, without filling out a free and reduced-price application. The percentage of directly certified students is called the Identified Student Percentage, or ISP. The USDA provides reimbursements based on the ISP, and the local district has to make up what is not covered by these reimbursements.

There are several benefits of adopting CEP For students, including increased access to nutritious food, reduced social stigma regarding meal status, and positive impacts on

diet quality and academic performance. For households, CEP eliminates paperwork since there is no need to submit free and reduced-price applications, and households save money because meal charges are eliminated. For schools, there is decreased administrative burden, streamlined meal service, and no more school meal debt.

In 2019 the Schools subcommittee and HPS administrators began looking closely at the feasibility of CEP in the school district. We consulted with the Connecticut State Department of Education, as well as with policy and advocacy groups who provided technical assistance. We arranged a visit to another school district operating CEP to hear directly about their experience and to ask questions. The school administration proposed CEP implementation, and the Board of Education voted in support of it. The district applied for a grouping of five schools in the 2020–21 school year: Church Street, Dunbar Hill, Helen Street, Ridge Hill, and Shepherd Glen. These elementary schools had the highest ISPs in the district. The application was approved, and since then every student enrolled at these schools has been eligible for daily breakfast and lunch free of charge.

CEP runs in four-year cycles and the 2023–24 school year is the final year of the first cycle. In the hope of expanding CEP, the district has been conducting SNAP and HUSKY Health promotional campaigns to help ensure that all eligible households know about these programs and apply. Not only does participation in these programs benefit students and their families, but it also increases the ISP at individual schools and across the district, improving the feasibility of further CEP implementation.

In the summer of 2024, HPS applied to expand CEP. The Connecticut State Department of Education approved the application, dramatically increasing the number of students in the district receiving school meals at no cost. Alice Peck, Hamden Collaborative Learning Center, Hamden High, Hamden Middle, and Hamden Transition Academy will be joining the five original elementary schools in operating CEP. This CEP expansion will add approximately 2,700 students to the CEP program in the 2024-25 school year, and CEP will now cover over 80% of district students.

Reference:

Hamden Considers Free Meals for All Students

New Haven Independent, 11/21/2019

https://www.newhavenindependent.org/article/hamden_boe_considers_free_meals

Hamden Public Schools Expands Free Meal Program To Students

Hamden Patch, 8/19/2024

<https://patch.com/connecticut/hamden/>

[hamden-public-schools-expands-free-meal-program-students](https://patch.com/connecticut/hamden/hamden-public-schools-expands-free-meal-program-students)



Allison Batson, founder of Dinner for a Dollar, and Adam Sendroff celebrate summer meals for Hamden schoolchildren.

SCHOOLS RESPOND TO COVID-19

HPS, like many other school districts across the state, ceased in-school instruction on Friday, March 13, 2020. On the following Monday, March 16, HPS and their food management company, Whitsons School Nutrition, began an emergency feeding program serving “to-go” school meals outside of school buildings. Waivers from the USDA allowed these meals to be provided at no cost. The continuity of school meals proved to be a lifeline to students and their families during this time of massive job loss and economic difficulty. The program evolved to include meals in bulk to last for several days, over weekends, and through holidays. In November 2020, school meal delivery was initiated through a partnership with the bus company, First Student Transportation. From March 2020 through August 2021, over 720,000 meals were served to remote learning students.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit there were two CT Food Bank mobile pantry stops in Hamden, one at Christ Bread of Life Church and the other under the sponsorship of HPS at Dunbar Hill Elementary School. CT Food Bank provided the volunteers for distribution, and clients walked up to the truck to receive food. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CT Food Bank told all local mobile pantry sponsors that they could no longer provide volunteers, nor would the specially designed mobile pantry trucks be available to hold, display, and distribute food. They could still provide food, but it would be dropped off on wrapped pallets. Due to these changes, many mobile pantries were canceled during this critical time.

The first large-scale drive-up food distribution was held at the Hamden Middle School on April 8, 2020, where it remained for over two years. Receiving the shipment of food, breaking down the pallets, and sorting and bagging the food began at the middle school the day before the distribution. Many partners helped plan and execute the drive-up distribution. It was a team effort that included the CT Food Bank, HPS, Town of Hamden, Hamden Community Response Team (CERT), Hamden Police Department, Hamden Fire Department, and the Connecticut National Guard. Nearly 400 households were served that day. The drive-up food distributions at Hamden Middle School continued until July 2022 and served 264,475 pounds of food. They concluded when CT Food Bank (now CT Foodshare) was able to resume the pre-pandemic mobile pantry visits to Hamden in September 2022.

