2022

METRO CARING

ENDING HUNGER AT ITS ROOT

TERMINAR LAS CAUSAS PROFUNDAS DEL HAMBRE

EST. 1974

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

LETTER FROM THE CEO & BOARD CHAIR

This year, we saw the return of many things we love.

We reopened our market, once again welcoming our full community into the building. The Fresh Foods Market has been the heart of our building since its opening, ensuring people have a choice in the foods they bring home to their families. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers and staff, we safely operated under various stages of ever-changing health and safety guidelines.

The reopening of our kitchen filled the second floor with aromas and tasty food from our nutrition classes and cooking clubs. Our twice-daily Volunteer Gatherings moved back inside, and Volunteer Orientation restarted, giving new volunteers a greater opportunity to learn more about our work to end hunger at its root. We were able to end our split morning and afternoon shifts, allowing staff and volunteers to spend time together again. We enjoyed ample opportunities to share a meal, taste new recipes, and gather with one another for night and weekend events.

The moment we announced COVID vaccines available to the community was a cheerful one. It signaled a sign of hope and offered the comfort of safety. We celebrated times when it was safe to reduce our face mask policies. For new folks in our community, it was the first time we saw each other's smiles. While we might miss the party lights in the outside tent on our Tuesday evening shifts, we think everyone agrees that being back together under the same roof brings more laughter, joy, and friendship.

The pandemic taught us many things and pushed us to develop new ways of doing things, like our home food deliveries that we are continuing to offer with our local partner Bondadosa. Our Operations team worked to improve technology in the building that makes it easier to have hybrid meetings, and we all got better about staying home when we feel unwell.

As the world looked to recover from the devastating economic and health fallout of the pandemic and woke up to long-standing inequities, we sought to rebuild back in new ways that would ensure greater strength in our full community. We assembled a new team at Metro Caring to nurture local entrepreneurs and build community wealth. We were able to fundraise in order to pilot "mini-grants" and invest directly in our community's entrepreneurs. These mini-grants generate opportunities for folks to launch a new business, rebuild after the pandemic, expand an enterprise, or try out a new idea. The awardees further bolster each other by meeting regularly as part of our Mastermind Circle to share ideas and collaborate.

While many great things have returned to us at Metro Caring, we did not plan to go back to normal—and we do not intend to. We cannot accept that "normal" looks like hunger in our community, like the unaffordable rent, inadequate public benefits, medical debt, health inequity, inadequate wages, and unfair laws that separate families based on citizenship. So many in our community face challenges that make it difficult for families to put food on the table, and we believe that all of us—Black, brown, or white—deserve the dignity and nourishment of groceries in our refrigerators.

This past year, Metro Caring underwent an Equity Audit to identify how we can strengthen our commitment to reimagining the systems that prevent people from accessing healthy, culturally connected, and sustainably sourced foods. We've appointed members of our community to serve on our IDEA committee—that's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, Accountability, and Action. The Board of Directors dedicate the beginning portion of every business meeting to focus on IDEA work. We're also working to prioritize language justice to make Metro Caring a multilingual space that is accessible and welcoming to folks of all backgrounds.

The reckoning we all faced in 2020, including the health and economic destruction from the pandemic and racial brutality that yet again exposed the inequities in our communities, gave us a shocking look at the work that lies ahead. For a moment, we felt swelling momentum. Significant change seemed promised. Yet as the world rushes back to a sense of normalcy, we continue to come face-to-face with new and old challenges and know that the fight is long. We must grit our teeth and dive back in. Change will seemingly take more time, extensive effort, and renewed togetherness. To do so, we must prioritize community care. We each must sustain ourselves, our bodies, our health, our families, and our neighbors if we are to stay in this fight for the long haul.

We need innovative, long-lasting solutions to end hunger in Colorado. If we are to show up alongside our community to catalyze those solutions, we must double down on caring for one another so we can stay in the fight, generate new ideas, and welcome more and more people to the table.

With our incredibly strong and diverse community—full of dedicated volunteers, resilient families, passionate supporters, and skilled staff—we know we have exactly what we need.

Teva Sienicki
CEO

Deborah Price
Chair, Board of Directors

REBUILD

REBUILDING COMMUNITY HEALTH

Vaccines

The arrival of COVID vaccines was a moment to cheer. They brought our community comfort in being able to safely re-engage with one another in person. Metro Caring hosted three events in partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to bring mobile vaccine clinics to our community. In total, 910 vaccines were administered. Volunteers also spent hours calling community members when they became eligible for vaccines to connect them to appointments at Saint Joseph Hospital.

