ESSENTIAL:
365 DAYS A YEAR

CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

2020 ANNUAL REPORT
DEAR FRIENDS,

In this last fiscal year, every one of us had more in common with our meal recipients — we felt the pain of isolation and the helplessness of being trapped in our homes. While we relied on calls and emails to stay connected, our frail aged neighbors felt even more alone and afraid.

Homebound elderly New Yorkers already live in the shadows, forgotten and hungry. And when the city shuttered, who else would care for them? Not just with nourishing meals, but a kind word and connection to the outside world. Each knock at the door — and deliverer smiling behind their mask — said You are not forgotten.

This year underscored what we’ve said all along: Citymeals is so much more than a meal.

Of course the year was defined by our unprecedented emergency response to the pandemic, but we cannot overlook the millions of weekend and holiday meals delivered too. With an outpouring of compassionate support, you helped guarantee there was not a day when one of our meal recipients went without something to eat.

We hope you’ll see these pages as more than a report — because behind the numbers are real stories of meal recipients, volunteers and deliverers. More than anything, they are stories of what your steadfast support makes possible, fulfilling a promise we made nearly forty years ago.

Through the Covid-19 crisis — and all year round — you show how even in our big city, we can be just as loving and generous as any small town. Thank you for keeping your vulnerable neighbors in your hearts and minds.

With endless gratitude,

Gael Greene  Beth Shapiro
Co-Founder and Chair  Executive Director
RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

MARCH 1 – JUNE 30, 2020

1,285,232
MEALS DELIVERED

112%
MORE THAN SAME TIME LAST YEAR

50,000
HOMEBOUND ELDERLY NEW YORKERS SERVED

5,324
VOLUNTEERS HELPING THEIR NEIGHBORS
While New Yorkers remember March 20th — the beginning of the state’s stay-at-home order — as the day life officially changed, Citymeals was already hard at work. As the designated emergency responder for the city’s seniors, our dedicated warehouse staff had begun packing emergency meals earlier in the month. Still, no one could have predicted the historic scale of our response.

Citymeals delivered 1,285,232 meals from March through the end of our Fiscal Year in June. That’s a 112% increase over the same period last year.

It wasn’t just our meal recipients who came to rely on us. Phone calls and emails were pouring in. Older New Yorkers, able to shop and cook for themselves before the pandemic, suddenly faced the prospect of going hungry. While food pantry lines stretched for blocks, standing for hours is not an option for those we serve. Masks and hand sanitizer were little comfort as their age and health left them especially vulnerable to infection. Others had relied on breakfast and lunch from their local senior center — all had been forced to close.

In the first wave of the pandemic, Citymeals was serving 50,000 of the city’s elderly. Almost three times the number of recipients prior to Covid-19, many lived in senior or public housing. By May, weekend meal deliveries had increased by a third.

Throughout Covid-19, Citymeals’ weekend and holiday deliveries have continued without interruption. To protect vulnerable recipients, staff and volunteers donned masks and gloves. Check-ins — never more essential — began taking place at a safe distance with deliverers hanging the meal on a doorknob, knocking and then stepping away to chat with each recipient.

At our warehouse, operations went from five to seven days a week as Citymeals doubled staff to meet the growing need. Two pods were created to ensure meal packing and delivery could continue even if...

“If I didn’t have meals on wheels, I don’t know how I’d survive.” — Fred, 88
staff became ill. Handmade cards and poems were tucked in with these emergency meals to let our frail aged neighbors know we were thinking of them.

Meanwhile, inside some of the city’s darkened restaurants, kitchens were bustling. Food world friends mobilized to donate 67,906 meals for our homebound elderly in the first four months of the pandemic. Chef Daniel Boulud and his team began preparing 5,000 restaurant-quality meals each week. And at Eleven Madison Park, Chef Daniel Humm and his kitchen staff were just as busy, preparing another 3,000 meals daily.

