

Building a Sustainable Future without Hunger

Annual Report 2023



METRO CARING

ENDING HUNGER AT ITS ROOT
TERMINAR LAS CAUSAS PROFUNDAS DEL HAMBRE



Letter

from the CEOs & Board Chair

Building a sustainable future without hunger.

Sustainability has many definitions. One that we appreciate, from the University of Alberta, defines it as meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to fulfill theirs. This definition mirrors our dual mission at Metro Caring. We continuously ask ourselves: How do we make sure a family has access to healthy, fresh foods today while simultaneously finding solutions that ensure they don't need to visit us a year—even a generation—from now?



It's a challenge, particularly as new barriers to food access emerge. Just as we were recovering from the pandemic's health and economic aftershocks, we were battered with inflated food prices coupled with reductions in government programs like SNAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that provides families with dollars to use at a grocery store or farmer's market. Following these cuts in March 2023,

new household visits to our Fresh Foods Market surged by 300% compared to the same time last year when visits were already high due to the pandemic.

At times of crisis, we're grateful for such a dedicated community. Our volunteers, supporters, and staff have all risen to meet this immediate need and sustain the daily operations of the Fresh Foods Market. But we'll be honest, with over 10,000 pounds of food going out the door every day, keeping the shelves stocked is a challenging, never-ending task. We need to address root causes more diligently, with great intensity and creative innovation, if we are to sustain a future where chronic hunger becomes obsolete. A future like that takes a serious investment and a holistic approach.

This report references the [United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals](#) because ending hunger can't happen in a silo. We have to partner across our community and lean into global sustainability goals to meet our mission. And, we need to find ways to sustain ourselves, to endure the challenges we face without succumbing to burnout.



Metro Caring supports the Sustainable Development Goals

This year, our leadership structure evolved to a co-CEO model: Teva as CEO-Visionary and Erik as CEO-Integrator. This framework leverages our individual strengths, allowing us to oversee distinct responsibilities that align with them. Shared leadership has helped us focus on collective action and the value of shared power.

As we search for long-term solutions to hunger, we're hearing a common concern across our community, from program participants, shoppers, volunteers, and donors alike: The lack of affordable housing in our community is a key driver of hunger.



We're thinking about how we can maximize the use of our building and property to directly address this root cause by adding affordable housing to our site. While we're still in exploratory stages, we are optimistic that the future Metro Caring site can directly address a leading cause of hunger and demonstrate how co-creating with community can lead to long-term positive change that reverses a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood.

We will sustain our work, our community, and ourselves until the day when hunger is no longer a chronic condition in our community. Thank you to our dedicated, passionate, and unwavering community for joining us.



Handwritten signature of Deborah Price in black ink.

Deborah Price
Chair, Board of Directors

Handwritten signature of Erik Hicks in black ink.

Erik Hicks
CEO-Integrator

Handwritten signature of Teva Sienicki in black ink.

Teva Sienicki
CEO-Visionary

2 ZERO HUNGER



Zero Hunger Means Zero Barriers

Whether we're talking about ending hunger globally or right here in Denver, we need to remove the barriers that prevent people in our community from accessing the food they need for themselves and their families. Our Fresh Foods Market is the busiest place at Metro Caring. More than 700 households visit us every week, and they come from a variety of backgrounds. We've met immigrants escaping the war in Ukraine, people displaced from South America, and hundreds of Denverites who had their SNAP benefits reduced.



12,485

Households shopped in the Fresh Foods Market

37,183

Appointments in the Fresh Foods Market

\$8,151,383

Value of food distributed

26%

Of our community are children



ERIK, IN AN OPINION TO THE COLORADO SUN:

"I'm proud of the work that we do at food banks, pantries, and nonprofit organizations. But picking up food from a charity is not the same as getting to go to a grocery store. SNAP gives families more power to decide what they need, where they want, and on their own time."

Ensuring a Consistent Supply of Food



We take pride in our Fresh Foods Market because our community can choose the food they want. Most of our food is donated from local suppliers and individuals, which helps us save money to buy items in high demand. But sometimes, our shelves run low, and for a family shopping on that day, it can be disappointing.