Nutrition

Our Nutrition team is committed to strengthening the health of our community by facilitating co-learning opportunities for individuals and families to hone their skills and take control of their health. This year, the team evolved our Diabetes Self-Management Program from a controlled set of lessons to a peer-led curriculum. Having people who live with diabetes facilitate the class is more meaningful to fellow participants, and everyone can participate in knowledge-sharing practices that work best for them. Working together fosters a stronger support system and sense of community, too.

Our programs expanded this year in multiple ways. We now have two community members and two staff members certified to facilitate the diabetes course—and it's offered in Spanish and English. When the pandemic forced us to learn how to conduct life online, we developed new virtual curricula for our classes. One of the added benefits was that the virtual curriculum was easy to share with partner organizations in more rural areas that we couldn't previously reach.

"In Diabetes entre amigos, I met weekly with other individuals who were living with the same challenges as me. This was the first time the class was offered in Spanish. Metro Caring helps me feel comfortable communicating in the language of my heart so I can participate, ask questions, and get the care I need. After 20 years of struggling to understand my disease, I finally feel healthy."

— Gloria, *Cocina y nutrición & Diabetes entre amigos* Graduate

Translated from Spanish

48 Cocina y nutrición participants

20 Kidz in the Kitchen families

13 Diabetes Self-Management Program participants

8 Skill Sharing Cooking Club members

98 Households participating in Nutrition Programs

REBUILDING COMMUNITY WEALTH

With the formation of our Community Development team, we looked to invest in our community by partnering with entrepreneurs and local businesses. The team launched our mini-grant program with a cohort of 20 members who accepted funding to develop their business ideas. Restaurant owners, landscape professionals, educators, and more are all collaborating as part of our Mastermind Circle, meeting regularly to share skills and collaborate with experts so they can take their ideas to market with confidence.

RECULTIVATING OUR GROWING SPACES

Urban Agriculture

This year, our Urban Agriculture team launched the Farmer Incubator Program to give budding agriculture professionals an opportunity to manage our growing spaces. Juan became our first farmer entrepreneur. He worked in our Hydro Farm that sits across the street from Metro Caring at Saint Joseph Hospital to grow healthy greens, like cilantro and basil. Through the program, Juan launched his own business, selling his harvest at pay-what-you-can farmers markets and to Metro Caring for our Fresh Foods Market. Originally from Chile, Juan joined Metro Caring as a volunteer in 2019. Now, he's part of our Operations team and quite literally keeps things running here at Metro Caring.

44 Community gardeners

9 Growing sites

120 Pounds of honey harvested by Red Mule Apiary

5,000 Seedlings distributed in partnership with City Park Greenhouse

FRESH FOOD

REIMAGINING STRONGER FOOD SYSTEMS

Fresh Foods Market

Our partnerships with local food banks and grocery stores help fill our market with healthy and fresh foods. Volunteers work hard to ensure food coming through our warehouse meets strict food safety and nutrition criteria. Simply put, if you wouldn't eat it yourself, then it doesn't belong on our shelves. But donations simply can't cover all of the need, so we allocate funding to purchase foods we're lacking. In the past two years, we've spent a total of $1 million in food for the Fresh Foods Market. This means more culturally relevant foods that give families options they're more acquainted with and that meet specific dietary restrictions for religious and cultural traditions. We also invest in more locally sourced foods by prioritizing Colorado farmers and growers, especially those who have historically been left out of the agricultural sector. It's better for our environment, and it's better for our community.

