2021 ANNUAL REPORT EDITION

THE CULTIVATOR

THE NEWSLETTER OF ACCESS OF WEST MICHIGAN

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

A LETTER FROM OUR CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

When we turned the pages of our calendars to January 2021, people across the globe let out a collective sigh of relief. No one wanted to hold onto the pain of the year 2020, and all hoped that 2021 would bring relief to the suffering, isolation, and confusion of the prior year. Though our hopes were not fully met simply by turning that calendar page, 2021 brought a greater sense of resolve, fortitude, and overall resilience. Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover or bounce back. While we collectively fought the woes of 2020 into 2021, there grew a sense of willingness to lean into strategy and vision despite our current lack of security. Resilience grew amidst the pain and the pain pointed to injustices that needed to be addressed. In 2021, Access of West Michigan practiced a willing resilience, a building of our muscles from the pain of the shared human experience to better accomplish our mission and vision. We went deeper into the work, rather than pulling back when our muscles began to ache.

As we reflect on our efforts of the past year, we are proud of our resilience. We partnered with New City Urban Farm to connect Michigan's small agricultural system to innovative food access partners. We re-launched our Poverty Education workshops with COVID precautions, knowing that the hands-on content and learning experience the workshops provide were more important than ever considering the disparities highlighted by COVID-19. We leaned further into our anti-racism journey through our regular caucus times with board and staff, engaging our partners via trainings on anti-racism, reading Caste by Isabel Wilkerson together, as well as willingly and regularly sharing and listening to one another's lived experiences and struggles as a multi-ethnic team. We joined nineteen other institutions to launch a broad-based organization that will work together to use community power to leverage and influence issue areas locally. We also celebrated our 40th year as an organization in 2021 (celebration pictured on the cover), acknowledging where we have come from and the work that is ahead.

Instead of pulling back, we pushed into our values and our commitments to anti-racism, collaboration, and shared leadership. As you read our Annual Report for 2021 you will see resilience as a mode of operation across our programs; our achievements and outcomes are testament to our internal willingness, and to your important support, to recover and to hold onto the strength needed to move forward with creativity and impact.

With Gratitude,

Emma & Christina

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Julie Benson, Board Chair
Susan Barnes, Treasurer
Ashley Gross, Secretary
Jacqueline Scherer
Toran Scott
Victoria Gibbs
Crystal Scott-Tunstall
Sarah Chartier
DeAndre' Harris
Katherine Wolthuis
Shontea Bell-Jenkins

2021 STAFF TEAM

Emma Garcia, Co-Executive Director
Christina Swiney, Co-Executive Director
Nikeyia Perkins, Congregation Connections Director
Jamiela Owens, Congregation Caseworker
Erin Skidmore, Good Food Systems Director
McKenzie Jackson, Good Food Systems Program Manager
Gratia Lee (2022), Good Food Systems Program Manager
Nancy Brubaker, Volunteer & Intern Coordinator
Manuj Sharma, Accounting & Business Manager
Alaina Dobkowski, Communication & Development Manager
Leila Villa, Development Coordinator
Jackie Van Dyk, Office & Development Assistant

GOING DEEPER WITH VOLUNTEERS & INTERNS

This year marked a deeper focus for our involvement and support of volunteers, interns, and work study students as Nancy Veldkamp-Brubaker moved into the role of Volunteer Program Manager in November 2021. For many years, Access has hosted and precepted student interns, partnering with several of our community's colleges and universities. Internships have been a mutually valuable experience for both Access and the students. Students share that their work at Access has specifically influenced their future academic and career decisions. Access is excited to have an influential impact with future leaders involved in building healthier communities. Their work with Access has further built our capacity with specific projects they have been responsible for throughout their internship. Volunteers have equally given us increased team capacity and outreach into the community.

