For years, the Alameda Food Bank worked to preserve the dignity of our clients by creating an “all choice” shopping experience for them at our small distribution center at the corner of Atlantic and Constitution on the western edge of Sweeney Park.

That all changed when the pandemic hit in 2020. We had to move lock, stock and barrel to our Alameda Point warehouse to accommodate a tenfold increase in clients by creating a drive-through service.

By necessity, self-service selection was suspended. Clients were given a pre-packaged assortment of fresh produce, protein and baked goods. With some exceptions for people with special dietary needs, everyone got the same thing.

But every cloud has a silver lining and the move to our warehouse meant that we had space to not only recreate the shopping experience but to expand and enhance it. It took some doing to accomplish this while adjusting to the dramatic increase in need, but we persevered. The result is our new Island Community Market inside the warehouse where clients can pick what they need just as they would in a grocery store.

In addition to giving clients a more dignified experience, this new service cuts down on food waste, since clients select only the items they will use.

As a nonprofit organization funded by the community with very little government support, we feel an obligation to deliver services to our neighbors in the most comfortable and convenient way possible. Some of our clients are coming to us for the first time to help them get through a temporary rough patch; others are people with an ongoing need. All deserve the same respectful service.

Alameda is a generous community that supports many nonprofits providing critical services to Island residents. The needs are widespread and varied, but one principle is universal: How an organization helps is as important as what it does. It’s essential that those in need be treated the same way that those with more resources like to be treated. They deserve no less.
Did you know that the United States dumps more food than any other country in the world? 80 BILLION pounds every year! That’s estimated to be 30-40 percent of the entire US food supply! Here in California, legislation was enacted on January 1, 2022 to reduce food waste, mitigate the effects of methane emissions in California landfills and address the crisis of food insecurity. At the Alameda Food Bank, we’ve been working with government agencies, local businesses and community partners for decades to eliminate food waste and we’ve maintained an active edible food recovery program for years. Senate Bill 1383 (SB 1383) is a first-of-its-kind “climate action law” which includes a directive for all cities to develop Edible Food Recovery Programs. This requires “food generators” including supermarkets, large grocery stores and wholesale food vendors to donate edible food towards human consumption instead of diverting it to landfills. Last year, the Alameda Food Bank recovered over 412,000 pounds of food through our partners Safeway, Trader Joes, Lucky, Grocery Outlet and Target. We also received bountiful donations from Alameda Backyard Growers and the Alameda Farmers’ Market who send us their excess fruit and vegetables throughout the growing season. “We have three vans and our volunteer drivers are on the road several days a week picking up food that the supermarkets can’t sell,” says Executive Director, Cindy Houts. “In addition to dry goods, plentiful produce is our most sought-after category. I feel strongly that we need to have a great quantity and quality of fresh produce for our clients.” Rising prices are, clearly, affecting the Bay Area in many ways. Nearly 30% of residents report serious financial hardship according to a survey by the Public Policy Institute of California. That number jumps to 43% for households with children. At the AFB, we see client numbers rising rapidly, after a brief post-pandemic reduction. However, by actively sourcing surplus edible foods from our Alameda food generators and local organizations, we continue to provide our clients with a wide variety of the groceries while decreasing the amount of food waste and helping the environment. It’s a win-win all the way around!

PARTNER PROFILE
ALAMEDA BACKYARD GROWERS

What would we do without our wonderful friends at Alameda Backyard Growers (ABG)? Since 2011, their Project Pick initiative has contributed over 47,000 pounds (23+ tons!) of fruit to the Alameda Food Bank. ABG volunteers pick up fruit that has been harvested and transfers it to the AFB. For fruit tree owners who have mobility issues, ABG will, actually, send volunteers to harvest the extra fruit and then deliver it to us. To learn more go to www.alamedabackyardgrowers.org

AFB ED Cindy Houts with Jillian Saxty, Co-President of the Board at Alameda Backyard Growers

HERE’S SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT

AFB NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2022

2022 Newsletter design by Grace Mathieson
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PARTNER PROFILE

ARCHIVE...
After retiring from the Marines 8 years ago Tony (not his real name) and his wife thought they could finally relax. Their home in Alameda was paid for in full. His and his wife's retirement was enough to cover the bills and their 4 kids were off on their own. It was the next chapter they both deserved.

"Life was great," Tony said. Then unexpected challenges began to crop up. First, one of their kids came back home due to a job loss, then another after a divorce, a third returned because of health issues and the fourth came home after losing a job during the pandemic.

Tony's grocery bill skyrocketed and utilities went up. They helped one child with legal bills and another with medical expenses. "I found myself $20,000 in debt. If I had known this was going to happen, I would have never retired," he said.

Tony and his family needed help and that's where we came in. We were able to help him dramatically decrease his grocery bill, so he had more money for all the other bills.

"I started having money to pay that debt off. It took me 4 years, but I paid it off. I couldn't have done it if I had not been coming here," Tony said. March was the last time we saw Tony at our Island Community Market. Like many of our clients, he just needed a little help to make it through a rough patch. He's back enjoying his retirement and his family.

CLIENT PROFILE: LIFE’S UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES