OUR VISION: A COMMUNITY ROOTED IN EQUITABLE SYSTEMS.

OUR MISSION: CELEBRATING THE ACTIVITY OF GOD IN OUR MIDST, ACCESS STRENGTHENS AND DEVELOPS WHOLISTIC SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY BY CULTIVATING EQUITABLE SYSTEMS THROUGH EDUCATION AND COLLABORATION.
As we reflect on 2020, many of us feel exhausted and ready to forget about all that the year held. Crisis has the power to bring out the best or worst in people and organizations, and though Access was not unaffected by the pain of 2020, our reflections include gratitude and pride as we look back at how we responded and what we achieved last year.

Our 2020 Annual Report showcases the ways that Access both pivoted to entrench ourselves in the important work of acting as frontline coordinators and responders during COVID-19, as well as the ways that we continued and grew our work to address systemic issues of poverty, an all the more imperative task in the wake of the pandemic.

We are proud to share that our work in both areas of antiracism and broad-based community organizing became more vibrant in 2020. The values of both initiatives have long been held at Access, but in 2020 we dug deeper to plant seeds in these areas to ensure they are practiced throughout our work, both internally and externally in the community. We are listening, we are acting, and we are thankful to be on the journey of living into these values no matter the season.

As we celebrate our 40th anniversary as an organization this year, we remember that those who have served at Access over four decades persevered through many difficulties, and we remind ourselves that resilience and creativity is always necessitated in the face of complex challenges. We are hopeful and postured to continue the work we feel our community needs as we together grow through change. Thank you for your support and your championing of our values.

With gratitude,

Emma Garcia & Christina Swiney
Co-Executive Directors

Emma and Christina at the Grand Rapids Business Journal’s 50 Most Influential Women in West Michigan Event where Emma was honored on March 4, 2020.

2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Patty Elzinga, Board Chair
Jacqueline Scherer, Past Chair
Dennis Hoyt, Treasurer
Shawn Beene
Toran Scott
Victoria Gibbs
Crystal Scott-Tunstall
Sarah Chartier
Amy VanFossen
Susan McPherson
Julie Benson
Margarita Solis-Deal

2020 STAFF TEAM
Emma Garcia, Co-Executive Director
Christina Swiney, Co-Executive Director
Nikeyia Perkins, Congregation Connections Director
Erin Skidmore, Good Food Systems Director
Kim Starks, Poverty Education Director
McKenzie Jackson, Good Food Systems Program Manager
Nancy Brubaker, Good Food Systems Program Manager
Jamiela Owens, Congregation Caseworker
Manuj Sharma, Accounting & Business Manager
Alaina Dobkowski, Communication & Development Manager
Jackie Van Dyk, Office & Development Assistant
At Access we know that we cannot address systems change or root causes of poverty without addressing racism. We recognize that many have labeled 2020 as a year of racial reckoning. The murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other black and brown lives led to protests against police brutality across the country and here in Grand Rapids. Over the past year we’ve seen an increase in Asian hate crimes. Native American, Hispanic, and Black communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. The history of racism in the United States has led us to today and it is painful. We recognize there is a lot of work to do to dismantle racism within ourselves and our systems as we work towards a more just, equitable world for all.

In the Fall of 2019 Access’ board and staff instituted the requirement to attend CORR’s 2.5 day Understanding Racism workshop. After attending the workshop we developed our Antiracism Team made up of board and staff members that launched in January of 2020. The purpose of the Access anti-racism team is to uphold systems change and address the root causes of poverty by unpacking internalized individual and historic racism. By holding the organization and our partners accountable through education, awareness, and action we will embed anti-racism into Access and our community for the long-term. As a team we continue to learn; in February of 2020 we took a field trip together to the Jim Crow Museum located at Ferris State University, a powerful resource not too far away from us. We also continue to interrogate our own internalization of racism through regular racial caucusing as an organization. We are grateful for our continued relationship with CORR that guides us in this work and for a team that is committed to doing this work together. It is challenging and necessary, and we see it as vital for accomplishing our mission and vision.