We're looking into ways to make sure we always have certain essential foods in stock, based on what our community says they need. As the true experts, our community knows what items are best and what values are most important to uphold in the food we buy, such as food that is local, sustainably grown, or from farms that pay a living wage. This is the first step toward our Universal Basic Food program, which aims to show how guaranteed food items can make our city and state healthier.





2 ZERO HUNGER



Breaking Down Language Barriers

We want everyone to feel safe and welcome in our market, regardless of their background or the language they speak. Our language justice efforts included updating market signage with more universal graphics to show food categories. We also translate temporary signs into the most common languages of our shoppers, like Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, and English. Conversations can be facilitated by Language Line, an on-demand service that video calls a live interpreter. Plus, many of our volunteers are multilingual, able to communicate in the language of people's hearts. As we improve access to healthy food, we hope to model best practices for food banks and grocers across the nation.



Connecting to the Best Resources



People don't come to our Fresh Foods Market because they can't find food at a regular grocery store. They are often forced to rely on places like Metro Caring because of barriers that prevent them from affording food. This year, our Community Development team launched the Community Connections program, a one-on-one service to help people access the most culturally appropriate resources to address these barriers.

Community Connections is an improved version of our Navigators program thanks to feedback from our community. One major change was making the service optional, which has reduced wait times for shopping appointments and allowed our Connectors to spend more time with each person. Now, Connectors have time to help people enroll for SNAP and Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) benefits on site.

235

Weekly Community Connections meetings

7,781

ID vouchers and birth certificates distributed

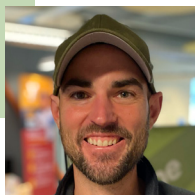
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Monthly partners table in the Fresh Foods Market to expand resources



GERARDO, COMMUNITY CONNECTOR COORDINATOR:

"We can take extra time, listen to their story, and hear what's going on. Being able to dig into the conversation a little deeper, that's what makes Community Connections important."



WIL, COMMUNITY CONNECTOR:

"It's really gratifying when people come back to Metro Caring and say they found a solution, like housing, because of a connection you helped make."



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Good Health Requires Good Community

Our Nutrition team expanded this year to host four programs plus various cooking clubs that focus on Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL). All these classes use culturally relevant programming that help people build a positive relationship with food, their body, and their culture.



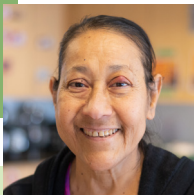
Empowering Community Leaders

We've learned that community-led programs are more meaningful and offer more relevant lessons. To support our community leaders better, we provided training using a model called Project Dulce. This is a culturally sensitive, peer-led diabetes education program that focuses on underserved populations. Established by Scripps Diabetes Institute in 1997, the curriculum features an overview of diabetes, its complications, and topics on diet, exercise, medication, and blood glucose monitoring, while being sensitive to cultural beliefs that may affect diabetes self-management. Our new community facilitators speak various languages and plan to expand Metro Caring classes to be hosted in more languages, like Arabic.

GLORIA, DIABETES ENTRE AMIGOS GRADUATE:

"Sometimes certain diet plans tell us we must give up our favorite foods or only eat one type of cuisine. But I had classmates who shared new ways to prepare important dishes from my culture in a way that meets my dietary needs."

Translated from Spanish



Caring for the Next Generation

This year, we partnered with Metropolitan State University of Denver to launch Baby Café, a lactation support group for parents and their babies. Founded by Danette, a community leader, the weekly group offers support and expert advice from lactation consultants. Some parents found Baby Café to be a source of friendship and comfort, with evidence-based support to explore options that work best for their family. The program also hosted special events, including a Valentine's Day Brunch for parents and their babies, with free "baby and me" photos.



KEILY, AS TOLD TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN PBS:

"Find the right groups like this, like Baby Café, where you're going to be loved, where they're going to care for you and take care of you."

Nutrition & Health Programs

All programs were founded and are currently led by members of our community.