References:

Video montage of first large-scale food distribution at Hamden Middle School, 4/8/2020
<https://youtu.be/3ZdIjaZWBpA?si=7r8W4YoHuFeBKaE5>

Operation Food Bank Feeds 390 Families

New Haven Independent, 4/9/2020

https://www.newhavenindependent.org/article/army_of_volunteers_gives_food_to_miles_of_cars

USDA FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM

In the 2020–21 school year, HPS and Whitsons School Nutrition applied for and received a grant to implement the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) at Church Street, Helen Street, and Shepherd Glen elementary schools. The FFVP provides all children at these schools with a variety of free fresh fruit and vegetable snacks at least 3 days a month in order to encourage healthy eating. The USDA gives FFVP grant selection priority to schools with the highest free and reduced-price enrollments to ensure that its benefits are reaching low-income students. The goals of the FFVP include making a difference in children's diets to impact their present and future health; increasing children's fruit and vegetable consumption; creating a healthier school environment; and expanding the variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that children experience. The FFVP program is considered an important catalyst for change in efforts to combat childhood obesity by helping children learn more healthful eating habits. The FFVP introduces school children to a variety of produce that they otherwise might not have had the opportunity to sample. HPS has applied for and received the FFVP grant each consecutive year and hopes to expand the program to more elementary schools in the future.

COOKING MATTERS AT CHURCH STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In spring 2022 the Cooking Matters program was offered at Church Street by the Community Health Network of Connecticut Foundation, in partnership with HPS and Whitsons. Cooking Matters works to ensure that children and caregivers with lower incomes learn to shop, prepare, and eat healthy foods on a limited budget. Through six hands-on cooking classes given in both English and Spanish, families were taught how to plan and prepare healthy meals with an emphasis on nutrition education. Families also learned food budgeting and shopping techniques during the classes. An additional feature of the program sent two bags of groceries home with families so they could try to cook what they learned to make in class.

Reference:

Cooking Matters Connecticut classes established for school students, families

Fox 61, 5/19/22

<https://youtu.be/UsIpZfQk53c?si=ofhRAFrWG03QgvFK>

II: Keefe Center—sowing and reaping for the community



Community garden at Keefe Center.

The Keefe Center in Hamden has long been associated with helping the community through hard times. The food pantry at Keefe is crucial to food distribution in Hamden.

Hamden Community Services is based at Keefe Community Center, and partners with United Way, Hispanic Health Council, Quinnipiac University, and others to understand and identify, then serve and meet, nutritional needs presented for Food Bank clients and others who access nutritional information and programs at Keefe Community Center.

In 2019 Keefe Community Center reached out to the community to share goals. During that time, at one of the community conversation dinners hosted by United Way, a resident raised the idea of having a community garden at Keefe to make fresh produce available at the Hamden

Food Bank. United Way offered a grant to launch the Keefe Community Garden project; Hamden Community Services Director Y’Isiah Lopes conducted a survey with over 120 food bank clients to find out what vegetables they were most interested in seeing grown.

By having this dialogue and pursuing the needs, Keefe Community Center received financial support for a community garden at Keefe from United Way; with an open green space at Keefe Center that affords a community garden opportunity. Community Services partnered with a Quinnipiac University sociology department professor to apply a needs assessment schedule in interviews with residents and food bank clients to learn about needs for fresh produce and to hear client desires for garden foods. Some of the produce requested included broccoli, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, apples, oranges, celery, and carrots. In July 2020, the Keefe Community Garden officially opened and is now maintained by students and staff from the Quinnipiac Albert Schweitzer Institute. The first vegetables harvested were sugar snap peas, distributed at the Keefe food pantry along with a recipe for using them.

In August 2020, Keefe hosted a “Visit the Garden Day” to officially introduce the garden to the community. Friends from the community came out to help prepare for the event by potting seedlings and more to give away. Neighbors and friends toured the gardens and were offered plants and veggies from the garden for late summer/early fall. We also encouraged that the information be shared with friends and family who were interested in learning more about the new community garden in Hamden.

Meanwhile, interns from Quinnipiac and Southern Connecticut State University went door-to-door getting residents to commit to signing up for classes offered by Hispanic

Health Council. The classes were promoting culturally competent nutrition education presentations for adults through its PANA nutrition education program. (See more on the Gardens project below).