BOARD RECOGNITION

We extend gratitude to two of our long-term board members who will be terming off of our board in 2021. Patty Elzinga and Shawn Beene have served Access for nearly a decade and have provided insightful and critical leadership. We are thankful for their support of and commitment to the mission of Access! In 2021 we are also excited to welcome three new board members – DeAndre’ Harris, Ashley Gross, and Katherine Wolthuis.

BROAD BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Since 2018, Access has been a part of a local movement focused on broad based community organizing. In 2020, we helped launch the formal West Michigan Community Organizing team, a group comprised of dozens of organizations focused on together using community power to leverage and influence issue areas locally. The goal of the team is to listen to community need and opportunity, and catalyze our support to affect positive change. We envision that being a part of this team will open up new relationships and give us opportunity to hear and share the voices of community members most affected by poverty. We are looking forward to all that this movement will accomplish. If you are interested in learning more about this work email us at info@accessofwestmichigan.org and we can connect you.

COMMITMENT TO ANTIRACISM

At Access we know that we cannot address systems change or root causes of poverty without addressing racism. We recognize that many have labeled 2020 as a year of racial reckoning. The murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other black and brown lives led to protests against police brutality across the country and here in Grand Rapids. Over the past year we’ve seen an increase in Asian hate crimes. Native American, Hispanic, and Black communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. The history of racism in the United States has led us to today and it is painful. We recognize there is a lot of work to do to dismantle racism within ourselves and our systems as we work towards a more just, equitable world for all.

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GOOD FOOD SYSTEMS

Access envisions a thriving community where all residents have access to healthy and affordable local food. We approach this vision by investing finances and relational capital into our local food economy, growing health equity to reduce health disparities, and supporting community power. Our sights are set on transforming West Michigan’s food system to become increasingly reflective of Good Food values with the belief that this transformation will uproot systemic poverty and lead to lasting change.

of Fresh Market shoppers say it is easier to access affordable produce
98%

of Fresh Market shoppers say they eat more fruits and vegetables
94%

of Fresh Market shoppers say they feel their health has improved
85%

$192,058
Invested in Local Farms
2017-18: $25,000
2018-19: $73,760
2019-20: $93,298

COLLABORATION: IN CRISIS AND FOR THE LONG TERM

When COVID struck our community we were able to lean on our long-term relationships with many food-related programs to serve as a connector and resource. We are thankful for the relationships that we can rely on in times of crisis. We know that an economic crisis, like COVID-19, creates an emergency that amplifies deep disparities and deserves an immediate response to address the emergency. It must then be followed closely by a long-term plan to ensure that disparities are addressed through proactive strategy, not continued emergency response.

What does long-term investment look like? In 2017 we launched a collaborative of five community centers with the goal of helping each partner open and operate a Fresh Market, offering affordable access to healthy and local food. Last year was our final year of the collaborative and we are thankful for the five new Fresh Markets that have opened. The lessons learned from this collaborative launched us into a new model for partnerships. In 2020 we asked organizations to submit proposals in order to receive funding as a Fresh Market or Refresh Now Program. Refresh Now is a food prescription program that improves health for those working to address a major chronic disease or risk factors for a major chronic disease. Our new Refresh Now Program partners, Catherine’s Health Center and Exalta Health, began programming in 2020. The United Methodist House is our new Fresh Market Partner, they opened their new market at 900 Division Ave SE on April 1, 2021. We are grateful for old and new partnerships as we work towards a thriving food system for all.

"One of the most important changes is that we strive to bring the voices of our neighbors into whatever conversation we are having."
-Chelsea Totten, SECOM, Fresh Market Collaborative Partner

"A participant has noticed a big difference with his son as his family has started to eat healthier. His son was pre-diabetic and now he’s clear."
-Exalta Health, Refresh Now Partner

Good Food Partners on an educational trip in 2019
CONGREGATION CONNECTIONS

Our mission is to train, assist, and collaborate with faith-based communities on issues of social justice, equity, community development, and antiracism. Congregation Connections works to strengthen communities throughout Kent County by supporting ministry and outreach teams with a focus on social justice, community development, and antiracism. We collaborate across denominations and faith communities throughout Kent County, offering training and casework services.