- Cocina y nutrición
- Kidz in the Kitchen/
Niños en la cocina
- Cooking Clubs
- Diabetes Among Friends/
Diabetes entre amigos
- Baby Café/
Bebe café



543

Visits to
Cooking Classes

28

Visits to
Baby Café

46

Graduates of Diabetes
Among Friends

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



Responsibility from Seed to Plate

Growing food in our city strengthens our understanding and connection to food—and each other. We can grow many of our favorite foods locally, proving that it doesn't need to travel miles around the globe to get to our tables. Our greenhouse helped three local nonprofits and food-focused organizations grow seedlings for community gardens. It's also home to a community member's budding house plant business, Planting Joy. In our Hydro Farm, we welcomed another new farmer to get experience learning hydroponic growing techniques.

Through a partnership with Ekar Farms, we worked with Denver's International Rescue Committee to welcome Afghan women refugees to the farm each week. The women cultivated a small section of land and used the produce to cook fresh meals for their families at their new homes in Denver. Ekar Farms donates a lot of their harvests to people in the metro area experiencing food insecurity, including to our Fresh Foods Market.



300+

Seedlings distributed
to community

800+

Seed packets distributed
to community

RAYZE, AS TOLD TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN PBS:

"I was a rancher. I had my own animals and I had big farm back in Afghanistan, so when I come to this farm, I feel so excited. We make food that reminds me of my country back home, and that's the happiest I've been."



A Sustainable Future Takes Dedicated Volunteers

Volunteers are crucial to keeping the Fresh Foods Market, warehouse, kitchen, and gardens operating. This year, they sorted through more than 2 million pounds of food and welcome thousands of community members to Metro Caring.

Our volunteer program hosts opportunities for work experience, training, and community building. Our apprentice program trains individuals to re-enter the workforce through partnerships with AARP, SER National, ReHire Colorado, and the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless. We also welcome students from local high schools, giving them a chance to learn new skills and get involved in their local community.

1,821

Annual volunteers

23,582

Hours of volunteering

2,546,157

Pounds of food sorted

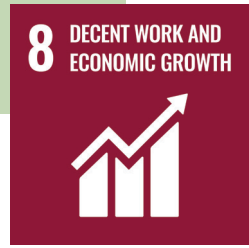
\$810,277

Value of volunteer time*

JOCELYN, VOLUNTEER THROUGH THE ARRUPE JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL WORK STUDY PROGRAM:

"Metro Caring contributes to my future by helping me learn to communicate with coworkers and to better understand others. I want to work in the medical field, maybe nursing or as an ultrasound tech. These jobs require me to take care of others, to be nurturing. I feel that the skills I've gained here will help me with future nursing jobs."

*Calculated by the [Value of Volunteer Time](#) report by Independent Sector



Economic Growth

for Community Wealth

We must invest in an economy where everyone can use their skills to build the wealth they need to be healthy, take care of family, and participate in their community. Throughout our nation’s history, communities of color, especially Black people, have been left out of wealth building opportunities. We hope to reverse that trend and strengthen a local economy that values fair financial and social wealth for everyone—whether Black, Brown, or white.



This year, we launched our first Mastermind Circle to bring together small business entrepreneurs who empower each other to build economic stability for themselves and their community. Our monthly classes included one-on-one coaching, business planning, and co-operative development assistance, using a culturally responsive model that better suits entrepreneurs from historically marginalized communities.

Mastermind Circle Topics Covered:

- Entities, Taxes, and Banking
- Marketing & Communications
- Funding, Budgeting, and Insurance
- Scale, Growth, and the Solidarity Economy

23
Inaugural Mastermind Circle graduates

7
Expert business consultants and advisors

SANDY, MASTERMIND CIRCLE GRADUATE:

“The entire class was informational and engaging. I enjoyed the connections with other new community business people who are excited about their work.”

Great Leaders for Greater Equality



Everyone should have a voice in the policies that govern their lives. Too often, the people left out of the room are the ones most impacted. Our Community Organizing team spent the year identifying and training leaders to form our first community-led Organizing Committee. One of the committee's first projects was collaborating with local organizations to host an affordable housing forum with Denver's mayoral candidates in the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods. Over 250 people attended to ask questions and voice their concerns.

