



SNAP Benefits Crisis



**UNITED
COMMUNITY
RELIEF FUND**

giveWELL
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

 **UNITED WAY**
Central Florida

THE FREEDOM TOUR

\$25,000



The funding awarded to The Freedom Tour was used to expand various projects in the east side of Polk County. In November, The Freedom Tour provided 40,019 pounds of fresh produce and frozen foods to mobile food pantries. They added four additional schools to their mobile food pantry schedule and even hosted an additional pantry prior to the week-long Thanksgiving break. This helped ensure that students had access to nutritious foods throughout the holiday. They also collaborated with HEARTH and PEP to provide after school snacks, food boxes, and additional support to students who experience food insecurity outside of regular school meal programs.

In December, The Freedom Tour received four semi loads of assorted food items including milk, yogurt, fresh vegetables, and bread. Approximately 160,000 pounds of fresh food were distributed via mobile pantries and school-based distributions. Additionally, they provided 2,800 free hot meals to the Eagle Lake, Wahneta, Eloise, and Winter Haven area over a two-week period.

Their UCRF award was also used to provide 4,000 pounds of hygiene products to Snively Elementary School, TASSEL, Winter Haven, and the surrounding area.

BARTOW COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER

\$5,000

Meat is one of the most requested items from families who utilize food pantries like the one run by Bartow Community Service Center. It is also one of the hardest resources to come by due to rising costs. With this in mind, Bartow Community Service Center chose to use their UCRF award to purchase a variety of frozen meat products for families in their community. By partnering with Harvest Meat Market, they were able to purchase and distribute 11 cases of bone-in chicken breast, 3 cases of hamburger, and 6 cases of boneless chuck totaling 340 pounds of product. This assortment allowed them to meet the diverse needs of their families, including those with dietary restrictions or religious considerations, while still providing flexibility and choice.

KIDSPACK

\$5,000

To say that the freeze on SNAP benefits affected the numbers served by kidsPACK would be an understatement. Out of the 90 schools that kidsPACK services, 42 schools reported an increased demand for meals during October and November 2025. Thanks to the UCRF funding, they were able to enroll 62 children into their program for a duration of nine weeks. Once SNAP benefits were reinstated, circumstances changed and only 6 of the 62 children have remained in the permanent program.

BLESSINGS AND HOPE FOOD PANTRY

\$5,000

When the federal government shutdown produced a delay in SNAP payments, the number of families coming to Inspiration Ministries for food each week increased sharply. From mid-October when SNAP suspensions were first announced through the end of November when payments were restored, their client volume increased to an average of 784 families weekly, peaking at 833 families served on November 25. The average client volume over that six-week period of anxiety for food-insecure families represents an 11% increase over the average volume in the previous month. They served more than 4,700 families during this time.

Increased expense items during this period included additional food packaging, transportation expenses for fuel and maintenance, extra fuel for our refrigerated trailers and for their forklift which were running overtime.

The additional funding from the UCRF grant enabled Inspiration Ministries to sustain service levels in terms of quantity and quality of food provided.

COMBEE CONNECTION MINISTRIES & CHURCH, INC.

\$5,000

As a result of the freeze on SNAP benefits, Combee Connection Ministries saw their numbers nearly triple. Using their UCRF award, they purchased fresh produce, cereal, and non-perishables to distribute throughout the community. Additionally, this funding allowed Combee Connection to replace organizational funds that had already been expended in response to rapidly growing needs, helping stabilize operations and sustain ongoing services.

In addition to serving families through their weekly Resource Center pantry, Combee Connection expanded outreach by hosting three additional pop-up food pantries in some of the hardest-hit areas of their community, including the Skyview and Universe neighborhoods, as well as several local mobile home parks.

During this time, they encountered many families who were forced to make heartbreaking choices—using funds set aside to pay their electric bills in order to purchase food. Thankfully, through UCRF, Combee Connection was able to provide utility assistance for five families, ensuring their lights remained on during this critical period.



CREATING DISCIPLES MINISTRY OUTREACH, INC.

\$5,000

The funding awarded to Creating Disciples Ministry was used to purchase essential administrative and operational supplies, including printer ink, distribution bags, and support for logistics such as a U-Haul rental truck and gasoline, which enabled them to transport food and supplies efficiently. In addition, the funds allowed them to purchase two chest freezers, significantly increasing their cold-storage capacity and strengthening their ability to safely store and distribute perishable food items.



