



Volunteer Handbook

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Message from the Executive Director

Welcome to the Locker Project! Thank you for your interest in supporting our organization. Our staff will strive to ensure that you feel welcome and supported while volunteering. We look forward to a mutually fulfilling relationship that furthers our mission to expand access to nutritious food for kids in Maine.

Since the Locker Project was launched in 2014, volunteers have donated more than 10,000 hours of their time, including nearly 2500 hours in 2024 alone. When we say we couldn't do it without you, we mean it.

This Handbook is designed to acquaint you with the Locker Project and provide you with information to prepare to serve as a volunteer. It will explain our mission as an organization, provide expectations and guidelines for volunteering, and describe the volunteer opportunities we have available. We hope this helps prepare you for a meaningful and positive experience!

Kathryn Sargent

Executive Director
November 20, 2024

Our Story

In 2011, a Portland parent, Katie Wallace, saw a need for snacks in her daughter's kindergarten class at the East End Community School and began bringing in snacks for other children. She worked with Good Shepherd Food Bank to set up a food pantry in the school nurse's office, and in 2014 she and founding executive director Katie Brown formed the Locker Project to operate school pantries across the district.

Two years later, 17 schools in Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook had Locker Project pantries. We began rescuing fresh food in 2017, to ensure that every child has access to nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables. By 2020, we had 34 program sites. During the pandemic, staff and volunteers began packing bags of produce and staples as a low-contact way for children to take healthy food home, and the amount of food we distributed nearly doubled.

We launched Farms to Families in 2021 to access more local produce to share in the community. In 2022, we moved to South Portland and invested in a facility that includes cold storage and volunteer space. In 2024, we shared 608,000 pounds of healthy fresh food and staples at 80 school and agency partner sites across Greater Portland. In 2024, we reached two important milestones: 10 years as an official nonprofit and 3 million pounds of nourishing food shared with children and families!

Our Programs

The Locker Project partners with Greater Portland schools, preschools, and local agencies to share more than 50,000 pounds of healthy food each month. We take a whole-family approach to child hunger which improves the nutritional content of diets, stretches food budgets and encourages the enjoyment of fresh food at home. We employ several distribution models to share food with children and families:

- We deliver **Green Bags** pre-packed with fresh fruits, vegetables, and bread and **Purple Bags** filled with healthy staples such as rice, pasta, soup, and cereal to public schools, preschools and other program partners for students to take home.
- We host **Fresh Food Events** at schools and community locations to offer low-barrier opportunities for children and families to choose from an assortment of fresh produce, bread, and meat to take home from a market-style distribution.
- We pack **Family Food Boxes**, which combine fresh produce, bread, meat and staples in one large box for case managers and social workers to pick up for home delivery to families.

Program Partners

Portland Public Schools

South Portland School Dept

Westbrook Public Schools

Baxter Academy

Boys & Girls Clubs

Falmouth Elementary

FedCap/Families Forward

First Baptist Church Westbrook

Head Start/Opportunity Alliance

Intercultural Community Center

LearningWorks

Lighthouse Childcare

Lifestance Health

North Deering Gardens

Omar Bin Alkhetab Masjid

Portland Housing Authority

Portland Public Health

Presente Maine

South Portland Housing Authority

South Portland Public Library

Westbrook Families Feeding Families

Westbrook Regional Vocational Ctr

WIC/Opportunity Alliance

Woodfords Family Services

Where does the food come from?

Good Shepherd Food Bank provides us access to discounted dry goods and free fresh produce. During the growing season, we are able to purchase produce from local farmers through the Mainers Feeding Mainers program. Some local farmers and community gardeners also donate their surplus produce.

We also “rescue” fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, and breads from Rosemont Markets, Standard Baking Company, Hannaford in West Falmouth and Scarborough, and Shaw’s in Portland and South Portland. “Rescuing” food means that we pick up foods that may not look perfect or may be nearing their sell-by date, and we share them through our school and agency partners. We sort through everything that we pick up at our warehouse to ensure it still looks okay and only offer “rescued” foods at fresh food events (as opposed to in pre-packed bags), so attendees can choose for themselves.

Our Mission

The Locker Project connects food-insecure children in Maine with nourishing food to improve their learning capacity, health, and future. We take a **whole-family approach** to child hunger with programs that strive to be **low-barrier**, **stigma-free** and **environmentally responsible**.

