



Grantee Highlight: Innovation Grant

Kitchen to Pantry

Hands on Hartford – Hartford, CT

Organization Overview

There is a lot of edible, unused food in grocery stores and farms that is discarded, adding to the excessive amounts of trash going to Connecticut's waste-to-energy plants. And at the same time, one-third of the residents in Hartford live under the federal poverty line and is the most food insecure community in Connecticut. Hartford is considered a "food desert" with residents facing a scarcity of available, fresh foods due to a lack of affordable, accessible grocery stores, farmers markets, and other healthy food providers.

Hands on Hartford (HOH), founded in 1969, is a social service nonprofit dedicated to strengthen community in Hartford by helping low-income residents in the areas of food, housing, and health. Hands on Hartford reaches about 8,500 people each year, through MANNA Food and Neighborhood Services (e.g. Community Meals, Community Pantry, the Backpack Nutrition Program for children), HOH Housing, and the Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau.

How has RecycleCT helped?

With RecycleCT's funding in 2017, Hands on Hartford's *Kitchen to Pantry* project provides families and individual access to healthy, easy to use produce, by adding value to hundreds of pounds of produce they receive from grocery stores, farms, special events, and more. HOH now receives rescued food and is able to sort out

inedible food, wash and trim unusable parts, chop, and

repackage good food for distribution at Hands on Hartford's Community Pantry. For example, large bags of limes are offered individually and watermelon and oversized squash are cut into smaller portions.

Food scraps generated from processing and repackaging, in addition to expired canned goods from food drives, or other foods with no reuse or edible value are collected and transported by Blue Earth Compost to Quantum Biopower, an anaerobic-digester plant that turns food scraps into electricity and digestate. As a result of RecycleCT's grant, Hands on Hartford has recycled 18,000 pounds of food scraps.



© Delilah Fairclough-Stewart



© Delilah Fairclough-Stewart

"When we're talking to other folks and other funders and individual donors, and we talk about the composting, the reduction in food waste, and the increase in choice. It also inspires greater [financial] support from them. It's like a bragging point for us."
– Kate Shafer

The ripple effect of this *Kitchen to Pantry* food rescue and composting project is immense, Janet Bermudez the Program Manager at MANNA says, “We have gotten our volunteers and our staff to really understand the importance of reducing food waste and to really embrace this whole idea of picking up this produce – some of it great, some of it isn’t – we don’t have to chuck it in the garbage, we can chuck it in the compost bins.”



Kate Shafer, HOH Communications Manager

Additionally, the layout of their Pantry and the repackaging and rescue of the food gives their residents more choices. Kate Shafer the Communications Manager at HOH says, “It reduces food waste because the folks who are coming to the pantry are choosing what they are actually going to use instead of what they have to take, a preset package of food.”

Future Plans

Hands on Hartford has been able to expand their outreach through this RecycleCT-funded project, Kate Shafer explains, “When we’re talking to other folks and other funders and individual donors, and we talk about the composting, the reduction in food waste, and the increase in choice. It also inspires greater [financial] support from them. It’s like a bragging point for us.” The *Kitchen to Pantry* project will continue rescuing, sorting, repackaging, composting, and distributing food as they provide support to Hartford residents.

The RecycleCT Foundation, Inc. seeks to promote and support programs that educate Connecticut students or the public about waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting to increase these activities in the state.
<http://www.RecycleCT.com>