



NOT  
FORGOTTEN

FALL 2023

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## Unhoused in Minnesota

The Challenge Thousands Will Face in the Coming Months

As fall settles in and the months of winter are knocking at our door, what does it mean for those experiencing homelessness? It means that your need for consistent direct services such as food access become even more critical. It can even be the deciding factor between life and death for some who are navigating health struggles.

Every day, when you are unhoused, you are spending as much time as possible walking from one area to the next in hopes of being able to check off some of your daily needs. The weather significantly limits your ability to do so in the winter. By having a secure knowledge and trust in when and where you will be able to eat, you can commit that limited and precious travel time by foot to other basic needs like health, clothing, shelter, and more.

While other nonprofits offering street outreach programs do important work, the majority do not frequent the local communities experiencing homelessness the same way Loaves & Fishes does. It may be less often, with less resources, indoors only, or other restrictions to access. This is where we show up differently and consistently for our guests. Our street outreach team is committed to providing the same access to food in the same areas our guests have come to know throughout the rest of the year.

The meals we offer consistently carry a crucial message to our guests in the cold and isolating days of late fall and winter. Loaves & Fishes' food is a vehicle of our core values as an organization. It's the conduit to comfort and kindness for our guests no matter what they are experiencing. It transforms a moment from 'hopeless' into 'hopeful'. More than just a meal, it's a constant reminder that there are people in the world that care and will continue to care each day... no matter what season it is.



Kiley Benson, Executive Director



"I've seen people's lives change because of the outreach program. It's not merely about survival; it's about having the opportunity to live, free from the constant worry of where their next meal will come from."

-Loaves & Fishes Volunteer



## Welcoming a New Board Chair: John Larson

*From Jewelry Making to Hunger Relief: My Journey to the Loaves & Fishes Board*

My personal journey with the issue of hunger started in 2013. My wife and I launched a food-themed jewelry brand called Delicacies Jewelry knowing absolutely nothing about making jewelry or eCommerce, so of course this made PERFECT sense. But from day one our goal was to donate money to hunger causes from every purchase. We just didn't know where to donate. We knew next to nothing about the issue of hunger in the United States.

So, we started by googling things like "hunger organizations" and "how to fight hunger." Intimidated by the breadth and scope of the problem, we punted and let the celebrity chefs we partnered with choose the organization they wanted to donate to. This worked for a couple of years, until we realized that something was missing.

When we stumbled across a quote by Bishop Desmond Tutu — "Do your little bit of good where you are. It's those little bits of good that overwhelm the world." — his words stopped us in our tracks.



*John has been volunteering at our commissary kitchen with his wife, daughter, and daughter's friends since 2018.*



It was the catalyst to realize that we were seeking a true partnership. We didn't just want to donate money. We wanted to volunteer. We wanted to learn about the issue. And it made us realize that you don't have to do everything; you just have to do something.

A close friend of ours suggested we check out Loaves & Fishes because they offered multiple in-person volunteer opportunities throughout the Twin Cities. So I signed up.

It was May of 2018 and I was in the Twin Cities packing up our office as we were moving our inventory to a fulfillment center out of state. I had spent all day packing and schlepping boxes, disassembling and moving office furniture, and hauling truckloads of things to the Goodwill. Once 4pm came, I was exhausted. All I wanted to do was go home and crawl into bed.

I got a calendar reminder that I had signed up to volunteer and serve meals with Loaves & Fishes. I told myself I needed to cancel. Too tired. I just don't have it in me, I thought. But for some reason I went. I showed up, I smiled, and I said those four magic words: "How can I help?" And I meant it.

That experience volunteering was profoundly impactful for me. I met the Site Coordinator Mona and learned so much about hunger in our community and the struggles our guests face. I learned how the food is made, how it is served, all about food rescue, and how it makes a concrete difference in so many peoples' lives. I saw first-hand how individuals really can make a difference.

At 9am the next day, I called Cathy Maes, then the Executive Director, and asked her the same question: "How can I help?" Thus began a five-year journey of showing up to volunteer, to board meetings, and trying to understand the issues on a deeper level. It was a far cry from our initial days of googling "how to fight hunger" — that's for sure. It put names and faces and individual stories to the issue of hunger.





Photo courtesy of Russell Heeter Photography

## Brian Finley & Rebecca Van Handel

"Loaves & Fishes plays a critical role in our community providing healthy meals to those who need it most. We especially appreciate their dedication to sustainability through the food rescue program and couldn't think of a better way to celebrate our wedding than introducing our guests to their incredible work and raising funds to help them make an even larger impact."



"Loaves & Fishes helped us find our way, personally and for our business, in the fight against hunger and food insecurity." - John Larson

This summer, we celebrated alongside two remarkable couples who included Loaves & Fishes in their big days. We are inspired by your ongoing dedication to serving our community and wish you a lifetime of love and happiness!

In addition to volunteering with Loaves & Fishes, we also volunteer regularly at an after school meal program in our adopted hometown of Merida, Mexico during the school year. It has been such a gift in our lives.