Additional needs: As demand for our services continues to rise, our organization has reached full capacity in both storage and physical space, limiting our ability to expand food distribution. To address this growing need, we are actively seeking additional funding to support the purchase of a larger facility, walk-in freezers, and expanded storage space. These resources would allow us to significantly increase distribution and better serve individuals and families who rely on our services.

FROSTPROOF CARE CENTER

\$5,000

Frostproof Care Center chose to use their UCRF award to replenish their food pantry. The following items were purchased:

- 7 cases of hamburger meat
- 41 cases of bagged leg quarters
- 3 cases of jumbo beef hot dogs
- 5 cases of vienna sausages
- 2 cases of ketchup
- 2 cases of mayonnaise
- 3 cases of peanut butter
- 3 cases of grape jelly



Additional needs: Other essential pantry needs are bags and boxes that are used to package food, ensuring individuals can transport their food safely and easily. The cost of a case of bags (500 count) is \$97.

HELP OF FORT MEADE

\$5,000



Like many organizations, Help of Ft. Meade noticed an increase in clients following the government shutdown and freeze on SNAP benefits. They chose to purchase additional meat items to supplement their regular food distributions. This purchase allowed them to offer over 465 households a more balanced and nutritious selection, including chicken, beef, and pork products, which are some of the most requested yet least donated items. In addition, a portion of the purchased meat was allocated to the creation of 250 Holiday food bags. These bags were distributed to families and individuals in Ft. Meade as part of an annual Holiday Food Program. Each bag included an assortment of items for a holiday meal—a \$25 gift card for meat purchase, canned vegetables, rice, stuffing, yam and dessert items—designed to help families celebrate the holidays with dignity and joy.

SALVATION ARMY OF EAST POLK COUNTY

\$5,000

The \$5,000 in received funds will be used to restock Salvation Army of East Polk County's food pantry with essential dry and canned goods. Purchases will be made through a local retailer to ensure timely access to staple items and to support immediate community needs. This investment will allow them to continue providing consistent food assistance to individuals and families served through the pantry.

SALVATION ARMY OF WEST POLK COUNTY

\$5,000

For Salvation Army of West Polk County, UCRF funds were instrumental in providing additional food resources for families living in the Community of Hope. A total of 91 households with 296 individuals received food to help feed their families while SNAP benefits were delayed. During this period, Salvation Army also provided a community Thanksgiving meal serving 123 people.

MULBERRY COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER

\$4,000

Funds were used to purchase 1,500 meals (three meals per family) at a total cost of \$7,567.31. In addition, emergency financial assistance was provided to meet critical housing and utility needs, including payment of two rental obligations totaling \$1,150.00, two electric bills totaling \$377.25, one water bill in the amount of \$239.27, a shelter stay totaling \$193.00, and two hotel stays totaling \$762.00.

Through these efforts, the Mulberry Community Service Center distributed a total of 481 emergency food boxes to individuals and families in our community.

THE MISSION OF WINTER HAVEN

\$4,000

The Mission of Winter Haven used their UCRF award to purchase food storage containers to ensure proper, safe, and sanitary storage of donated items. These containers can be used to support additional food drives and will allow their organization to receive larger quantities of food and respond quickly to the surge in demand from individuals and families seeking assistance.

TABERNACLE OF PRAISE CHRISTIAN CENTER

\$4,000



Feeding with Love, the food pantry operated by Tabernacle of Praise experienced an unexpected cut in funding around the same time that SNAP benefits were suspended. As a result, it was harder than ever for community members to feed their families during the holidays. The UCRF award was used to restock their pantry with meat, bread, dairy products, canned goods, fruits, and vegetables which allowed them to serve 500 people just before Christmas. Remaining funds will be used to continue operations and conduct a food distribution at the end of January where they expect to serve 700 people.

WORTH & PURPOSE

\$4,000

Staple grocery items including fresh produce, meat, dairy products, dry goods, and other essentials were purchased by Worth & Purpose using UCRF funds. These groceries were distributed at a free community event that served dozens of families. Beyond the tangible food support, the event provided encouragement, community, and hope during a time when many families felt overwhelmed and discouraged. Food bags were also delivered to neighbors who are served by Worth & Purpose on a regular basis.

