

# Insecurity Amid a Pandemic

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## UNI Alumni: Fighting Food Insecurity Amid a Pandemic

Written by: Olivia Sickelka

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As



unemployment soars and businesses remain closed, food insecurity begins to creep into communities across the nation. For UNI Alums, Shannon Bass, Dan Bohnker, Joslyn Canfield, Maddie Christensen, Bryan Helleso, Melissa Hicok, Becca Huber, AmeriCorps Member Tyler Montgomery, Mara Warnke, Michelle Winkey, and the rest of the staff at the Northeast Iowa Food Bank (NEIFB), production seemed to ramp up overnight. UNI alums makeup one-third of the staff at the NEIFB, an impressive percentage highlighting alumni commitment to #EngagedUNI and #BetterTogether.

From day one it was made clear to the NEIFB staff just how crucial they each were to the food system. There was no one else that was going to play a role in providing hunger relief amidst skyrocketing unemployment and the threat of mass illness, but the individuals gathered. Thankfully for the staffers at the NEIFB, they knew what they had signed up for.

“I won’t lie, it’s been challenging,” states Bryan Helleso, Marketing Manager at the NEIFB. “But morale is up.”



The process for providing mass relief to counties served by the Northeast Iowa Foodbank

was not

easy as the pandemic rolled in. Much of the food acquired and distributed is donated or rescued. With people panic purchasing food, the food banks sourcing strategy was significantly impacted. Another aspect affected was volunteerism. With the stay-at-home order in place, NEIFB saw a dramatic decrease in the number of volunteers showing up to lend a helping hand.

The staff at the NEIFB has had to dig deep as the fight against food insecurity continues. For the UNI alumni on the front lines, tapping into why they fell in love with nonprofit work in the first place is always a good place to start. For UNI grad, Maddie Christensen, she simply continues the work she started in college.

“I had amazing professors who taught me so much about the ins and outs of the nonprofit world. Through student organizations such as Nonprofit Leadership Alliance and Connecting Alumni to Students I gained leadership experience that made stepping into a role of leading volunteers so incredibly easy.” states Maddie, Individual Volunteer Coordinator at the NEIFB.

Preparing for a pandemic was at one time, a far off thought in the minds of most people. But as COVID-19 continued its severe spread throughout the world, plans had to be put into place relatively hastily. For UNI alum Dan Bohnker, his preparedness for the pandemic reverted back to his classes in Leisure, Youth and Human Services at UNI and his involvement in the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance.

“My classes helped me to gain exposure into many different nonprofits including the Northeast Iowa Food Bank. It was here that I first became aware and interested in the mission of Northeast Iowa Food Bank. The skills I learned at UNI help me every day of work. I am very grateful for the education and experiences I had while I was there.” states Dan, Group Volunteer Coordinator at NEIFB.



The coronavirus pandemic, although difficult for many to navigate, is not a new concept in terms of assistance for the NEIFB. The food bank's inception was a direct response to the closing of the Wrath Meatpacking plant in the winter of 1981. Thousands of people suddenly lost their jobs

and were at risk of going hungry. In the last 39 years, the NEIFB has stood as a symbol of relief through economic downturns, flooding, and deadly tornadoes. Although, on a seemingly larger scale the coronavirus pandemic is no exception. The food bank will continue to support the counties and communities within its districts.

The food bank has been a staple to providing support in times of need to people who suffer most. The easiest way to support the food bank in return is through volunteering or donating. Visit [www.NortheastIowaFoodbank.org](http://www.NortheastIowaFoodbank.org) to see how you can help out your friends, family, neighbors, and your food bank.

#EngagedUNI #BetterTogether #UNITogether



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