A Win for Colorado Kids and Families: Healthy School Meals for All

Our biggest legislative priority this year was spreading the word to Say Yes to Prop FF. Coloradans approved the proposition in November, ensuring that all K-12 students across the state, no matter their income, get free healthy lunches. The bill also strengthens partnerships with local agriculture by sourcing more food for school lunches from Colorado farmers.

9
Organizing
Committee members

46
Organizing
events

6
Coalitions and
partnerships

LAURIE-ANN, ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MEMBER:

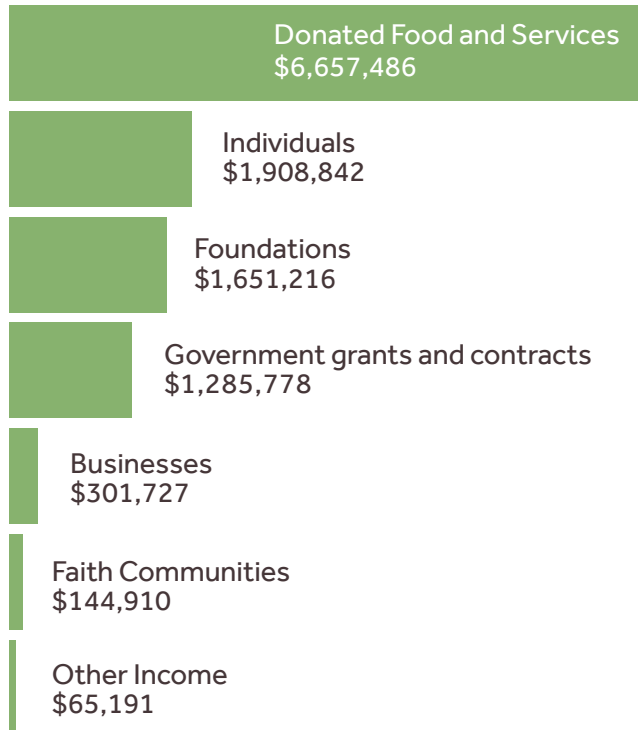


"Because of Metro Caring, I have so many tools in my toolbox. They've empowered me to go out on my own and open people's eyes to issues. Even if I'm not doing testimony at the Capitol, I'm explaining to somebody on the bus why they should vote. The Organizing Committee has the power to give voice to people who feel like their voices don't matter, who used to think it wasn't accessible."



Financials & Board

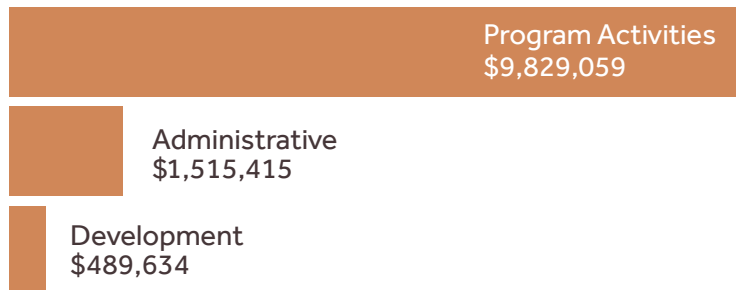
Income



INVESTMENT LOSS: \$ (81,126)

TOTAL INCOME: \$11,934,024

Expenses



TOTAL EXPENSES: \$11,834,108

TOTAL NET ASSETS FY23: \$9,206,497

INCREASE IN NET ASSETS FROM FY22: \$99,916

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The Roots to Rise Society honors committed donors who have pledged a five-year investment in our mission.

\$25,000+ per year

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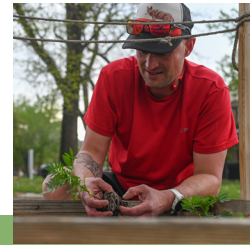
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303.860.7200
MetroCaring.org



Mission

As a leading anti-hunger organization in Denver, Colorado, Metro Caring works with our community to meet people's immediate needs for nutritious, culturally relevant food while building a movement to end hunger at its root.



Photos by Saucedo Media
and Metro Caring staff