Our Mission at Work

Our “**whole-family approach**” to child hunger provides fresh produce, meat, bread, and healthy staples including items culturally important to New Mainers, covering the full range of essential nutrients. This approach aims to ensure children become familiar with nutrient-dense foods early in life, stretch family food budgets, reduce stress, free up resources and acknowledge parents as dietary role models who need healthy food, too.

We aim to be “**low barrier**” by designing our programs to be as simple and inviting to access as possible. We do not require any kind of identification or eligibility information to participate.

We strive to create “**stigma-free**” environments to ensure that individuals do not feel ashamed or judged while participating in Locker Project programs. This can be accomplished by using respectful and asset-based language, training staff and volunteers to be compassionate and non-judgmental, and promoting the Locker Project as a community resource that is open to everyone regardless of their circumstances.

Our food rescue program diverts thousands of pounds of food from the waste stream each year. We aim to be **environmentally responsible** whenever possible by reducing waste and using resources like fuel and packaging as efficiently as possible.

Volunteer Guidelines and Expectations

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (“DEI”)

The Locker Project is committed to maintaining an environment in which all employees and volunteers are valued for their skills, experience, and unique perspectives and all employees, volunteers, and participants feel welcome and safe.

Diversity is the variability of life experiences and an individual’s personal characteristics, including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability/disability or attributes, religion and religious beliefs, age, socioeconomic status, national origin, veteran status, education, family status, and languages spoken. At the Locker Project, we recognize, appreciate, and value the Diversity of our employees, volunteers, vendors, partners, board members, and program participants.

Equity refers to fair treatment and equal access to opportunity and advancement for all. At the Locker Project, the Equity work we do each day involves eliminating barriers to fair treatment to eliminate social forces such as racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Inclusion means all employees, volunteers, vendors, partners, and participants are welcomed and feel a sense of belonging. Every individual’s worth and dignity is acknowledged, their voice is respected, and their contributions are valued. Inclusion refers to both how we treat others and how we are treated.

At the Locker Project:

- We celebrate the variety of races, genders, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, ability levels, and backgrounds that make up our community.
- We dismantle barriers that stand in the way of opportunity based on identity, group status, or background.
- We make sure everyone on the team feels like they belong.
- We appreciate each other’s differences and unique identities.
- We treat each other with kindness and care.
- We value well-being as an essential element of high performance.
- We keep learning and share what we learn with others.
- We listen, support, encourage, and stand up for each other.
- We find – and act on – opportunities to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

Standards of Conduct

All volunteers are urged to become familiar with these expectations and keep them in mind while volunteering with the Locker Project in any capacity:

- Harassment and/or discrimination of any employee, volunteer, or participant based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation (including gender identity or expression), physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, membership in the National Guard or U.S. reserve, etc. is prohibited.
- Uphold an atmosphere of mutual respect towards fellow volunteers, Locker Project staff, and program participants at all times.
- Avoid using stigmatizing or othering language (especially important at Fresh Food Events). Here are some helpful tips:
 - Stigma = negative social perception or stereotype against individuals or groups based on characteristics, behaviors, or conditions which can result in feelings of shame, isolation, or devaluation.
 - Use asset-based language and thinking. Focusing on strengths and capabilities rather than deficits helps to destigmatize a situation or individual. Use language that fosters empowerment and encourages a sense of community rather than dependency.
 - For example, instead of referring to or thinking of people as "needy" or "poor," you might describe and think of program participants as "community members" or "neighbors" who are accessing resources.
 - Hearing someone say "I don't need this food, I won't take any because this isn't for me" can cause feelings of shame and othering for those accessing our programming. Remind attendees that Locker Project food is a community resource and is meant for everyone!
 - There are many factors, including food insecurity, that affect how someone might interact with Locker Project programs so remember to be respectful. If you need to limit what someone is taking or manage a line at a fresh food event, try to be objective and clear rather than commenting on a behavior or judging someone directly in any way.
- Remember that Locker Project programs are low barrier - everyone is welcome at fresh food events, no questions asked or forms required.
- Do not take pictures of employees, volunteers, or program participants without permission.