Nancy has taken on the role of Volunteer Program Manager. Reach out to her to get involved: nancy@accessofwestmichigan.org or (616) 774-2175 x 109

"I have found that my own skills in marketing have grown significantly... I have genuinely enjoyed working for an organization that is actively making a difference in the community."
-Justin Dykstra, Davenport Work Study Marketing Assistant

In 2021, with COVID pivots to working virtually, we hosted one Master of Public Health Intern through Grand Valley State University. Sabrina worked with our Good Food Team, working to build communication resources for Access' Refresh Now Program. We also hosted one Public Health Intern from Calvin University and a Work Study Student through Davenport University. Bethany supported the Walk for Good Food in the Spring of 2021 and Justin worked with our Communications Team, supporting and assisting staff with social media communications.

Access is also grateful for the many volunteers who assisted us in variety of ways this past year: serving on our Board of Directors, assisting with our 40th Anniversary Celebration last September, supporting our work by sending out mailings or entering data, volunteering as a Walk for Good Food Team Leader, and more. We are so thankful for the many ways people support our work and join our community.

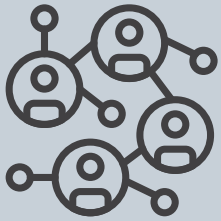
VOLUNTEER, WORK STUDY, & INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Want to gain experience with or support the work of an innovative non-profit? Internship and volunteer opportunities in each of our programs exist for 5-15 hours weekly. The volunteer positions include work in the following areas:

- Poverty Education Administration
- Congregation Casework
- Good Food Systems Program Assistance
- Communications & Marketing
- Special Events
- Fund Development

For more information contact Nancy Brubaker at nancy@accessofwestmichigan.org or 616-774-2175 ext. 109.

CONGREGATION CONNECTIONS DIGS DEEP



$46,830 shared with families through the SouthEast Pod, a 421% increase from last year

Our Congregation Connections program's mission is to train, assist, and collaborate with faith-based communities on issues of social justice, equity, community development, and antiracism. In 2021 we dug into the work we have been called to do in our community by providing training opportunities to congregations, and casework services to churches connecting meaningfully with their neighbors during times of crisis and critical need. We also continued to work with the Southeast Pod, a network of churches who have been working together to meet the needs in their community. They have worked alongside neighbors to prevent eviction, keep utilities from being shut-off, make security deposits, and assist with first month's rent and car payments. There are so many stories and we are grateful to do this work alongside churches throughout our community. We are thankful for those who join us for our Lunch 'n Learns each Fall as well as engage our trainings, such as Benevolence 101 and Understanding Systems of Poverty. Together we will work towards creative solutions and address root causes of poverty.

We send a monthly newsletter with info on community resources, antiracism, and social justice engagement. Every Fall we host a Lunch 'n Learn Series. In 2021 we focused on housing, antiracism, and food justice. Contact Nikeyia Perkins at niki@accessofwestmichigan.org to receive our newsletter and updates!

> *The POD component of which we are a part of is the best! It allows churches to work together to solve financial problems of clients. It also doesn't then deplete the benevolence balances of individual churches. I will rate the overall program a 10 out of 10.*
> *-Calvin Christian Reformed Church Deacon*

$243,458 distributed to neighbors in 2021 in partnership with 176 churches

376 families and neighbors connected with churches for support

> *I deeply appreciate you both taking the time out to do this training, the things I did not understand before I do now.*
> *-Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church Deacon*

GOOD FOOD SYSTEMS STAYS FOCUSED

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.

There are a lot things for us to be grateful for this past year! Our team continued to invest in Good Food partners through:

- Entering year two of Refresh Now, our veggie prescription program, at Catherine's Health Center and Exalta Health.
- Celebrating the second year of the United Methodist Community House Fresh Market, a healthy & affordable retail start-up offering local and fresh produce to neighbors.
- Investing financially in New City Urban Farm so they could grow produce for fresh markets throughout the community.
- Serving as a part of the formation team that formalized the Kent County Food Policy council in 2021.
- Engaging in the work of the steering team for The Food and Nutrition Coalition this past year.
- Providing funding to 11 community organizations through The Walk for Good Food.