FAMILY LITERACY ACADEMY AT LAKE WALES

\$3,000

The UCRF was a welcome source of funding to assist students of the Family Literacy Academy at Lake Wales. With the funds, the Academy was able to restock and expand their in-house food pantry and provide fresh fruit and vegetables to families. They also offered their students \$25 gift cards to be spent at a local produce vendor.

HARDEE HELP CENTER

\$3,000



As demand for food rose following the suspension of SNAP benefits, the inventory of staple protein items at Hardee Help Center was quickly depleted. Thanks to the UCRF funding, they were able to restock their pantry and respond immediately to this crisis without an interruption in services. They partnered with Fussell's Meats LLC to purchase hamburger meat at cost, allowing their grant dollars to stretch further. Fussell's generously donated a whole hog to Hardee Help Center to provide even more protein for their operations.

LAKE WALES CARE CENTER

\$3,000



Beginning in late October 2025, Lake Wales Care Center experienced a notable rise in requests for food assistance. Their UCRF award was primarily used for the purpose of replenishing their food pantry to sustain assistance during and after this period of heightened demand. The Center increased food assistance by approximately 28% and served 309 individuals, distributing more than 3,100 pounds of food to families in the area.

Additional needs: While SNAP benefits have been restored, the need for food assistance remains.

ANGELS CARE CENTER OF ELOISE

\$2,500

Before the suspension of SNAP benefits, Angels Care Center operated a small food pantry that was mostly stocked with whatever items were leftover from their monthly food distribution. The government shutdown, and subsequent increase in food insecurity, made them realize that their monthly food distributions were not enough to sustain the Eloise community. With their UCRF award, Angels Care Center was able to increase the size of their food pantry and keep it stocked on a daily basis.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES

\$2,500



Families visiting the Catholic Charities food pantries in Lakeland and Lake Wales expressed concern that with the freeze on SNAP benefits they might not be able to provide sufficient food to celebrate Thanksgiving with their loved ones. To help their clients, Catholic Charities' pantries provided them with Thanksgiving baskets. These included turkeys purchased from Second Harvest Food Bank and other essential food items to sustain clients through the holiday. 238 families were served through the Lakeland pantry and 158 families were served through the Lake Wales food pantry.

HANDS OF HOPE AMERICA, INC.

\$2,500



The \$2,500 UCRF grant awarded to Hands of Hope America played a critical role in addressing immediate hunger while also serving as a catalyst to secure matching contributions in neighboring counties. The organization received a total regional contribution of \$10,000 across Polk, Lake, Osceola and Orange counties. This funding allowed Hands of Hope to stabilize food inventory, increase distribution capacity, and transition to a client-choice pantry model across service areas. Bi-weekly emergency and supplemental food distributions helped families reduce immediate hunger, alleviate stress, and avoid difficult trade-offs between food, housing, utilities, and medical expenses while SNAP benefits were paused. In Polk County alone, they assisted 252 households and served 832 individuals with additional households supported across the Four Corners area.

CENTRAL FLORIDA HEALTH CARE

\$2,500



For Central Florida Health Care, the UCRF award played a critical role in ensuring families had access to food and resources at Christmastime. They hosted a Holiday Celebration at their food distribution site at Crystal Lake Elementary School where they served 158 families, including 307 children. They also supported 50 HEARTH families from the school. The Holiday Celebration had an immediate and lasting impact as families left with food to nourish their households as well as a renewed sense of community and encouragement.

TALBOT HOUSE MINISTRIES

\$2,500

Thanks to the UCRF, Talbot House was able to secure additional food and restock their kitchen. In November and December 2025, they served a total of 23,716 hot meals. 500 of those meals were covered by the UCRF.



ACHIEVEMENT ACADEMY

\$2,000

Achievement Academy utilized their UCRF award by providing immediate food assistance to the families they serve as well as their program staff. They purchased bags of shelf-stable groceries that were distributed on a “take if you need” basis. Those families and staff experiencing the greatest hardships were identified and given grocery gift cards to ensure assistance was flexible and practical.

Additional Need: As federal and state services continue to evolve, families within the disability community face increasing uncertainty. Flexible “bridge” funding allows Achievement Academy to respond quickly, providing short-term support while longer-term resources are secured.

Hi Mary,

I hope you're doing well. I wanted to reach out with a grateful heart and say thank you not only to you, but also to the generous donors who helped provide the gift cards for food, diapers, wipes and gas. Your kindness, and the kindness of those who chose to give, has been such a blessing during a time when every bit of support truly makes a difference.

