

CATALYZING IMPACT

ANNUAL REPORT
APRIL 2015 - MARCH 2016



Access of West Michigan
Providing a place at the table

About Access

HISTORY

Access of West Michigan began in 1981 in response to federal government cutbacks for social services programs. A group of faith-based and community leaders recognized the need for central coordination of services in order to prevent duplication and maximize resources.

Currently, there are over 300 Kent County congregations and 12 Pantry Resource Centers working with Access to meet needs in our community. We have played a critical role in helping our partner churches and food pantries move from short-term, emergency solutions to asset-based development which works at the systems level to create equity and access.

Our Poverty Education programming creates economic development opportunities for those living within poverty, as well as education and advocacy opportunities for over one thousand community members each year.

Since our founding in 1981, Access has become a faith-based leader in community issues of poverty and hunger, educating, connecting and inspiring our community as we support and build solutions to poverty.

MISSION

Celebrating the activity of God in our midst, the mission of Access is to be a faith-based leader in linking congregational, individual, and community resources to eliminate hunger and reduce the impact of poverty in Kent County.

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Hunger Response

MORE THAN A TEMPORARY FIX TO AN EMERGENCY NEED

Charitable food organizations have a strong role to play in creating systems of health and nutrition within their communities. Working within our network of 75 food pantries and with more than 30 community partners, Access equips charitable food organizations, upholds health and nutrition and catalyzes food system development.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Connected five local pantries with over \$8,000 in fresh produce from local farms
- Began Faith & Food Speaker Series, uniting interdenominational leaders in discussions on the relation of food and faith
- In 2015, Access helped found the Kent County Food Policy Council, bringing together nine other entities in collaboration
- Led 30 organizations in incorporating healthy food guidelines into their practices

As a charitable food organization,
we have a responsibility
to understand how our work can
create positive health
for the communities we serve.

Emma Garcia,
Access Program Director

Benefits Outreach

Expanded services to 15 community organizations -- including 9 new sites -- enabled 261 individuals to access SNAP and community resources.

By working one-on-one with families, Access helps identify available resources and bring hope, stability, and access to their families.

Access Hunger Walk

Over \$86,000 raised to benefit local and international recipient agencies working in areas of food insecurity and poverty.

Holiday Giving Network

Over 6,600 families and individuals received a holiday food service.

Over 800 individuals, businesses, and congregations came together to help bring the spirit of joy and community to our neighbors.

NOW Program

SELF-MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC DISEASE THROUGH HEALTHY OPTIONS

The Nutritional Options for Wellness (NOW) Program provides: free, weekly, healthy food service; Healthy Living Education Classes; and health coaching. The NOW Program reduces food insecurity, promotes healthy nutrition for wellness, and increases health equity in our community.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- 388 NOW Program Participants
- 4,622 healthy food and health coaching services provided
- 1,101 education opportunities provided through Healthy Living Classes

CHRONIC DISEASES SERVED:

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Chronic Renal Disease
- Celiac Disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

Did You Know

Chronic disease is costly to the whole community.

The NOW Program focuses on self-management and preventative health through nutrition and wellness strategies.

Meet Connie, NOW Participant

Connie has shopped at her local food pantry for nearly a decade due to her fixed income.

Afflicted with high cholesterol, diabetes, and depression, she would pick processed foods high in sugar and trans-fats -- food readily available to her fixed income level, and which perpetuated the effects of her disease.

This all changed two years ago, when she saw a sign about the NOW Program. To date, Connie has lost 40 pounds. She has been taken off several of her medications, saving her thousands of dollars each year.

The NOW Program is more than just a diet, "It's a whole new mindset."

"Participants are enthusiastic before they even begin. THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF HOPE IN THEIR VOICES FOR IMPROVING CHALLENGING SYMPTOMS OF THEIR ILLNESS, AS WELL AS FOR IMPROVING THEIR OVERALL HEALTH."

**NANCY VELDKAMP-BRUBAKER,
NOW PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

Poverty Education

REDUCING STIGMA THROUGH ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

By participating in one of our poverty simulations, attendees learn the complex factors which affect those living in poverty. Most importantly, attendees learn how to advocate for issues of poverty and make a difference within their community.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Engaged 1,476 people in a poverty simulation
- Partnered with 25 community organizations to host a poverty simulation
- Provided 20 individuals currently living in poverty with economic development opportunity via poverty simulation employment

"This event is now a standard part of our leadership education and MBA program.

It has led to greater awareness when making decisions."

*Mark Lubberts, MSN, RN
Spectrum Health*

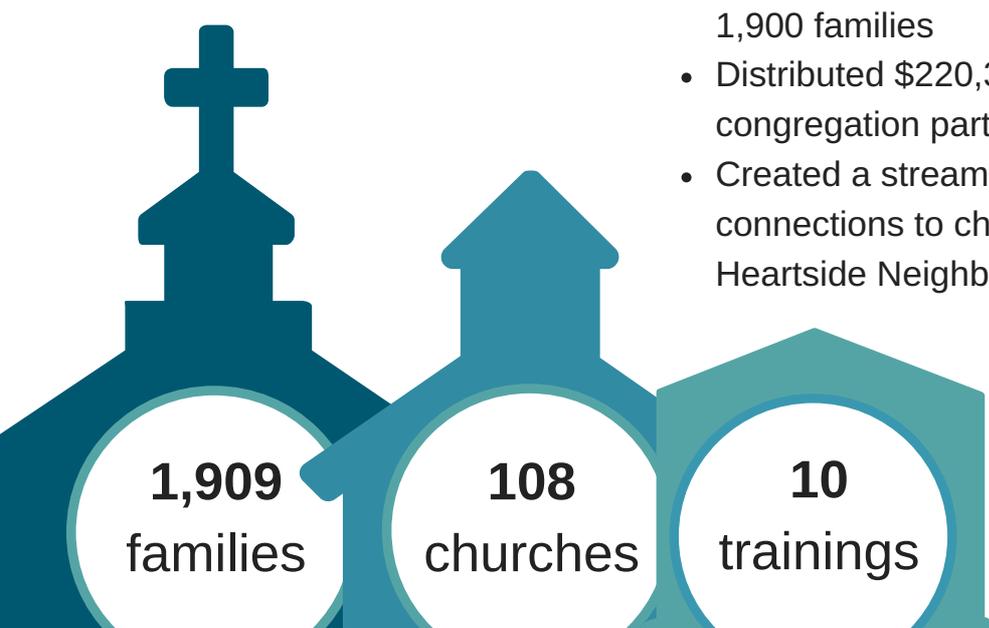
Congregation Connections

HELPING CHURCHES DEVELOP THRIVING COMMUNITIES

By supporting churches in their ministry, we are able to alleviate the complicated system of social services agencies for them and their parishioners. While we handle the logistics, the churches focus on relationship building, working with clients to create long-term solutions.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Partnered with 108 churches to assist more than 1,900 families
- Distributed \$220,315 to meet local needs through congregation partners
- Created a streamlined system for referrals and connections to church communities within the Heartside Neighborhood Collaborative



1,909
families

108
churches

10
trainings

Get Involved

Donate

Your contribution creates local impact in supporting and building solutions to poverty

Join our monthly giving club to create your impact.

Volunteer

Help fuel our work by joining us as a volunteer. Learn hands-on what Access does.

One-time or recurring opportunities available.

Learn

Connect with us on social media and join our mailing list.

Get the latest information about solutions to poverty.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit us online at
www.accessofwestmichigan.org
Via email at
info@accessofwestmichigan.org



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