We're so thankful to have had opportunities to learn, grow, educate, and collaborate with amazing partners. Our sights are set on transforming West Michigan's food system to become increasingly reflective of Good Food values with the belief that this will uproot systemic poverty and lead to lasting change.

$68,000 invested into local farm and food economy

Produce offered at the United Methodist Community House Fresh Market

Meeting with our partners at New City Neighbors

We work alongside Good Food Partners to implement fresh markets and veggie prescription programs called Refresh Now. These programs are funded through grants we secure and distribute to our partners. Below are some of the results from the past year we are proud to share with you:

98 Refresh Now participants and 435 Fresh Market Shoppers

91% report overall health improvement

91% report that they eat more fruits and vegetables

91% report visiting the Emergency Room less due to interventions of the Refresh Now program

> *Diego was able to access fresh foods, even though grocery store prices are increasing. He plans to continue utilizing SECOM's Fresh Market beyond his completion of the program.*

> *Valerie has taken the opportunity to try new vegetables and find ways of preparing them. She has shared these dishes with her grandchildren who she reports are now eating more vegetables - even spinach!*

POVERTY EDUCATION RETURNS

> *"I plan to bring this back to our organization to discuss ways to address issues such as transportation, loss of work, and more."*
> *–Leadership GR*

Our Poverty Education workshops took a hiatus for one year due to COVID-19, but we jumpstarted the workshops back up in July 2021 with three outdoor workshops three days in a row for middle and high school students. We had not done outdoor workshops previously, but our amazing team of Independent Contractors facilitated the workshops with ease. Our team was eager to begin providing the workshops to a variety of audiences again, especially in light of the disparities related to poverty highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our responses to the workshop in 2021 were just as positive as ever, host sites and participants reported immediate impact in our two main goals – to educate participants on the realities of systemic issues of poverty and to motivate them to take action. We ensured that our workshops added safety measures to protect all participants and our facilitation team, and we accommodated needed cancellations with flexible policies for rescheduling. As we move into 2022 we continue to uphold safety, as well as knowing that the workshop is more impactful and needed than ever. If you're interested in hosting a workshop, contact us at info@accessofwestmichigan.org.

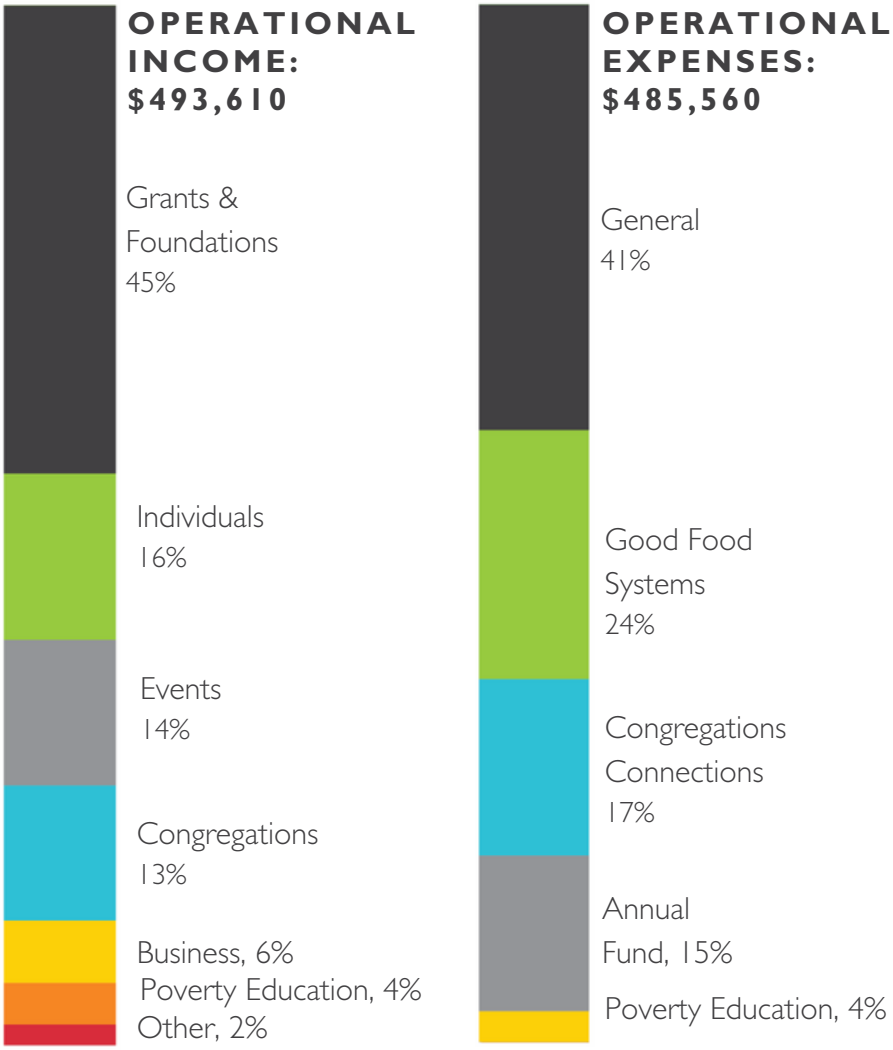
> *It made this issue real to students and created empathy. It helped them see that these are real issues faced by real people. The end of the experience blew away so many. The question of, 'did you get to do anything fun this month' left some dumbstruck. A student said 'I didn't realize that poverty was so hard.' - Workshop Host*