There’s no doubt Citymeals was — and continues to be — on the frontlines of responding to the pandemic. With the help of our dedicated family — staff, deliverers, volunteers and partners — older New Yorkers have had a lifeline through it all. Isolated and afraid, the security of nourishing meals 365 days a year has been a reminder someone is looking out for them.
Citymeals provides nourishing meals to nearly 20,000 homebound elderly New Yorkers. We deliver to the city’s most vulnerable population on weekends and holidays — when there is no government funding — and during emergencies. While our emergency meals program saw extraordinary growth as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, our lifeline of weekend and holiday meals remained as essential as ever.

**WEEKEND MEALS**

By partnering with community-based organizations and senior centers throughout the five boroughs, Citymeals is able to fill in where government funds fall short. On Saturdays and Sundays, we hand-deliver nourishing meals and check on the well-being of our frail aged neighbors. During the pandemic, meal deliverers have often been the only human interaction for many of our recipients. In Fiscal Year 2020, Citymeals delivered 1,622,656 weekend meals — reflecting an additional 3,000 vulnerable older New Yorkers placed on regular weekend delivery routes in the first few months of Covid-19.

**EMERGENCY MEALS**

At the Joan & Bob Tisch Emergency Meal Distribution Center in the Bronx, Citymeals maintains a permanent stock of shelf-stable meals in case of localized emergencies. That meant we were ready to step up when a blackout on the west side of Manhattan knocked out one of our centers’ kitchens in July 2019, guaranteeing no recipient went without a meal. But this past spring and summer our emergency response was tested as never before. Last fiscal year, as a direct consequence of the pandemic, we delivered 554,600 emergency meals to older New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. That’s nearly nine times more than in any previous year.

“Before I had these meals, I was always gripped with tension. Now I’m not afraid.” — Aleta, 72
EMERGENCY FOOD PACKAGES

If harsh winter weather delays our regular meal deliveries, our older neighbors can count on these vital packages delivered each fall. Filled with essentials like tuna, organic brown rice, oatmeal and canned vegetables, as well as special treats like low-sugar cookies and hot cocoa, each box contains four shelf-stable meals. Most importantly, our Emergency Food Packages stock bare kitchen shelves, providing essential security when snow or ice storms strike. Citymeals delivered 72,544 of these meals in the last fiscal year.

“The Passover food is a bright spot in a difficult time.” — Karen, 76

HOLIDAY BOXES

Citymeals delivers special boxes packed with nonperishable meals in advance of Labor Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Passover, Memorial Day and Independence Day. These packages ensure our fragile elderly have meals even when centers must close for national or religious observances. In April, with many still panicked and reeling from the citywide shutdown, our Passover boxes had already arrived at the homes of existing recipients. But for seniors newly in need during the pandemic, Citymeals quickly delivered an additional 36,000 Kosher for Passover meals. In Fiscal Year 2020, Citymeals distributed 194,796 meals through our holiday boxes.
MOBILE FOOD PANTRY

Homebound recipients don’t have the option of walking to a grocery store or a food pantry when their cupboards are empty — they are simply too old and frail, and too vulnerable to Covid-19. For those most at-risk, Citymeals supplements regular deliveries with additional food, including soups, stews and whole-grain breakfast cereal. Serving as protection against malnutrition, we distributed 57,387 pantry meals in Fiscal Year 2020.

FRESH PRODUCE

Even before the pandemic, our meal recipients were unable to visit the many farmers’ markets across the city. And while every home-delivered meal includes fruits and vegetables, seasonal local produce is a special treat. Through a partnership with GrowNYC and support from the New York City Council, Citymeals is able to provide strawberries, tomatoes, apples and more. We made 12,626 deliveries of fresh produce last year.

HOLIDAY MEALS

The holidays can be particularly isolating for the homebound elderly. Citymeals is there to remind them they haven’t been forgotten — bringing festive holiday meals right to their doors. And before Covid-19, we also hosted special celebrations at senior centers for those able to leave home. For Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year’s Day, Lunar New Year, Mother’s Day and Independence Day, Citymeals provided 78,566 holiday meals last year.
After five years, delivering meals has become a ritual for Linda. First, she checks her list, then she’s off to climb stairs and knock on doors. With each recipient, she spends a few minutes catching up. She knows who prefers “Miss” or “Mister” and who likes being called by their first name. Moving slowly, sometimes painstakingly, to answer the door, Linda is always patient.

