



SERVINGS

News from the East Texas Food Bank

2024 Holiday Newsletter

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Every Little Bit Helps: Alex's Journey with the Longview Resource Center

Our Resource Centers are more than just food pantries — they're lifelines for neighbors in need. Neighbors like Alex.



85-year-old Alex discovered the Longview Resource Center (LRC) several months ago. He enjoys supplementing his weekly groceries with fresh produce and other nutritious foods, such as hazelnuts.

"Prices are really high at the store right now, so every little bit helps," said Alex. "I have diabetes and take high blood pressure medicine, so I try to eat food that's good for me."

Alex is retired and a widower. He had to learn how to take care of himself after his wife of 43 years, Betty, tragically lost her life at work during a bank robbery.

"I miss her and look at her photo every day," he said with tears in his eyes. He is deeply thankful for his family, including two children, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

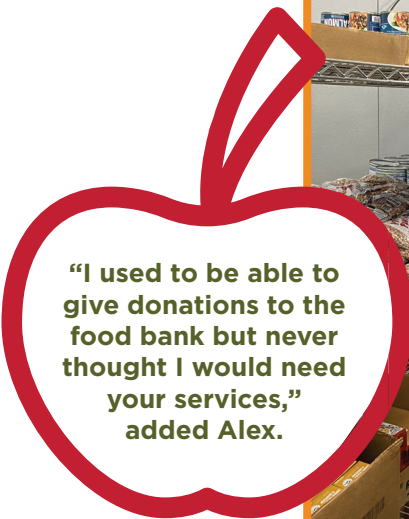
The LRC is located in a low-income neighborhood, where 31% of the population lives below the poverty line. The center provides nutritious food through a neighbor-choice distribution model, which allows people like Alex to choose the food that is best for them.

"We currently estimate that the East Texas Food Bank will serve 1.9 million meals annually at the LRC," said Kim Morris, Chief Impact Officer.

According to *Map the Meal Gap*, an annual study conducted by Feeding America, an estimated 16.7% of Gregg County residents, including 26.7% of children, are at risk of hunger.

"I really appreciate the friendly staff who visit with me and being able to shop and learn about other services when I come here each week," added Alex. "It's wonderful to have a place like this to help seniors like me."

Alex's story reminds us that hunger can touch anyone, at any stage of life, and highlights the critical role that your gifts play in supporting our most vulnerable neighbors. Thank you for supporting the East Texas Food Bank.



"I used to be able to give donations to the food bank but never thought I would need your services," added Alex.



FROM SKIPPED MEALS TO A STOCKED PANTRY

Jessica is a single, working adult from Tyler who, like so many of our neighbors, found herself struggling to make ends meet.

“My rent is over \$1,000 a month, car note, insurance and all the other bills,” said Jessica as she held back her tears. “I skip meals or eat things that are not good for me because I don’t have anything left at the end of each month. I have six dollars to my name right now.”



Unfortunately, stories like hers are all too common in our community. It illustrates the silent struggle many of our neighbors face, and the tough choices they must make between food and other life essentials. **Thankfully, they can rely on our programs to help fill in the gaps.**

When Jessica came to the Tyler Resource Center for the first time, she was all smiles as she selected nutritious food from the pantry. “I love to cook, and I am hoping this will keep me from stressing about where my next meal will come from.”

She admitted feeling embarrassed to ask for help initially, but was grateful that a friend encouraged her to take the first step.

“I am so excited that the East Texas Food Bank helps people like me as I didn’t know where to turn. Thank you for having this resource for me.”

HARVESTING HOPE

In the fields of Lindale, Jonathan Wells tends to more than just crops; he cultivates hope.

As a fourth-generation farmer, he’s one of our many partners who provide fresh produce to the East Texas Food Bank, benefitting our neighbors in need.



“The fruit crops this year, including blueberries, peaches and plums, are some of the best we’ve had in five years because of the colder winter,” explained Wells. “We grow 26 varieties of peaches with over 5,000 trees.”

“The East Texas Food Bank buys produce from local farmers to feed our hungry neighbors,” said Andrew Ayo, Chief Operating Officer. “We served over 15.7 million pounds of fruits and vegetables last fiscal year. It’s a win-win as the food bank is able to acquire fresh produce right from the area, and we are able to help the local farmers.”

Wells sells some of his produce at his store, Main Street Produce and Plants, in Lindale, as well as at farmers markets in the region.

“I enjoy working with the East Texas Food Bank and am happy to participate in helping people receive nutritious food. It’s rewarding to see the products we grow go out to serve a good cause.”

Thank you, Jonathan, for helping us nourish our neighbors with healthy local produce!



A Message from our Board Chair

Dear Friend,

One of my favorite sayings is **“Nothing changes if nothing changes.”** This applies to the operation of the East Texas Food Bank. As the number of neighbors needing assistance continues to grow, we must evolve to fill that need.