100% of participants report the workshop improved their understanding of the barriers faced by people experiencing poverty

99% of participants reported that they have increased sensitivity and compassion related to issues of poverty because of the workshop

99% of participants reported that the workshop increased their awareness of the root causes of poverty

2021 FINANCES



PASS THROUGH MONIES TOTAL: $465,741.30
**not included in operations*

Monies are passed through Access to partners via grant funding, congregation casework, and when we act as a fiduciary for local organizations. Examples of how this money is used include:

$195,530
Congregation Casework

$59,200
Local Farm Investment

$58,668
Fresh Markets

$25,332
Refresh Now

**these numbers are based on calendar year 2021, for audited fiscal year numbers for 2021-2022 please contact us.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2021 PARTNERS

GRANT PARTNERS ($30,000+)

- Amway Corporation
- Doug & Maria DeVos Foundation
- Michigan Health Endowment Fund
- Spectrum Health Healthier Communities
- WhyHunger

BUSINESS PARTNERS ($2,000+)

- Andy J. Egan Co, Inc
- Amway Corporatioon
- Advance Packaging
- The Ireland Group GR Realty
- SJA Solutions
- SpartanNash

CHURCH PARTNERS ($2,000+)

- Alger Park CRC
- LaGrave Avenue CRC
- Trinity Lutheran Church
- Cornerstone UMC
- First Park Congregational UCC
- First Evangelical Covenant
- Madison Square CRC
- Westminster Presbyterian

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've walked for the past 45 years.

May 1: In-Person Kick Off at Briggs Park

- This year's event will include an in-person kick-off event at Briggs Park (324 Knapp St NE, 49505) from 2 to 4pm. The event will include t-shirt pick up, light refreshments, routes for walking, and children's activities.

May 1-11: Walk in your Neighborhood

- In the past two years we've found that many loved engaging in the Walk by gathering in their own community or walking on their own. So, we have started a new tradition! You and/or your team do not have to attend the in-person event to participate, you can walk on your own through May 11th.

Questions? Contact Leila Villa at leila@accessofwestmichiga.org or call 616-774-0989.

2022 ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING WALK FUNDING

- Access of West Michigan
- Baxter Community Center
- The Green Apple
- The Kent County Food Policy Council
- The North End Wellness Coalition
- Our Kitchen Table
- SECOM Resource Center
- UCOM
- New City Neighbors
- St. Mark's Episcopal Breakfast Program
- Trinity United Methodist Community Ministries Program

YOUR PARTNERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

There are many ways you can support our work!. Volunteering (check out page 2), walking with us, or giving a financial gift in one of the ways below:

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