10,096 Families shopped in the Fresh Foods Market

48,458 Appointments in the Fresh Foods Market

9,686 ID vouchers distributed

RETHINKING BETTER POLICY

Community Organizing

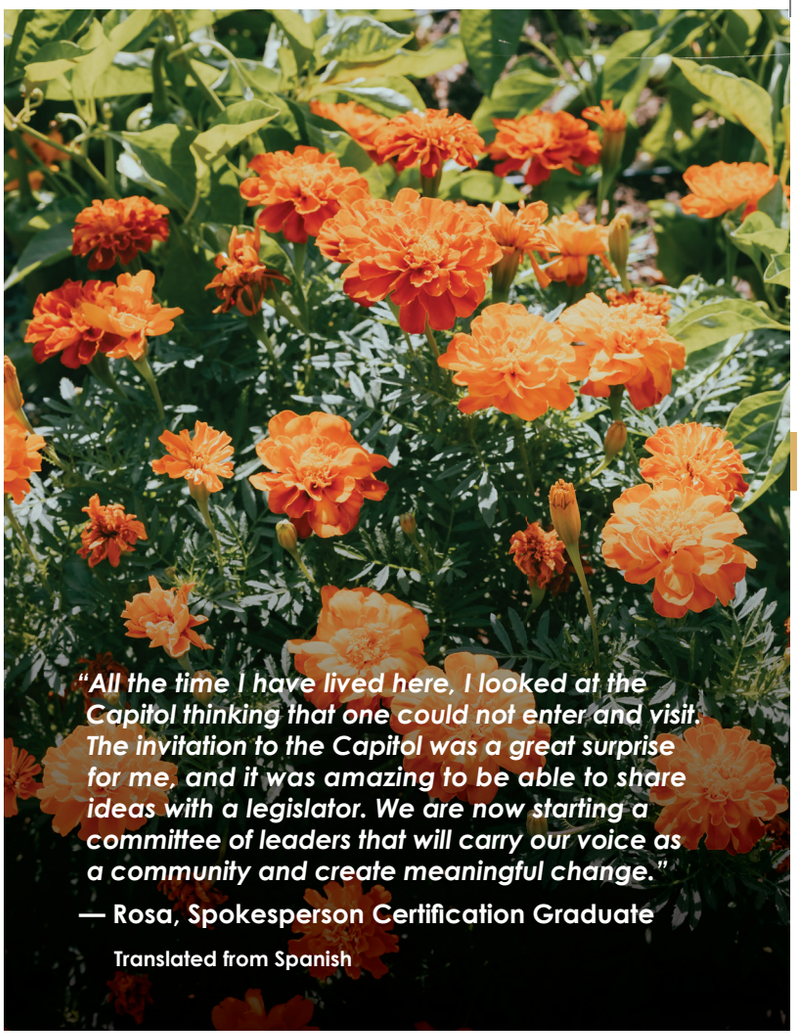
At Metro Caring, we focus on shifting power to the people that are most negatively impacted by our current food system. Those who have lived experience with hunger are the best equipped to address the root causes. But too often, our community does not see people in positions of leadership that look like them or share their experiences. Metro Caring's Community Organizing program focuses on strengthening leadership skills and bolstering stories so that our community can become a strong base of advocacy and change.

Our Spokesperson Certification Program expanded this year to be offered for the first time in Spanish. This program brings individuals together to hone their voices and sharpen their stories so that they can feel ready to advocate for their communities, whether to give testimony or write to their elected officials.

Overall, Metro Caring supported eight bills in the 2022 state legislative session and asked our community to help us advance important measures—like Healthy School Meals for All and improvements to the SNAP appeal process. Together, our community sent 182 emails to elected officials, and three individuals testified during committee hearings.

Legislative Agenda

1. Healthy School Meals for All
2. TANF Restructuring—COLA
3. SNAP Rules/Appeal Process
4. Employment Support and Job Retention Services
5. Mobile Home Park Resident Support
6. Sealing Criminal Records
7. Child Health Plan Coverage of Pregnant People without Work Authorization
8. Sales Tax Exemption Essential Hygiene Products



"All the time I have lived here, I looked at the Capitol thinking that one could not enter and visit. The invitation to the Capitol was a great surprise for me, and it was amazing to be able to share ideas with a legislator. We are now starting a committee of leaders that will carry our voice as a community and create meaningful change."

— Rosa, Spokesperson Certification Graduate

Translated from Spanish

8 Legislative bills moved along

182 Emails sent to elected officials

3 Community members testified at committee hearings

REFOCUSING, REDEFINING, AND REBUILDING

Refocusing Towards Equity

In alignment with our core value "Pursue Equity," a group of staff members worked with Chrysalis Consulting Collaborative to complete an Equity Audit of Metro Caring's internal policies, practices, and procedures related to the Board of Directors, volunteers, and staff. Marginalized communities experience hunger more often in this country. If we are going to end hunger, we must work to undo the oppressive systems that hold people back, so that everyone has access to what they need to live a happy, healthy life. The Equity Audit report showcased several constituent-based recommendations for how we could strengthen our commitment to justice and pursue equity in our work to end hunger at its root. These recommendations will guide our work for the next three years, and beyond, and were formally included in our strategic plan.

Redefining Our Culture

We completed a survey that showed that over 30 languages are represented in our community. To make sure we can adequately connect everyone to programs and resources they need, we hired Language Line, an online service that allows us to instantly call an interpreter on a phone or tablet to help us communicate effectively with others. We continue to work with local interpreters and translators with the Community Language Cooperative to make Metro Caring a more multicultural and multilingual space where everyone can participate and engage in the language of their heart.