Volunteer Opportunities

Green and Purple Bag Packing

We fill bags with food and box them up for delivery to schools and partners at our warehouse in South Portland. **Green bags** are filled with fresh produce and bread which we pack into either large 15 lb bags or small 7 lb bags depending on who will receive the bags. *While our staff sort produce before bringing it to the bag-packing area, volunteers are asked to watch for any items that don't have 3 to 4 days of shelf life or are overripe, punctured or have mold on them. These should be discarded for composting.*

Purple bags contain nonperishable meal items and weigh about 6.5 lbs. We aim to include carbohydrates, dairy, and protein in each bag. *While typically these items come from cases purchased from the food bank, volunteers are asked to keep an eye out for broken or open packaging and any items that are not suitable for children (for example, that unexpectedly contain caffeine or other supplements).*

The contents of the bags will be different each time you volunteer, as we receive produce, bread and staples from several sources: Good Shepherd Food Bank, Hannaford, Shaw's, Rosemont Markets, Standard Baking, local farms, and food drives. The number of bags we need to pack also varies depending on each week's schedule.

A staff member will set up items to go in the bags and refill as needed. You will not be expected to lift anything you don't feel comfortable with, and there will always be someone within earshot to ask for assistance. That person will also be able to answer questions you may have throughout the shift.

Fresh Food Events

Fresh Food Events are market-style distributions often held during lunch or dismissal at schools or in partnership with another agency. Events held at schools will be visited mainly by students and teachers, while you may see more families and adults at Events held in community spaces. Each Event is a bit different, but usually we set up a table or two with fresh vegetables, fruit, bread, and meat and help attendees take what they would like. The Locker Project staff member will let you know if they need any help with line facilitation or limiting of certain items during the Event.

As a volunteer, you will be a welcoming presence, making sure attendees know that everyone is invited to take food. Providing open access is a great way to destigmatize free food distribution. Sharing information about how we rescue fresh food that would otherwise go to waste reinforces the messages of abundance and community connection.

Volunteer Tasks:

- Help Locker Project staff unload the van and set up distribution tables
- Help restock the table and make sure all produce looks good throughout the event
- Help hand out bags
- Help clean up

Standard Bakery Pickup and Bagging

Standard Baking donates leftover bread and sweets Sunday through Thursday after they close at 5pm. This opportunity involves going to Standard Baking, picking up donated bread and sweets, and bringing them to the warehouse at 111 Wescott Road, where you will bag up the donation for next-day distribution. It's important to note that there is usually no staff on site during this time. As a result, we require volunteering at least once at our warehouse and receiving a brief in-person training prior to signing up. Please feel free to bring a friend to help!

Delivery Driving

We have a few regular weekly or bi-weekly commitments to make small deliveries from our warehouse to partners across Portland, South Portland and Westbrook. These shifts do require some lifting and the use of a personal vehicle, as well as training. These opportunities are not listed on Sign Up Genius; email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org to learn more.

Volunteer Ambassadors

We are looking for volunteers who are interested in representing the Locker Project and sharing our story in the community. This may mean tabling at local businesses or community events, helping with some fundraising activities or organizing food drives. Email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org if you are interested.

Committees and Board

The Locker Project is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of community members. From time to time, board and/or committee positions become available. Email info@mainelockerproject.org if you're interested in learning more.

FAQs

What should I bring to my shift?

We recommend that you bring a water bottle and wear comfortable clothing, closed toed shoes, and bring a warm layer as it can be chilly in the warehouse.

Should I arrive early for my shift?

We will do any training necessary during your shift, so please arrive at the start time listed for your shift.

How do I cancel my shift?

You can cancel your shift directly on Sign Up Genius, or email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org for assistance. If you need to cancel within 24 hours of your shift please, email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org so we can try to fill your spot.

Is there an age requirement to become a volunteer?

You must be 16 years old to volunteer unsupervised.

Can I bring my kids?

Kids, friends, and family are always welcome to join you for a Standard Bakery shift. Please email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org before bringing kids under 16 to a bag packing or Fresh Food Event shift, as we may not always be able to accommodate kids.

I don't see open shifts on Sign Up Genius.

We load new shifts into Sign Up Genius monthly and as needed, so just keep checking in!

Volunteer benefits?

You are encouraged to take home a bag of produce, fruit, bread and whatever else we have available on the day of your volunteer shift! We also hold a Volunteer Appreciation party each year in June to thank and celebrate all of our wonderful volunteers.

Can I give feedback about my experience?

Yes! We appreciate your input whether provided anonymously or not! The forms are available on the Sign up Genius landing page or in print next to the whiteboard in the volunteer space at our warehouse. You can also email volunteer@mainelockerproject.org with any questions or concerns that arise during your time volunteering.

I have read and understand the roles and responsibilities of a Locker Project volunteer.