We rose to the challenge and in 18 months, opened new resource centers in Longview, Texarkana and Tyler. These centers, along with the Deep East Texas Resource Center, will serve over three million meals in the coming year.

We also opened a cold-storage Produce Distribution Center, which allows us to store and assemble a variety of produce for our 200 partner agencies.

During this holiday season, I ask you to think about what you can do to transform our community for the better. The construction of each facility begins with one brick and every produce box with one fruit or vegetable, which cumulatively brings about a sea of change.

In the same way, filling a volunteer slot or making a monetary donation helps us fulfill the mission to Fight Hunger and Feed Hope. (If you’d like to make a gift online, simply visit etfb.link/240114.)

With gratitude and wishes for a joyous and peaceful holiday season,

Leslie Harrison
Chair, Board of Directors of the East Texas Food Bank

A HELPING HAND

Ron Webb has volunteered in Lufkin for the mobile pantry, and now the Deep East Texas Resource Center, for three and a half years.

He is a trained electrician and came to Lufkin for a job. He met his wife Mary and never left. Together they have four children, eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. "We were married 26 years, but a few months ago, she suffered a heart attack and passed away."

Ron has been food-insecure before. He remembers skipping meals, pawning tools and picking up aluminum cans to make ends meet.

Now, he stocks shelves and assists neighbors with their shopping four days a week. "It's great to see people's faces light up when they see the food we offer, especially the children."

In his spare time, he helps his elderly neighbors. "I bring them food as many are homebound. It just feels good to take care of others."

I will keep doing this until I meet my maker."

We're thankful for volunteers like Ron, who selflessly give their time to help us further our mission of fighting hunger and feeding hope in East Texas.

Interested in volunteering?

Visit easttexasfoodbank.org/join-the-fight/donate-time/.



"I was looking for something to do in retirement after I injured my back, and I love helping people," said Ron.

FAITH IN ACTION: LONGVIEW CHURCH PARTNERSHIP

For Mobberly Baptist Church of Longview, providing nourishment to the hungry is part of their mission of sharing hope with East Texans.

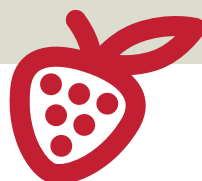
Greg Martin, pastor of congregational care, says the church recognizes that food insecurity is a significant issue and is grateful that we expanded our programs into Longview and opened the Resource Center.

"Our ultimate goal is to share the love and hope of Jesus by meeting people's basic needs," said Martin. "According to Isaiah 58:10, the Bible says, 'And if you offer yourself to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness and your night will be like noonday.' Jesus cares most about the hearts of people, but he also cares about their day-to-day physical needs. He himself fed 5,000 hungry people in a day."

Martin says the church is passionate about investing its time and money in helping many organizations like East Texas Food Bank meet the needs of people outside the church.



"We believe that the East Texas Food Bank is an efficient and effective team in providing healthy food. They offer convenient hours, and because they buy their food in bulk, each dollar feeds more people. Our prayer is that these funds will help to feed many—perhaps providing the only meals they may have through the course of the week."



SUPPORT CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Thousands of children across East Texas rely on free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch at school, but struggle with food insecurity when they don't have access to this resource.

We have three child hunger programs to address the meal gaps these children experience:



SUMMER FEEDING

We deliver fresh breakfast and lunch to community organizations to feed children throughout the summer. This year, we expanded our sites from 35 to 45!

KIDS CAFÉ

We provided over 115,000 meals to local after-school tutoring programs last year.

BACKPACK PROGRAM

We provide meals to children in 54 East Texas school districts so they have food during the weekends. Last school year, we distributed over 200,000 backpacks!

Your gift this holiday season will ensure that these children receive nutritious food year-round. Visit etfb.link/240114 to give.



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A LETTER FROM A NEIGHBOR

Every dollar you give to the East Texas Food Bank has a profound impact on the lives of individuals in need. We hope you enjoy reading this heartfelt letter we received that embodies the difference your contributions make.

Dear East Texas Food Bank,

I am a widow, retired teacher and grandmother. I came to you two months ago for help with food, and your volunteers encouraged me to take extra items with me for other low-income neighbors.

I distributed the extra food to people who were ill or elderly, had no one to visit them, and had to depend on a neighbor for rides to the store, among other challenges. I also gave food to others at my apartment complex who were struggling. One of my neighbors is a 90-year-old who is wheelchair bound who has no car, no children, or anyone to visit him, and you put joy in their hearts and gratitude for the food and you. I saw smiles on people who never smile.

It is amazing how grumpy people begin smiling when they receive your generous gift. Despite having a broken back and other health issues, I was blessed by your people.

Thank you for your generosity.

ETFB BY THE NUMBERS

1 in 6

East Texans are Hungry

1 in 4

Children are Hungry

31+ Million

Meals Distributed this Year

200

Agency Partners & Feeding Programs

26

Counties Served

4

Resource Centers: Lufkin, Tyler, Longview and Texarkana



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