One of my proudest parenting moments was seeing my 16-year-old daughter become a leader among her friends, encouraging them to volunteer at the Loaves & Fishes commissary kitchen in Minneapolis. Her friends had traveled 2,500 miles from Merida, Mexico to see Taylor Swift perform at U.S. Bank Stadium. They also prepared 500 pounds of healthy, nutritious food to be served to our guests. My daughter was thrilled, of course, to go the concert, but she was also genuinely excited to share her experience of volunteering and helping others with her best friends. It's a moment I will never forget.

I am also proud to say that since starting Delicacies Jewelry we have donated 828,000 meals both to Loaves & Fishes and other hunger non-profits in the U.S. and Mexico. Beyond the money, we've made profound and powerful connections in the communities we live in through volunteering. By showing up and asking: "How can I help?"

Thank you for your trust, support, and unwavering dedication to our shared mission of fighting hunger. I am excited about the journey ahead, and I look forward to working with all of you to build a bright, bright future for Loaves & Fishes.

You can email me directly at [john@delicaciesjewelry.com](mailto:john@delicaciesjewelry.com). My door is open 24/7/365. **And please consider signing up to volunteer or donate today.** I am SO glad I did.

## John & Nicole Adams Giardino

"A few months ago, we asked ourselves the question, 'how many people can we really feed for the cost of a wedding reception?' Well, now we have the answer and it is over 10,000 meals! At our reception we had about 200 family and St. Cecilia parishioners, and they gave close to \$6,000 in support of hunger relief. Their generosity far exceeded our goal of matching our wedding expenses. Nothing could make us happier as our first married venture."



Photo courtesy of Dave Hrbacek, The Catholic Spirit

All my best,  
John Peter Larson  
Loaves & Fishes Board Chair





# A Millennial's Story: Emily

## *Navigating the World of Inflation as a Young Adult*

I always thought I would be prepared to struggle financially. Growing up, my parents were limited financially. They were not afraid to talk about finances and the necessity of budgeting. When I was old enough to understand their situation, my parents were in a better position and freely gave me and my younger siblings advice on how to avoid the hardships they experienced.

One of the things my mom and I always enjoyed doing together was running errands. It was a great time for us to catch up and it gave her an opportunity to pass on her budgeting wisdom. We have a family of eight and grocery shopping for that many people on a tight budget is no joke. I remember her showing me how I could spend \$50 for two weeks' worth of groceries when I first moved out on my own. She made sure I was being smart and financially responsible, and I believe I have done a good job applying her advice to my life. However, all her advice could not have prepared me for today's reality.

My partner and I graduated from college in 2021. We earned four-year degrees, work full time at jobs we enjoy, have two other roommates, share one car, and take public transportation as often as possible. In general, we are doing our best to keep up with the increased cost of living as two young professionals starting out their careers.

We alternate weeks paying for groceries and we are hard pressed to stay within our budget of \$80-\$120 for one weeks' worth of groceries. We love trying new foods, but the cost of groceries does not allow us to cook outside the box, or the can, or the bag in the freezer.

We have a few staple meals that we make every week because the ingredients are more affordable. Breakfast is typically fruits, yogurt, granola bars, egg, toast, and all the combinations you can make with those items. Lunches include pasta salad, canned soup or chili, and sandwiches with lunch meat. We care the most about dinner and put the most money towards that meal. Even then, we stick with our staples of different chicken and pasta dinners. It is amazing how far a siracha mayo can carry a meal!

It is not lost on us that we are in a better situation than other members of our community including our peers our own age. We regularly have conversations with our friends about how we are supposed to get through these financial challenges and how we can brighten up an economic reality that feels dull most days. It always comes back to supporting each other however we can because we feel that is all that's left for us to control.

As I grocery shop, I cringe at the price of fresh fruits, vegetables, and proteins. I can't help but think about our Loaves & Fishes site coordinators who are challenged with being creative with the random assortment of food items we receive through our food rescue program. I love hearing about their tips and tricks and how they spice up the meals they create. I often ask: "how do you make the most of what you have? What is your go-to affordable, healthy meal?" I look forward to learning alongside this community and supporting each other during tough times. I continue to hope for a day when things are fair and equitable — when everyone can reliably access their basic needs.

# Thank You

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. We are grateful to all of you who attended, contributed to, and supported the 2023 Fall Jubilee.

Your contributions are already making a tangible difference.

**Save the date for next years' Fall Jubilee on September 21st, 2024**



## give TO THE MAX Nov. 16, 2023

**Join us for Minnesota's annual day of giving on Thursday, November 16th!**

It's your chance to create change locally.

When you give to Loaves & Fishes, your gift will be **AMPLIFIED.**

Early giving starts on Wednesday, November 1st.

Make your donation here:

[www.givemn.org/organization/Loavesandfishesmn](http://www.givemn.org/organization/Loavesandfishesmn)

Scan here to donate or learn more!



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