Activating Our Community
Whew! What a year. We’re exhausted, aren’t you?!

It’s a tremendous feeling to be both tired and exhilarated by work this important. We have come so far over the past twelve months. But there’s still so much work to do.

The past year has proved a year of great progress. Metro Caring has a fully staffed leadership team comprising (in addition to me as CEO) Erik Hicks, Chief Development Officer; Donna Munip, Chief Financial Officer; and Sisi Dong Brinn, Chief Impact Officer. For the most part, these are new positions for Metro Caring, and they will allow the leadership to be more creative and innovative. We are all ecstatic to be here.

As we continue Metro Caring’s distinguished legacy of work to end hunger at its root, we also want to make sure the organization continues to meet our community’s evolving needs. With so many new faces here, the office is brimming with fresh ideas and points of view. This means new projects. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Metro Caring has been rolling out new frontline programming and building capacity behind-the-scenes. Our several community-garden locations have been a big hit, with individuals and families already signing up for the 2019 waitlist. Similarly, our Community Nights series—usually featuring dinner and discussion of a community topic—is attracting more participants. We have also begun giving mission-focused Planting Seeds tours to community members, in addition to launching a multiyear giving society we call Roots to Rise. The theme tying all these initiatives together? **Activating and engaging our community.**

We want our work to reflect what community members actually need, so we’re identifying shared priorities. With these in mind we can help ensure that the essential work of ending hunger is done *with* rather than for our program participants. We have therefore recruited staff, volunteers, and board members who reflect the community we serve. In fact, the process of recruiting participants to the board of directors is already underway. We have also gone through a listening campaign with participants, volunteers, staff, and other stakeholders. Strategic planning, always a demanding process, is also about to commence.

In short, the past year has brought immense growth, accomplishments to be proud of, and the realization that we have much more to do. We are excited for the journey ahead, and hope you are, too. We would like to welcome anyone interested to become an ambassador of Metro Caring, and to host a Planting Seeds tour of our mission and facility for their network! We love having your input and are constantly thankful for your support as we continue nourishing neighbors, providing tools to thrive, and fostering community.

See you soon!

Teva Sienicki
CEO
Metro Caring’s Fresh Foods Market is the entry point for individuals and families living off of low-incomes to access programs and services that address the factors connected with food insecurity. We meet community members’ immediate needs by offering free, fresh, healthy foods in the market, while pivoting to prevention and intervention by offering programs that address poverty—the real cause of hunger.

In FY2018, Metro Caring distributed nearly 2.2 million pounds of food to families in need. Metro Caring received this food from hundreds of generous local grocers, faith communities, backyard gardeners, companies, and individuals. Through our many wonderful partnerships, some of this food gets redistributed to other local agencies. Some is composted (200,000 pounds last year). And even more was bartered as feed to local pig ranchers (whose pigs are later butchered and sent back to us as flavorful meat, one of our most requested items).

With these generous resources, Metro Caring provided food to nearly 23,000 individuals at least once during the fiscal year. With many individuals coming back multiple times throughout the year, we nourished over 68,000 of our neighbors in FY2018. The average amount of food received by each household per visit was 83 pounds, an estimate based on participant selection and our guideline of taking a week’s worth of groceries through our “Take What You Need” model.

What people are saying about Metro Caring…Hunger Free Colorado Survey

In April 2018 Metro Caring partnered with Hunger Free Colorado to conduct a survey of 369 individuals and families who shop in our Fresh Foods Market. The results taught us a lot about the most important needs in our community and how we can best support them.

45% of respondents said protein is the most important item they can receive from a food pantry. One of our most significant goals for the coming year is to increase the supply of meat and dairy in our Fresh Foods Market in order to meet the high demand.

67% of those surveyed said they visit Metro Caring every month. Individuals visiting Metro Caring cited transportation as their most significant barrier—this despite the 10,731 bus fares we provided throughout FY2018.

85% strongly feel they are welcome here, and also that the people they encounter at Metro Caring are helpful.

The most popular response to the question, “What other services would be helpful?” was “How to eat healthier.”
At Metro Caring, we are challenging the business-as-usual model seen in traditional charitable food banks. We understand that the provision of free food is not enough to keep our community members from reaching rock bottom, and that food insecurity is in fact a marker of poverty. To address the constantly changing and unique needs of our participants, Metro Caring’s community navigators provide referrals to almost any resource they might need, whether through us or one of our partner organizations. These resources range from vouchers for identification procurement, assistance paying utility bills, and health screenings provided by our partners at Saint Joseph’s Medical Center.

- **8,298 Colorado ID vouchers distributed;** 5,634 reported using their voucher for employment
- **627 families received utility assistance**
- **189 participants in a new tax-assistance program** in partnership with Denver Asset Building Coalition; bringing in over $175,000 in federal refunds, nearly $30,000 in state refunds, and saving more than $50,000 in accountant fees from tax preparation companies. This contributed to almost $260,000 going back into the local economy!

In FY2018 we filled 899 seats at a variety of Bite into a Healthy Lifestyle cooking classes. These classes are now taught in both English and Spanish thanks to volunteer and former participant Eva Valdez. We look forward to adding more culturally relevant and inclusive classes in FY2019.