As an essential worker, Linda has been at the forefront of responding to Covid-19. Quick to smile and normally unflappable, Linda admits the pandemic has been the most challenging time of her career. “A lot of these people don’t have family and they’re alone. So their Citymeals deliverer may be the only conversation they have that day.”

Before the virus, the recipients on her route might step out to get their mail or see someone in the hall. Now, every interaction is dangerous and Covid-19 has only amplified their isolation. That’s why Linda always makes time to check in with each meal recipient. “They’re like moms and dads to me… I really cherish them and look up to them,” she beams.

While Linda delights in conversation, she misses the hugs from those on her route. “With the pandemic, we have to be so distant from each other. It’s like we’re missing that passion we have for each other.” The affection runs both ways. “They’re definitely scared for their lives, but they want to protect me as much as I want to protect them,” Linda explains.

Working the same route every day, Linda generally knows what to expect. So when she picks up her delivery sheet and sees a name missing, she always fears the worst. Despite her years of experience, Linda says the shock and sadness of losing a meal recipient never goes away.

“The worst part of this is to lose a client. It’s been to the point that sometimes I just want to take a break. But then you’ve got to jump back in and remember I have sixty other people who need me.” It’s that natural optimism that endears Linda to those we serve.
Growing up in South Bend, Indiana the youngest of five, Arthur figured his future was the same as his brothers’ — working in one of the city’s automobile factories. But now, at 87 years old, he can hardly recall a time when music wasn’t part of his life.

Early on, Arthur’s voice caught the eye of his chorus teacher Ms. Webber who encouraged him to nurture his talent. She even helped him win a scholarship to the University of Indiana in Bloomington. While Arthur loved singing in choirs, he found his other coursework boring and ultimately left.

Unsure how to make a living out of his passion for singing, Arthur enlisted in the Navy, serving on the U.S.S. Pittsburgh. With 1,100 men aboard, Arthur found others who were interested in music, even managing to form a choir in his free time. “I loved the Navy, mostly because of the music.”

After his tour was over, Arthur arrived in New York City and landed a coveted spot at Juilliard. “It was all so exciting, but I didn’t know anything,” he recalls. Finally, Arthur had found a school where he enjoyed every class, soaking up everything he could on music theory and piano while serving as the tenor soloist for the school’s orchestra.

Not long after graduating, Arthur struck up a friendship with Harry Belafonte. He joined The Belafonte Folk Singers, providing backup vocals for the celebrated singer and activist at concerts and recording their own albums. The group spent several years touring, mainly in West Africa. And in 1961, their album won a Grammy for Best Folk Recording.

Arthur’s greatest honor came in 1964 when The Belafonte Folk Singers were invited to perform at President Johnson’s inaugural gala. It was a landmark moment for black musicians, coming at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. “It was quite a thing to do at the time,” Arthur states with his signature modesty.

After years of touring, Arthur finally decided to settle down. He moved into a Hell’s Kitchen apartment — the same one he’s called home for nearly 45 years — and began teaching privately. He continued singing too, often performing at The Bitter End or The Village Gate nightclubs. Both would allow his most talented students a spot, usually late on a weeknight.

While it’s been many years since Arthur has had students, he wasn’t going to stay idle. Three nights a week, he used to ride the bus to Harlem where he was a soloist at the Salem United Methodist Church. As he developed neuropathy in his legs, standing for long performances became impossible and Arthur would sing from a chair.

Today, Arthur is confronting the hard realities of aging. Nearly two decades ago, he was diagnosed with HIV. His daily regimen of pills has allowed him to live longer than he expected, but Covid-19 poses a serious risk to his weakened immune system. He hasn’t ventured outside since March, save for one doctor’s appointment.

Once played daily, the piano Arthur bought when he first moved into the apartment now sits unused and untuned. On top, carefully chosen photos capture cherished memories performing with his friends and laughing on tour buses. Alone, Arthur smiles as he reminisces.