We are encouraged by churches coming together in partnership with The Micah Center to support undocumented families in need.

**$36,502**

66% of total funds supported housing needs (mortgage, rent, shelter)

**$232,391**

distributed to meet needs in 2020 in partnership with 176 churches.

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION: COVID RESPONSE INITIATIVE

A year ago we launched our first Pod network of churches. This network includes Boston Square Church, Oakdale Park Church, Plymouth Heights CRC, Christ Church, Shawnee Park CRC, Calvin CRC, and Fuller Avenue CRC. While this year clearly has not gone as any of us planned, we are so thankful for the way we have seen this Pod come together to walk alongside their neighbors who have experienced challenges. This group will continue to go deeper together this Spring as we begin training focused on understanding root causes of poverty and injustice in their community.

The COVID-19 Pandemic amplified existing disparities and injustices throughout our community. Churches across our community had to make adjustments during this time to how they did benevolence, which prompted us to create the Gap Fund at Access. This fund supplemented benevolence funds from churches to meet needs. We also partnered with The Micah Center to create the Undocumented Families Fund which supported requests referred to us on behalf of families in our community who did not qualify for other assistance due to their documentation status.

Each month we share a newsletter with resources to dive deeper into antiracism, and this past fall we hosted a lunch ‘n learn series focused on social justice, food access, and housing. We invite you to learn with us as we work towards more equitable systems for all in our community, email Niki Perkins at niki@accessofwestmichigan.org to learn more.

“The Southeast Pod continues to be a positive way for churches to support each other in meeting needs in our neighborhoods. Educational zooms have helped individuals grow in ideology and relationships with each other.” - Crystal VanBeek, Fuller Deacon

“The Pod has been a blessing. Prior, we handled requests individually and sometimes our benevolence funds were insufficient. The pod has enabled more churches to satisfy larger requests. I have gotten to know other benevolence people and don’t feel alone when I need help.” - Gordon VandenBerg, Calvin CRC
COVID ADJUSTMENTS
In the wake of COVID-19, Access determined that our Poverty Education program and its experiential workshops would be halted through July 2021. As this date approaches we will continue to monitor health and safety guidelines. Our inability to operate large group workshops, and our desire to protect the health of our Poverty Education staff, independent contractors, and host sites is central in this decision. Data and quote to the right are from workshops we were able to hold in 2019-March 2020.

We will continue booking for workshops during the halt of the program; workshops can be booked for any time after August 1, 2021. We will plan to ensure that the workshops are updated with relevant content and information related to our current world situation. We are eager to offer a dynamic and safe in-person experience in 2021. With questions, for more information, or to book a workshop please reach out to Emma Garcia or Christina Swiney at 616-774-2175 or info@accessofwestmichigan.org.

“A YEAR OF CREATIVELY STAYING CONNECTED AT ACCESS
Suddenly in March 2020 we all had to learn how to use Zoom and navigate working from home. Thankfully at Access we were already in the process of moving our internal shared drive into the cloud and were able to adapt to working remotely quite well. To the left, below, is a picture of our staff Christmas party that looked a little different than years past. On the far right are photos submitted by staff on “Sports Day” during one of our two spirit weeks we held. Towards the end of the summer and while it was warm in the Fall we did gather safely with masks and social distancing at a park once a month. We look forward to being together again in the future, and we give thanks for our incredible team that adapted and worked hard to stay connected throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

POVERTY EDUCATION
The Access Poverty Education Initiative provides learning opportunities on poverty related issues, including our Poverty Education Workshops which inform participants about the intricate realities of life in poverty. The workshop is designed to provide insight into the barriers faced by low-income individuals through role-playing the lives of various family types experiencing poverty.

