

# The Good Food Exchange



## A Story of Community:

### How a Neighborhood, a School and FDN Launched a Much-Needed Food Program

Lehman Alternative Community School (LACS) is only blocks from West Village on Ithaca's West Hill. While both communities have much to offer each other, "we hadn't collaborated in a focused way until recently," says Jon Raimon. A social studies and English teacher at LACS, he also is the school's coordinator of service learning, which integrates community service with teaching.

Staff and students at LACS were looking for ways that their school could serve as a meaningful resource for the West Hill community.

"We discovered that there's a lot of potential for doing good and productive work together," says Raimon.

Meanwhile, parents at West Village had formed a group they called Our Children's Future and sought ways to enrich their kids' lives, planning trips to places like Ithaca's Sciencenter and envisioning such projects as a community garden and cooking demonstrations to encourage healthier eating, explains Melie Meléndez, a West Village mom involved in the initiative.

When students surveyed West Village families about their most pressing needs, the study's results showed that more than 90 percent needed to take a bus to get groceries. It also showed that by the end of most months many families had a hard time coming up with funds to buy food.

So the West Village community, along with LACS students and staff, decided to plan a monthly food pantry for all West Hill neighbors, to be held at the school cafeteria. They worked long and hard over several years to get approval for the project, which they named GIVE — Giving Involves Virtually Everybody.



**Left:** Greens supplied through FDN are abundant at the first GIVE (Giving Involves Virtually Everybody) program this fall at the Lehman Alternative Community School serving Ithaca's West Hill neighborhood. **Shown, l. to r.,** are: Jamila Walida Simon, Cornell Bronfenbrenner Center civic engagement specialist; Anisah Mohammed; Anthony Hayton and Melie Meléndez with their son, Anthony Jr.; and Jon Raimon, LACS teacher and service learning coordinator. Raimon's students and West Hill community members helped set up the new neighborhood food pantry, the first ever at the school.

Most important, they established a relationship with Friendship Donations Network through coordinator Meaghan Sheehan Rosen and arranged for volunteers to pick up fresh food donated to FDN and bring it to the GIVE program at the LACS dining room on the fourth Monday of every month.

The new GIVE program officially opened on Monday, October 24, at 5 p.m. In addition to eggs, the tables were overflowing with an abundance of donated food for all: leafy greens, apples, peppers, leeks and fresh bread, canned garbanzo beans, corn, tomatoes and tomato sauce and prepared foods such as chickpea and carrot salads. All of it was fresh, healthy food that would otherwise have ended up in a landfill, adding to harmful greenhouse gases. Instead it was enjoyed by many, who really welcomed it.

Local fresh food suppliers included FDN food donor partners: GreenStar, Wegmans, Grisamore Farms and vendors from the Ithaca Farmers' Market. In addition, the Youth Farm Project of Tompkins County offered Harvest Boxes containing farm-fresh produce at an affordable price, which could be purchased using SNAP benefits.

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**Special thanks to all of the farmers who donated produce to FDN this season! Ithaca Farmer's Market vendors, West Haven Farm CSA, Full Plate Farm Collective CSA, Dilmun Hill Student Farm, Grisamore Farms, Cornell potato growers, Cornell Orchards, Indian Creek Farm, Stick and Stone Farm, and Kestrel Perch.**

Like all pantries supplied with food rescued by FDN, everyone who came was invited to shop freely — a rule of thumb established by Friendship Donations founder Sara Pines 28 years ago. There are absolutely no requirements to do so.

At the first GIVE program, Meléndez was holding her baby boy, Anthony Jr., while admiring the selection of greens. "It looks great!" she said. In the spring she hopes produce from the planned community garden will be available at the pantry too. "We want to use it to teach our children about nutrition and how to grow and cook healthy food and also get parents to make healthy meals, which I think is an awesome idea. I'm very excited about food coming from the community and going back into it."

"People want to make the neighborhood safer and more positive

for teens, and the GIVE program and garden will help," notes Jamila Walida Simon, civic engagement specialist at the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University and a promoter of the GIVE program. "We also hope to have community events at the school, and make it a space for neighbors to come together with other parents, on whatever people want," says Simon.

Since the initiatives began, West Hill neighbors have taken part in a dinner discussion, with food supplied by FDN, a game night, a festive holiday party and a Halloween gathering at the LACS community facility. "We're hoping that all of this will be the beginning of a bigger relationship," says Simon. ■

—By Linda B. Myers



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**Volunteer Spotlight**

**Carol Ann Brust** recalls having her interest sparked in FDN about six years ago, when then-board president Judy Dietz (now deceased) described what the organization did to provide needy people with nutritious food that might otherwise be discarded. "I'm the rogue at FDN. I look for unconventional ways to get food donations to people who really need it," says Carol Ann. To read more about Carol Ann, and other FDN volunteers, visit [friendshipdonations.org/category/volunteer-spotlight/](http://friendshipdonations.org/category/volunteer-spotlight/). To become a volunteer, contact us at 607-216-9522 or write us at [info@friendshipdonations.org](mailto:info@friendshipdonations.org).

**2016 Neighborhood Food Hub Report**

**3,664 lbs of food donated, 17 hubs**



**Area gardeners have donated more than 15,000 pounds of produce since the program began in 2013.**

**Thank you to everyone who contributed to the 2016 season of FDN's Neighborhood Food Hubs!**

**For more information visit: [friendshipdonations.org/hubs](http://friendshipdonations.org/hubs).**



**Above:** FDN volunteers pick apples at Grisamore Farms.