Since Arthur began getting meals, the regular knock at the door from his deliverer — particularly during the pandemic — has been a bright spot in his lonely days. It’s a reminder that he is still part of the city where he made his home all those years ago.
Volunteers have always been part of the bedrock ensuring we can fulfill our mission. But in Fiscal Year 2020, their tireless spirit and endless smiles meant so much more to our meal recipients, lonely and afraid behind their apartment doors. Still others saw the city going into lockdown and immediately took action, packing thousands of shelf-stable meals at our warehouse. This year, 19,865 dedicated volunteers donated 82,673 hours of their time to Citymeals.

MEAL DELIVERY
As the number of seniors needing meals skyrocketed across the five boroughs, we relied more than ever on volunteers to supplement our professional delivery staff. In the face of a dangerous pandemic, caring New Yorkers from all walks of life set aside their own concerns to help guarantee our meal recipients could count on a nutritious meal and a kind check-in no matter what was happening outside their doors.

A FRIEND AT THEIR DOOR

The majority of the frail aged we serve live alone. And nearly 10% have no one with whom to talk, save their meal deliverer. The effects of isolation are clear: deteriorating physical and mental health that leaves the elderly susceptible to heart attacks, strokes, depression and dementia. Through our Friendly Visiting program, volunteers are carefully vetted and matched with a meal recipient with whom they share a common interest for weekly visits. In the midst of Covid-19, our volunteers quickly pivoted to phone and video calls, ensuring these meaningful relationships remained intact.

FRIENDLY VISITING
Senior Script and Senior Chat

Each day we receive many letters from meal recipients who reach out. Often they just share their appreciation and thanks. Other times they talk about their day-to-day circumstances or provide personal stories about their past. Our volunteers respond to every one — sometimes establishing a regular correspondence. They also connect by phone with lonely recipients who would enjoy a weekly chat with a warm familiar voice. These exchanges remind our frail aged neighbors they are still valued members of their communities.

Handmade Cards

For our homebound elderly, many of whom have outlived their friends and relatives, a personalized card is a cherished gift. Handmade cards remind the recipient they still matter to someone. In 2020, volunteers from student, community and corporate groups created 80,000 cards for birthdays, holidays and other special occasions — over 10,000 more than last year. Every single card is included with a meal delivery to one of our frail aged neighbors.

“They’re alone, cooped up in their apartments. You can tell that they’re longing for connection and friendship.” — Chelsea, a Citymeals volunteer
Towards the end of her life, Betsy’s Aunt Edie received meals from Citymeals on Wheels. Betsy saw how her aunt would light up with pleasure whenever a volunteer stopped by. “Much more than the actual food, she adored when they visited and engaged with her,” Betsy explains.

It was this experience that motivated Betsy to sign up to volunteer with her three sons: Laszlo, Elijah and Lenny. With her eldest contemplating college, Betsy wanted her sons to be exposed to the wider world — to unfamiliar neighborhoods and people in need.

“So beginning in 2018, Betsy and her boys have volunteered preparing meals, packing shelf-stable food and delivering to the elderly. Betsy loves to watch the frail recipients brighten as they slowly open the door to see three smiling young men. “We’ve learned to identify with people on a very deep human level,” she reflects. “I’ve become a better person for it.”

Of course Covid-19 has complicated their routine. Now, the family arrives early at the meal center, washing hands, applying sanitizer and putting on gloves before having their temperatures taken and attaching a wrist band announcing they have been screened for the virus.

These steps are necessary to protect vulnerable meal recipients, and Betsy’s family doesn’t mind. It’s heart-wrenching, though, the fear and loneliness on the faces of elderly New Yorkers who before the pandemic were able to walk down the block for lunch at a senior center.

Betsy can see the isolation takes a toll. She understands that for many, she and her sons are the only people they will speak to all day.

But still, Betsy knows the deliveries are appreciated. She is quick to emphasize that the social interaction is just as vital for seniors as the meals. “Company and food are equally important to survival,” she points out. It’s a responsibility the family takes seriously.