“It was so critical for us to go through this experience and take from it learning we can use to help our kids, help our families. It put us in a better place to understand some of the struggles our students are facing.”
-Casey Gordon, Kent ISD

93% Of participants report an increased sensitivity to poverty
92% Of participants motivated to take action
2020 FINANCES

INCOME: $474,419

- Gris & Foundations: 30.1%
- Individuals: 19.7%
- Congregations: 16.4%
- Events: 13.5%
- PPP Income: 12%
- Poverty Education: 3.1%

EXPENSES: $456,078

- Gris & Foundations: 30.1%
- Individuals: 19.7%
- Congregations: 16.4%
- Events: 13.5%
- PPP Income: 12%
- Poverty Education: 3.1%

PASS THROUGH FUNDS: $515,560

There are two ways monies are passed through and distributed at Access. One is through our Congregation Connections Program, and the other is when we serve as the fiduciary for grant programs (for example, the funding for Fresh Markets or Refresh Now). In 2020, $232,391 passed through Access for Congregation Casework Services, and $283,169 for grant funding to community partners and organizations.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2020 PARTNERS

GRANT PARTNERS
- Wege Foundation
- Heart of West Michigan United Way
- Michigan Health Endowment Fund
- Non-Profit Technical Assistance Fund
- Spectrum Health Healthier Communities
- Spectrum Health Innovation Fund
- Amway Corporation
- Michigan Nonprofit Association

CHURCH PARTNERS ($2,000+)
- St. Jude Parish
- First Park Congregational UCC
- Sherman Street Church
- Westminster Presbyterian Church
- Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church
- Cornerstone United Methodist Church
- Alger Park Christian Reformed Church
- LaGrave Christian Reformed Church
- The Local Church
- Ada Bible Church

BUSINESS PARTNERS ($2,000+)
- Advance Packaging
- SpartanNash
- Andy J. Egan Co.
YOUR PARTNERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

There are many ways you can support Access of West Michigan today. We invite you to consider joining the Walk for Good Food, or making a financial contribution. You can give a gift to our general fund, or designate a gift for one of our initiatives: Good Food Systems, Congregation Connections, or Poverty Education. Here are the ways you can give a gift today:

Mail: Send your donation to Access of West Michigan, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508.
Online: Visit accessofwestmichigan.org and click “donate” where you will be prompted to donate using your credit card.
Phone: Call 616-747-0988 and we can assist you with a credit card donation.

IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD
MAY 2-12, 2021
ACCESSOFWESTMICHIGAN.ORG/WALK

WALK WITH US!
What if everyone in our community could have equal access to food that nourishes, creates good jobs, is affordable, and treats the earth well as it is produced? We believe it’s possible. That’s why we walk. Share the vision, walk with us.

None of us will ever forget the Spring of 2020. We were in the middle of preparations for the Walk for Good Food when it became abundantly clear we were going to have to make significant changes to our annual Walk, which had taken place for more than 40 years. We stayed the course and held the walk, but encouraged participants to walk in their own neighborhoods safely. We were floored by the results: together we raised $120,000 to support organizations working to build a thriving food system in Kent County.

This year we invite you to walk with us again by staying connected virtually and walking in your own neighborhood. To learn more visit accessofwestmichigan.org/walk or contact Alaina Dobkowski: alaina@accessofwestmichigan.org or 616-747-0988.

2021 ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING WALK FUNDING
- Access of West Michigan
- Baxter Community Center
- Family Network of Wyoming
- The Green Apple
- The Kent County Food Policy Council
- The North End Wellness Coalition
- Our Kitchen Table
- Revive & Thrive Project
- SECOM Resource Center
- St. Mark’s Episcopal Church Breakfast Program
- St. Alphonsus Food and Clothing Center
- Trinity United Methodist Church Community Ministries Program
- UCOM
- Westminster Food Pantry
*also received funding from the 2020 Walk for Good Food