Other services at Keefe included:

- ▶ Healthy Eating presentations to the surrounding community for “Fat, Sugar and Salt Oh, My!” and “Label Reading for your Health.” Provide guidance and funds for the community health exercise program for health and wellness.
- ▶ Information and guidance were provided on our website, and we shared tips and tools in social media.
- ▶ Numerous Community Dinners at Keefe with discussion topics on diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- ▶ Community Health Coalition meetings at Keefe Community Center participation in discussion for public health improvement
- ▶ Health Fair
- ▶ Implementing the SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) program, which helps fight chronic disease. SWAP is a traffic light program that indicates which foods to take a lot of (green—lower in sugar, fat, sodium), yellow for take some, and red (take only a little since they are foods highest in sugar, fat, and sodium).



A farmstead produce giveaway at Keefe Center.

Some events that have been held around the Community Garden since 2020 include:

- ▶ On **August 11, 2020**, Chaila Gilliams (Bodyworkers) hosted “Nutrients for the Soul,” a wellness workshop.
- ▶ **August 2020** several different events in the Community Garden for Using Your Grief to Grow involving Youth Health and Wellness
- ▶ **August 24, 2020**, marketing flyers for Healthy Eating and highlighting Keefe Community Garden to promote the Community Garden
- ▶ **October 2020** Education for Sleeping Giant Day Care 3–5yr
- ▶ **October 24, 2020**, Keefe Community Garden Swords to Plowshares Northeast demonstration of transforming guns into garden tools
- ▶ **June 2021** UWGNH had a day of services around the garden, plants were given away as well as 5 lb buckets that consisted of an herb or vegetable were delivered to the door of residents who lived in the neighborhood around Keefe Community Center.
- ▶ **Every Summer in the month of June, July, or August** there are at least two free community farmer stands where fresh produce is given away, and the residents have access to free produce. There are always 150–200 in attendance. We also provide fresh grilled vegetables.

HOW OUR HAMDEN COMMUNITY GARDENS HAVE GROWN

One of the priorities taken by the Task Force following the 2019 report was in Community Gardening: supporting the direct growing of fresh produce in southern Hamden's food-insecure neighborhoods.



In fall 2019, the Keefe Community Center entered into an agreement with the Albert Schweitzer Institute at Quinnipiac University to co-manage a community garden at the Keefe Community Center. In the winter of 2019–20, Hamden's Department of Public Works built 12 raised bed structures and prepared a suitable portion of the property at 11 Pine street to host the garden. In March of 2020, the raised beds were filled with a soil-compost mix. Then things shut down with the pandemic.

In April 2020, representatives from Quinnipiac's Albert Schweitzer Institute, acting in isolation, planted the garden beds. With support from the Keefe Center budget, annual vegetables and herbs were planted in the raised beds, four fruit trees (two apple, two pear) and blueberry bushes

were planted in the area adjacent to the raised beds, and a pollinator border was installed on the property. These features have been maintained and built out from that point.

Over the four growing seasons since, produce from the garden has been supplied on a weekly basis (sometimes more than once a week) to the Hamden Food Pantry on the premises of the Keefe Center. Neighbors have been encouraged to pick their own (as needed), particularly late in the season when summer gardening interns (QU students) return to classes.

In addition to the regular harvests, the garden is a feature in other Keefe Center activities—such as community days, farmer's markets, and senior support events. At these events, different methods are used to connect the gardens to gardening efforts of Hamden residents by distributing vegetable plants and herbs for growing at home.

In summer 2023, Hamden residents were encouraged to take over beds for their own use. Although there were several interested, only one person took over a bed for her own use. Efforts for inviting Hamden residents to take ownership of this resource are ongoing.

In addition to the Keefe Center garden, the establishment of several other gardens have been supported by Task Force members and funding through the Keefe Center during the period of this review. The Winnett Food Forest (on the corner of Putnam and Winnett) was established in summer 2022. The WFF has supplied produce to the Keefe Center and has entered into a partnership with Interfaith Volunteer Care Givers (IVCG)

to be a location where they supply weekly groceries to seniors. Its overarching vision is to become a neighborhood/community resource for food, free for the taking.

Additional gardens were established during the summer of 2023 at Grace & St. John's Church in the Hamden Town Center, and at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church on the corner of Shepherd and Sherman Avenues. Both gardens were successful in their initial seasons and are being expanded.

III: Dinner for a Dollar growth

The good news is that the food ecosystem in Hamden has many bright spots.