"Metro Caring has cultivated an incredibly welcoming community, and it's such an honor to be part of the organization's impact. It's a joy to connect and work alongside Metro Caring staff, volunteers, and community members every week."

— Chloe, volunteer

Rebuilding Back Together

Metro Caring is more than the food pantry we started as back in 1974. Ask our volunteers, and they'll tell you how they find community and belonging when they're here. At the start of the pandemic, many volunteers had to stay home for their own health and safety. As public health guidance changed and our conditions became safer, we welcomed back volunteers who were in vulnerable populations. We met new volunteers who were looking for a place to end months of social isolation and re-engage in their community. Local corporate partners showed up by the dozens. And other organizations, like the Ability Specialists, volunteer every week with us, filling the warehouse with positivity and energy.

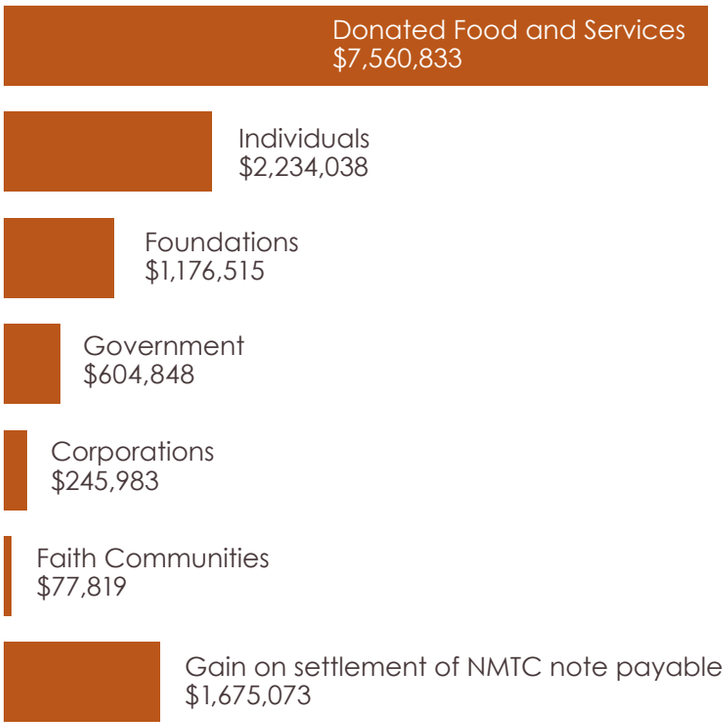
Building a movement to end hunger will take all of us, contributing our strengths in the best way we know how.

23,231 Hours of volunteering

1,161 Volunteers

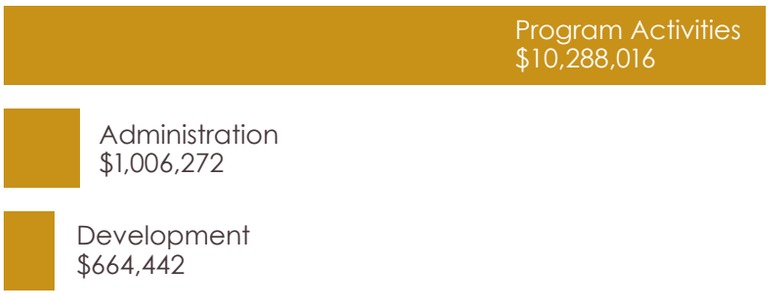
FINANCIALS & BOARD

Income



TOTAL INCOME: $13,575,109

Expenses



TOTAL EXPENSES: $11,958,730

TOTAL NET ASSETS: $9,106,581

INCREASE IN NET ASSETS: $1,616,379

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Roots to Rise Society

By making a five-year financial pledge to the organization, Roots to Rise Society members are a special group of friends that believe in Metro Caring's mission and want to ensure that we can meet people's immediate need for nutritious food for as long as needed in our community and invest in the long-term work of movement building, organizing, and advocacy to end hunger at its root.

$25,000+ per year
Deborah Price

$10,000–$24,999 per year
Gerald Forney and Irene Ludwig
Mike and Cheryl Porter
Becca and Robert Reichenberger

$1,000–$9,999 per year
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Krista and Dan Wesdyk
Lisa Whitesides
Brian and Lori Whitney
Janice and Chuck Woodward
Barbara Young

The Greenhouse

The Greenhouse is a special group of supporters who have chosen to donate monthly.

Laurel Adler
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