

CASE  
STUDY

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# Bread for the City

WASHINGTON, DC

## FOUNDED ON FOOD ACCESS, WITH ROOFTOP GARDENS, GLEANINGS, PANTRIES AND A FARM

Its name reflects its origins. Bread for the City (BFC) started as a hunger relief organization over 40 years ago. Partnering with Capital Area Food Bank in 1976, it opened a food pantry serving Washington DC's low-income families and elderly. The medical clinic started in 1974, standing alongside the pantry. The organization grew to include legal, social and educational services, becoming a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded health center about five years ago.

operated by the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). Staff and volunteers grow orchard fruit, including pears, apples and berries.

George Jones, CEO, says the farm has become a laboratory for volunteers and patients to work together just outside of the city, enjoying the fresh air, building garden skills and participating in alleviating food insecurity. About 10-15,000 pounds of produce has been harvested for the pantry from the farm (UDC also contributes extra produce from some of their field).

Rooftop gardens have also been added at both clinic sites. Volunteers, including patients, tend the plants. Classes are held on the rooftop, covering topics such as nutrition, food preparation and garden skills.

Glean for the City is a program started by the center that is in partnership with metro area farmers markets. Volunteers pick up donated food from the markets that didn't sell. They receive 1-2000 pounds of donated food on these weekend gleanings, adding it to the week's pantry offerings.

Despite all the success, Jones wishes they could grow more and do more. He notes that the farm food costs more to produce than it would to simply buy. But BFC is about transformation, and that process requires more than simply handing out food. Bread for the City lives up to its name.

The food pantry operates five days a week, eight hours a day. Patients and community members may access it once per month, with about 5000 families using it monthly. Most families visit the food pantry six to seven times per year.

The pantry is designed as a supplement to assist families to make ends meet. Originally, three days

worth of food was given, but this has increased to five. It bridges the gap between Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which typically last 3.1 weeks, and the end of the month. Staples are included, so there is always a meat, fresh food and some shelf stable food.

In recent years, BFC increased its ability to provide fresh food by leasing a three-acre portion of a farm

*For over 40 years, Bread for the City has provided the urban poor with a food pantry and access to tools that assist community development and health justice.*

*Community gardens, produce bags, gleanings and connections to social services are fundamental to the health care at the center.*

## PROMOTING EQUITY WITH CHOICE

Bread for the City (BFC) promotes economic and racial justice. Addressing food insecurity is one piece of that effort. They also provide legal, housing, medical, literacy and other social services. As they examine ways in which structures deter equity, Jones says they are also looking at how BFC might have unrecognized implicit bias in its practices.

Giving clients power over their choices is one way BFC tries to promote equity. Clients select what they want from the varieties

of produce, meat, grains and shelf stable items available. They have a distribution allotment, but if they prefer all their vegetables to be broccoli, that is their choice. This simple act changed the way food transactions are perceived by staff and clients.

The center also avoids offering non-nutritious foods. Their gardens, gleanings and farm allow them to limit pantry food to about 60% of the total. Patients with literacy problems are assisted reading labels and making their own choices without being stigmatized.



## INTERVENTIONS

### PARTNERING WITH AN AREA FOOD BANK

#### COLLABORATING WITH A LOCAL UNIVERSITY FARMING PROGRAM

#### PARTNERING WITH LOCAL SOCIAL SERVICE, LEGAL AID, LITERACY, HOUSING AND OTHER MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

#### CREATING ROOFTOP GARDENS AT CLINICS WITH CLASSES IN GARDENING, COOKING AND NUTRITION

## PARTNERS

### CAPITAL AREA FOOD BANK

### FEEDING AMERICA

### LOCAL COALITIONS

### UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