One of the most visible resources is Dinner for a Dollar, which has been operating out of Grace and St. John's Church, 2927 Dixwell Avenue, for 12 years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Dinner for a Dollar served approximately 60 dinners each Friday evening to guests who would dine at fully set tables in the church's undercroft. During the height of the pandemic Dinner for a Dollar switched to a takeout model and their numbers increased to as many as 100 meals or more per week.

Currently, Dinner for a Dollar serves 80 to 100 meals every Friday evening with both eat-in and takeout options. Under the guidance of Allison Batson and Pastor Bob Bergner, the Dinner for a Dollar program is a shining beacon of success in the Hamden food ecosystem. We've all seen the sandwich board advertising the dinners at Grace and St. John's Church in the center of town—now they're offering meals across Hamden.

One of the enduring lessons learned from the success of Dinner for a Dollar is that people appreciate the food and the community that comes with food.

Less than a month before the beginning of the pandemic, Dinner for a Dollar began a second weekly meal on Saturday evenings at Hamden Plains United Methodist Church at 15 Church Street. That meal continued despite the immediate inconveniences and impediments of the COVID shutdown and continues now to serve 50 to 60 meals each week.

In October of 2021 Dinner for a Dollar started a third site on State Street and that location is now served by...a food truck!

A little more than a year ago, Batson reported to the Task Force that thanks to a grant from United Way, Dinner for a Dollar had acquired a fully equipped food truck. Since July 2023, the food truck has been serving to-go meals every Sunday afternoon at 1935 State Street. The Food Truck has added a notably festive air to the Dinner for a Dollar meal program. There's something about the Food Truck model that captures Dinner for a Dollar guests'—and Dinner for a Dollar volunteers'—fancy and imagination. Eighty to



Dinner for a Dollar on the road: a long-awaited food truck travels to the State Street area to host dinners on Sundays.

100 meals are served each week from the truck. As well, the Dinner for a Dollar Food Truck has served meals at events hosted by The Village, the Episcopal Diocese in Connecticut, and others.

In addition to meals served, Dinner for a Dollar distributes food that it acquires from a variety of sources, including the Knights of Columbus, Midwest Food Bank (in Manchester), and Haven's Harvest. Dinner guests are invited to take home loaves of bread, canned vegetables, cereal, desserts, etc. Furthermore, Dinner for a Dollar's host parish of Grace and St John's has begun to grow organic vegetables on its campus, vegetables which will be included in Dinner for a Dollar dinner menus and/or added to the food items distributed to Dinner for a Dollar guests.

One of the enduring lessons learned from the success of Dinner for a Dollar is that people appreciate the food and the community that comes with food. Guests who attend these meals are varied; they include families with children, seniors, single people, people that are unhoused.

The Dinner for a Dollar Food Truck has opened up opportunities for expansion of the Dinner for a Dollar meal program. In the future Dinner for a Dollar plans to host meals seven days per week around Hamden and in neighboring municipalities. At the moment, the only impediment to this expansion is volunteer participation. Dinner for a Dollar is currently reaching out to a number of religious, governmental, and community service organizations in an effort to expand its volunteer base.

Therefore, part of Dinner for a Dollar's involvement in the HFTF will be the encouragement of volunteer participation and a request for aid in increasing the Dinner for a Dollar volunteer pool.

LOSING ST. ANN'S SOUP KITCHEN

While Dinner for a Dollar has flourished, many Hamden residents have noticed the impact of the closure of the soup kitchen hosted for decades at St. Ann's Catholic Church. The soup kitchen was closed as part of a diocese reorganization. The kitchen had operated at the corner of Dixwell and Arch streets since 1989, serving hundreds of Hamden and New Haven residents regularly. When the diocese closed the church, it also decided not to reopen the soup kitchen at an alternate location.

IV: Communication is key

If a tree falls in the forest and there's no one to post about it on social media, did it really fall?

So much has happened in the world and in Hamden since 2019, and keeping on top of communicating, even about something as critical as food resources, is challenging.

The Task Force created a subcommittee for communication in 2022. One of their first charges was to update and distribute the Hamden Food Resource Guide, which strives to be a comprehensive guide to all the food pantries, dinners, food trucks, and ways to get help in Hamden.

The town of Hamden website now includes a [page for food resources](#), thanks to the committee and the Mayor's office, and our social media presence is also bolstered by the committee's input. The comms team has advised other sub-groups on getting their messages out.