Betsy is proud that volunteering has taught her boys how to navigate the city, talk politely with strangers and express compassion for their neighbors who have no one else to depend on. “The experience is just as valuable to us because we get to be a force for good at however small a level. We need each other.”
CORPORATE & FOUNDATION COVID-19 PARTNERS

In an unprecedented year, Citymeals’ historic emergency response to Covid-19 was made possible, in part, thanks to our generous foundation and corporate donors. We thank them for their compassionate support.

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Citymeals would like to thank these generous donors who have gone above and beyond in their support of our programs by contributing to this important campaign.

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*In Memoriam
RESTRICTED FUNDS SPENT

100% of all contributions to Citymeals on Wheels from the general public are used exclusively for the preparation and delivery of meals. The graph on this page represents how these general donations were used in Fiscal Year 2020.

All funds needed to cover administrative and fundraising expenses are raised separately and specifically for those purposes. Administrative grants come from Citymeals on Wheels board members, foundations, corporate sponsors, and the City of New York.

**TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES**

$19,200,222

- **WEEKEND MEALS** $9,943,982
- **HOLIDAY BOX MEALS** $1,283,466
- **HOLIDAY MEALS** $541,178
- **EMERGENCY FOOD PACKAGE MEALS** $518,397
- **EMERGENCY MEALS** $3,803,500
- **PROGRAM COORDINATION** $2,259,782
- **FRIENDLY VISITING** $804,371
- **MOBILE FOOD PANTRY** $7,745
- **FRESH PRODUCE PROGRAM** $21,746
- **NON-MEAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM** $16,055

**FUNDED ITEMS <1%**

- MOBILE FOOD PANTRY $7,745
- FRESH PRODUCE PROGRAM $21,746
- NON-MEAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM $16,055

**2020**

$9,943,982
NUMBER OF MEALS FUNDED

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**TOTAL MEALS SERVED**: 2,698,955

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

**TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE**: $42,111,103

**PROGRAM EXPENSES**
- Weekend Meals: $9,943,982
- Emergency Meals: $3,803,500
- Emergency Food Packages: $518,397
- Holiday Box Meals: $1,283,466
- Holiday Meals: $541,178
- Mobile Food Pantry: $7,745
- Program Coordination*: $2,259,782
- Friendly Visiting: $804,371
- Non-Meal Assistance Program: $16,055
- Fresh Produce Program: $21,746

**TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES**: $19,200,222

**TOTAL EXPENSES**
- General & Administrative Expenses: $2,509,356
- Fundraising Expenses: $2,668,322

**TOTAL EXPENSES**: $24,377,900

**Total Assets**: $66,678,704
**Total Liabilities**: $8,353,676

**NET ASSET BALANCE**: $58,325,028

* Includes Client Intake, Senior Chat, Senior Script and other Program Services.

Information extracted from the audited financial statement provided by RSM US, LLP, certified public accountants.
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*Founding Executive Director
**Past Presidents
This year, Citymeals lost three beloved family members. In October, Jessye Norman passed away. In April, Karen Garvin and Phyllis Bierman both died as a result of Covid-19.

A Grammy award-winning opera singer, Jessye was one of Citymeals’ earliest supporters and a Board Member. She once said, “I find it impossible to be in this world and concerned only with one’s profession. If you go to the home of a person who’s bedridden, it’s really hard to worry if your costume is going to be plum or purple.”

For many years, Karen was the coordinator overseeing weekend meal deliveries to 900 of our homebound elderly neighbors in the Bronx. Working in the city’s most food insecure borough, Karen was tireless in ensuring every meal was delivered.

Phyllis spent nearly a decade in our Programs & Aging Initiatives department where she was the first point of contact for those in need of meals. Prior to Citymeals, she worked with seniors in Lower Manhattan helping them navigate and access vital social services.

Jessye, Karen and Phyllis will be dearly missed by everyone at Citymeals.
Founded in 1981, Citymeals on Wheels provides a continuous lifeline of nourishing meals and vital companionship to New York City’s homebound elderly. Working in partnership with community-based organizations and senior centers, Citymeals prepares and delivers weekend, holiday and emergency meals for our frail aged neighbors throughout the year.