Our Metro Caring Diabetes Self-Management program and Diabetes Prevention program, in partnership with the YMCA, provide evidence-based, interactive support for community members who want to gain skills and understanding to help them lead healthier, happier, longer lives. This past year, 53 participants attended these programs.

In addition, 69 health screenings were provided in FY2018, and Lannea Hand (our Registered Dietician) provided 18 individual nutrition consultations. These services help participants get what they need to reach their full potential.

Seeds for Success

Seeds for Success is one of Metro Caring’s newest programs, and we believe it has vast potential for growth and impact in our community. This job-readiness, job-training, and employment-services program lasts at least 8 weeks, and helps individuals find their next job or career. Programming focuses on the individual’s self-awareness and emotional intelligence, job-skill development, and assistance with resume writing and application submission. As program graduates finish their 8 weeks of courses, they are encouraged to stay connected to Metro Caring, as support will continue to be available as needed, often long after they get the job. Over the past year, we have begun to see and address the gaps in this program and look forward to rolling out phase two of Seeds for Success.

“From how to select jobs to apply for, resume building, cover letter writing, and mock interviews to providing one on one assistance with other aspects of living...the Seeds for Success program offered so much! Even after I found a job, the Metro Caring staff sent a card congratulating me.”

“The most useful aspect of the Seeds for Success program was the instructor’s palpable desire to see the participants actually succeed. The instructor encouraged participants to apply for jobs that would add to your overall life satisfaction.”

*Quotes from Seeds for Success program participants.*
In collaboration with community partners and other local organizations, we have begun cultivating several community garden spaces in our nearby neighborhoods. We currently sponsor 59 garden plots: 28 are just a few blocks east of our building and are underwritten by Saint Joseph’s Hospital; 18 plots are under cultivation along 13th Ave, on the grounds of Saint John’s Episcopal Cathedral; and 13 more garden plots are connected with the Cancer Centers of Colorado through Saint Joseph’s Hospital.

Our vision is that these gardens will be at the heart of our goal to activate community spaces. Individuals or families adopt a garden bed to grow food for their home, furthering Metro Caring’s mission of helping community members to access and eat healthy, nutritious, and fresh foods.

We have also begun offering Community Dinner nights, to which all are welcome to come together for a free meal as well as educational experiences such as lectures, documentaries, and open community dialogue.

A recent grant has allowed us to begin the hiring process for a new position: Gardener and Community Activator. This position will work to engage the community around a new vision for our gardens. Our goal is to create change by helping residents bond with each other and generate the social-support networks we all need to thrive. We look forward to sharing “what’s growin’ on” with our garden and community programs.

Our most recent cohort of Diabetes Self-Management graduates have joined together to pass on the knowledge and skills they received to other members of the community through neighborhood healthy-cooking classes. We are proud of the way these participants have taken charge of their futures and chosen to give back to our community.
Meet Nawal

Our volunteers and participants come from diverse places and have various work and family backgrounds. Nawal grew up in Kuwait, with a strong family background that gave her a safe home, a great education, and the opportunity to travel the world. Dedicated to her career and her future, Nawal left her family and home behind to come to the United States. While earning her graduate degree, she met someone and eventually got married, and together they had a family. She raised her children and continued leading in her career, teaching Arabic to members of the military, opening a motel, and at one point was even recruited to work for the CIA.

Unfortunately, in time, she found herself in an unhappy and unsafe marriage. Worried for her own health and future and that of her children, she made the choice to leave and divorced her husband. For the first time, Nawal found herself without a family support system. She kept her children clothed, housed, and fed, accomplishing all these things on her own and with strength, intelligence, and passion. Then, nine years ago, Nawal suffered a devastating loss. Her oldest daughter, Diana, was killed at the age of 25. The loss had a profound impact on Nawal. In the years that followed, she confronted numerous challenges and setbacks, facing new burdens again with little outside support, and continuing to raise her children as successful members of society.

Nawal came to Metro Caring seeking food and resources to share with others in her community. Eventually, she learned about our Seeds for Success program and joined with encouragement from Helen Katich, our Programs Manager. She then got involved in Metro Caring’s nutrition programming, using her history of leadership, resourcefulness, and comfort speaking and teaching in front of others. She now works as a full-time house mother at Shannon’s Hope and Julie Greeley women’s shelter in Arvada, helping other women get back on their feet. These experiences also led her to volunteer as leader of Metro Caring’s Middle Eastern Cooking Club, teaching community members how to cook traditional Middle Eastern meals like Shawarma as part of our new series of Community Cooking Clubs. When Nawal is asked about everything she has gone through, she simply says, “I’m thankful.”

“I WAS BROUGHT UP TO BE STRONG.”
Financials

**INCOME**

- **Donated Food** $6,479,823
- **Individuals** $488,716
- **Foundations** $375,742
- **Corporations** $192,008
- **Faith Communities** $97,488
- **Government** $277,652
- **Utilities Assistance** $371,987
- **Interest and Other** $67,925

**TOTAL REVENUE:** $8,351,341

**EXPENSES**

- **Programming** $8,213,099
- **Administration** $465,949
- **Development** $343,111

**TOTAL EXPENSES:** $9,022,159

**TOTAL NET ASSETS:** $5,623,799

**DECREASE IN NET ASSETS:** $670,818

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