Please know that your generosity eased so much stress for me and helped me make sure my boys had what they needed. I'm incredibly humbled and touched by the compassion you and the donors have shown us. In the middle of everything we're facing, your support has been a true light.

Thank you again, sincerely, for thinking of us with so much warmth and care. It meant more than I can ever express.

Huge thank you,



An email from a client to an Achievement Academy staff member expressing their gratitude for the assistance they received. The name of the client has been redacted in order to protect their privacy.

FIRST FRIDAY KIDS SUPPORT GROUP

\$2,000

The First Friday Kids Support Group will use this grant to replenish the pantries at Davenport School of the Arts and CODE Academy in January 2026, providing weekend food for 50 children for 5 weeks.



LIBERTY LINK FOUNDATION 360

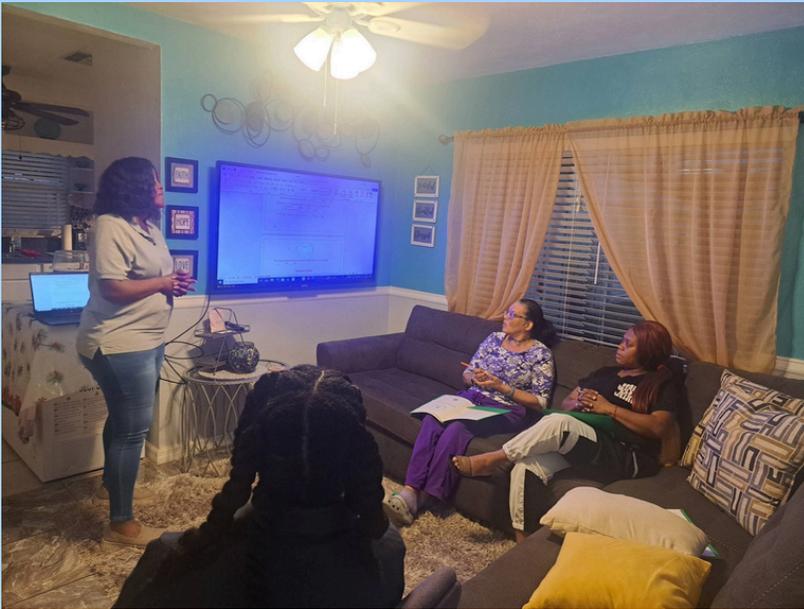
\$2,000



In times of ongoing economic uncertainty and social hardship, access to nutritious food is not a given, especially for elderly members of our community who often live on limited means. Because of the UCRF, Liberty Link was able to provide well-balanced, nutritious meals that promoted strength, health, and vitality among their elderly participants. These meals were thoughtfully prepared to meet dietary needs, improve energy levels, and support overall well-being. Food was provided to 70 “neighbors” on two separate occasions. Additionally, Liberty Link was able to provide 10 additional meals to disabled neighbors who are homebound.

DESTIKNEE PLACE

\$1,500



Every client who comes to Destiknee Place for assistance are encouraged to apply for SNAP benefits. When the SNAP freeze occurred, all clients were affected. For this reason, Destiknee Place used their UCRF funding to provide food, toiletries, clothing, transportation, and housing to their clients. Following the SNAP crisis, their staff saw the need for education that would benefit their clients long-term. They presented a financial security workshop, Nuts and Bolts of Personal Finance, to teach clients the importance of budgeting and saving.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CARES

\$1,500



SVdP CARES provides Emergency Housing and Rapid Rehousing assistance to both veteran and non-veteran clients. They used the UCRF grant to provide gift cards in the amount of \$25 or \$50 to seniors and households in need of food and housing supplies.



CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN

\$500

The UCRF funds awarded to Champion for Children supported two first-time client families impacted by SNAP interruptions. By providing utility assistance, these limited household funds could be redirected toward groceries and food costs.

- **Family One:** A single mother with two children, one with a disability. Although the child's disability income continued, the loss of SNAP benefits created immediate financial strain. Champion for Children Foundation paid the family's Duke Energy bill in the amount of \$366, helping stabilize the household and free funds for food purchases.
- **Family Two:** A two-parent household with a stay-at-home mother that experienced financial hardship following the loss of SNAP benefits. Champion for Children Foundation paid the family's water utility bill in the amount of \$163, reducing immediate financial pressure and allowing the family to prioritize groceries.