The subcommittee will continue to seek ways to use all forms of media to communicate to multiple stakeholders, understanding that people receive information in different ways.

You may be eligible for SNAP BENEFITS!

Students from SNAP households automatically receive FREE school meals.

Connecticut residents qualify for SNAP if their monthly gross income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Household Size	Monthly Gross Income Limit	Maximum SNAP Benefit
1	\$2,430	\$291
2	\$3,287	\$535
3	\$4,144	\$766
4	\$5,000	\$973
5	\$5,857	\$1,155
6	\$6,714	\$1,380
7	\$7,570	\$1,592
Each Additional Person	+ \$857	+ \$219

END HUNGER CT! has a pre-screener to help determine your potential eligibility. They can also help you with the application process. The pre-screener is free to use, completely confidential, and your information is never stored.

Visit www.endhungerct.org/prescreener or call the End Hunger CT! SNAP Call Center for assistance at 866-974-7627

HAMDEN
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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hamden Food Security Task Force has continued to meet regularly for the last five years, and this report attempted to assess our progress and determine goals and whether or not the Task Force was adding any value.

There are many resources for food in our town and region—the number of food pantries, delivery options for home-bound neighbors, and free meals is impressive. Yet we know we are only scratching the surface in terms of ensuring food security along with food nutrition security.

There are barriers to ensuring food is on the table on a daily basis—time, income, transportation, knowledge.

Based on our work and recent findings from the community, we recommend the following as goals going forward.

- ▶ **Improve access** to healthy food.
- ▶ **Support families** so that they have enduring access to free, affordable, and sustainable healthy food for their children and households.
- ▶ **Grow the Task Force** and seek new representatives (individual and organizational) for the Task Force to keep the work moving and determine new goals for the group. Expand the network of collaborators to identify and include the many individual community and church-related pantries in Hamden.
- ▶ **Design an emergency response system** for food delivery. The inter-organization connections that were made in the early years of the Task Force were tapped at the beginning of COVID to develop ad hoc emergency responses to ensure food was provided to anyone in need (and beyond). This type of response needs to be codified and scalable at the town level to be prepared for future crises.
- ▶ **Create regular community events** for food distribution, following the Dinner for a Dollar model. We need to talk to our neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity and see how to help them feel part of the community.
- ▶ **Expand reach to students and seniors**, both demographics often at high risk for food insecurity and challenging to communicate with.
- ▶ **Seek new modes of effective advocacy.** How can we promote attention to food hardship as a priority at the municipal, state, and federal levels?

CONCLUSION: IT'S ABOUT CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

Our neighbors are often surprised that there is food insecurity in Hamden. One trip to the monthly food pantry is eye-opening: these are our neighbors who need to augment their food budget for a variety of reasons.

When we talked to the folks we met at the various resources in town, we heard gratitude for what was provided. We also clearly heard the need for community. People would prefer not to have to take the food that's offered and hope it's a temporary solution. What they are also seeking is conversation and connection.

The need for connection is human. Over the years the all-volunteer members of the Hamden Food Task Force worked together to support the collective efforts of the organizations that were working independently toward the same goal. The connections mattered. We hope our recommendations are considered and there is the will to move them forward.

APPENDIX

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to our friends from the United Way: Charlie Urban-Mead, Aly Fox, and Mike Degen, who served as coordinators for the Task Force over the last five years. They provided consistency, accountability, grace, and compassion as they rounded us up to focus on improving food and nutritional insecurity in Hamden.

Organizations represented on the Task Force

United Way of Greater New Haven
Town of Hamden
Hamden Public Schools
Quinnipiac University
The Albert Schweitzer Institute at Quinnipiac University
Southern Connecticut State University
Haven's Harvest
CT Foodshare
M L Keefe Community Center
Interfaith Volunteer Care Givers
Dinner for a Dollar
Nutrition and Security Solutions
Grace and St. John's Episcopal Church
Hamden Plains United Methodist Church

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Original Partnering Organizations (2019)

Christ the Bread of Life Parish
Community Alliance for Research and Engagement
Connecticut Food Bank
Davenport-Dunbar Home Pantry
FISH of Greater New Haven
Hamden Public Schools and Students
Hamden Community Members
FoodCorps
Food Rescue US
ML Keefe Community Center
New Haven Public Schools, Food Services Division—Central Kitchen
Quinnipiack Valley Health District
Quinnipiac University and Students
Southern Connecticut State University
Town of Hamden
United Way of Greater New Haven
Yale School of Public Health

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