

FOODFOR THOUGHT

FALL 2025



MEET CHAYTON

Chayton contacts KLF to inquire about the qualifications to receive help with food. "I am a single dad taking care of my kids since their mom left. It's been a real struggle," Chayton shares when he calls. "I work full-time, but get paid too much to qualify for any other programs. I'm barely over the income limit, but it doesn't matter. Trying to find any viable option at this point." We assure Chayton that his story is not unique; we hear about this same struggle almost daily from families who are employed but are not earning enough to keep up with rising costs. Because Chayton works during the day, he asks for an appointment during one of KLF's five evening pantry shifts.

MEET JEAN

In the past year, Jean has gotten several home deliveries from KLF. When she first called, she shared that she had a vehicle but was unable to afford much gas. Our delivery option was extremely helpful for her and her family because they were going through a rough patch financially. Despite her struggles, Jean is always very kind to the KLF staff, expressing her deep appreciation for the support. The most recent time Jean called, she shared some difficult news. "We just couldn't keep up with the bills and lost both our house and car." Jean continued, "We have been living in our tent for the past few weeks until we figure out another option." Jean asked if there was any way she could meet our delivery drivers in a local gas station parking lot to receive food. We scheduled the appointment and made note that Jean would need food items that didn't require cooking or cold storage.



MEET STEPHANIE

Pregnant with her first child, Stephanie is doing what she can to ensure her unborn child has every chance for a healthy life. She is diligent about her prenatal care, making sure to stay on schedule with her doctor's appointments. Stephanie and her husband are currently living with a family member in a rural town in Kalamazoo County while they save enough money to secure their own place. Money has been tight for everyone in the household, especially with the increasing cost of food. Stephanie has been very worried that she is not eating well. Because of cost, they often skip more nutritious options including fresh produce and lean meats. On the way to her doctor's appointment one day, she passed Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes. "I didn't realize that this was an option for us because my husband is employed," Stephanie commented when she stopped in to get more information. "This is going to be such a help over the next few months for all of us, especially for me and the baby. I am so excited for more healthy options and to have fresh produce!"



While the client stories featured above are true, their names and images have been changed for anonymity.

A NOTE FROM JEN

Returning to the classroom is a seasonal milestone for families, educators, and students of all ages. The Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (KRESA) provides a variety of educational support programs to school systems throughout the County to assist with challenges inside and outside of the classroom. Within local districts, like Kalamazoo Public Schools, where more than 60% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, KRESA staff members are prepared to support students as they grow and learn, despite potential setbacks, like facing food insecurity at home. **For this newsletter, we spoke with School Social Worker, Kristie Brzezina, about the impact of KLF's school-based programs and the importance of our partnership with KRESA.**

— Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director



KRESA Students Working in the Pantry

Q: How does partnering with KLF impact KRESA's programming?

A: Through our partnership with KLF, we can operate one large pantry that is utilized in a few different ways. The pantry is available to all KRESA staff and students. Additionally, the pantry provides a job site for our Young Adult Program (now titled Transition Services) participants to grow their skills. By working in the pantry, stocking shelves, keeping everything clean and organized, the students advance their independent living skills and learn about balancing nutritional needs.

Q: Can you discuss the importance of providing basic nutrition and meeting the personal needs of students?

A: KRESA believes in being trauma-informed and doing our best to meet the needs of students that extend beyond the educational setting. Food is a big part of being able to show up and participate. We know that students are unable to focus and learn when they're hungry and their basic needs aren't met. For these reasons, in addition to providing Weekend Food Packs and access to the food pantry, we also operate a diaper bank and clothing closet.



Stocking Cereal with a Smile

Q: What kind of obstacles are students and their families facing right now?

A: Food and grocery prices are a huge concern as well as the uncertainty of whether school meals will continue to be covered by the State. Affordable housing and transportation are other common issues. We're also anticipating that the upcoming changes to Medicaid will impact many of our students' families.

Q: What would you suggest for families who need support?

A: Starting a new school year can be overwhelming. It can be a challenge to secure physical and dental exams, gather costly school supplies, and navigate online enrollment. Thankfully, our community provides some great resources during the back-to-school season, so I would encourage families to seek out and take advantage of those events. Find a contact person within your school and work with them to gather details. Head Start and after school programs can provide a great support system too. We always do our best to share information and important resources wherever we can.

For more information about the resources provided by KRESA, visit kresa.org or call 269-250-9200.



Fresh produce is one of the most requested items at Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes. Luckily, we live in a state that produces over 300 different types of food and agricultural products. Through our partnerships with KVCC ValleyHub, local farmers, and many backyard gardeners, we receive a wealth of fresh produce during the summer and fall that our clients love. Here are 10 interesting facts about Michigan produce that you may or may not know:

#1 Michigan is the nation's leading producer of **potatoes** for potato chip processing.

#2 Michigan ranks 6th in the nation for the production of **milk**, contributing to local suppliers of dairy products including ice cream, cheese, and sour cream.

#3 Michigan is 1st in the nation for the production of **dry black beans** and **small red beans**.

#4 Michigan is 1st in the nation for **asparagus** production, utilizing a hand harvesting method that results in a more tender and flavorful product.

#5 Michigan egg farmers supply all the **eggs** to McDonald's east of the Mississippi.

#6 Michigan ranks 3rd for the production of **blueberries** with all product coming from fewer than 600 blueberry farms.

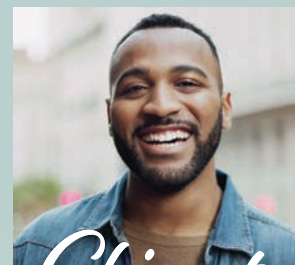
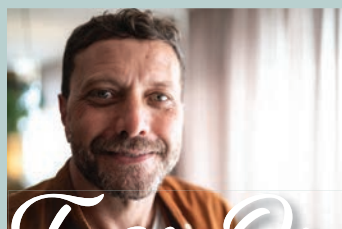
#7 Michigan produces more **squash** than any other state, which is helpful for Michigan companies such as Gerber baby food.

#8 Michigan ranks 1st in the nation for production of **cucumbers** for pickling and 3rd for fresh market cucumbers.

#9 While not usually associated with Michigan, you can find 280 acres of **cranberries** growing in our state.

#10 Finally, Michigan ranks 1st in the nation for tart **cherry** production and 4th for sweet cherries.

Source: www.michigan.org



From Our Clients

This summer, we conducted our annual client survey at all pantry locations, including home deliveries. We received 644 completed surveys. Here are a few highlights.

65%

have children and teens in the home

51%

said the food they receive from KLF helps them use funds for other basic needs such as housing and childcare

42%

are employed full or part-time

58%

said that receiving food from KLF allows the household to experience less daily stress

45%

are retired, unable to work due to disability, or stay-at-home parents

42%

said that receiving food from KLF has increased their access to fresh produce

56%

receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or WIC but are unable to cover their food needs with the amount they receive

99%

reported being treated with respect and compassion when visiting KLF

Sensing Change:

A Partnership with
MRC Industries



If you call KLF's Need Food line in the afternoon, you may find yourself chatting with a few new voices. These eager, friendly agents are part of a new partnership with MRC Industries, a local non-profit dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities. Much of their work focuses on providing people with the tools to be independent, including workplace development. Last fall, our two organizations forged a collaboration to provide a new technology path for MRC's participants. **Not only does this partnership allow participants the opportunity to learn database skills, phone knowledge, and customer service proficiencies, but it also provides KLF with a vital resource - volunteers.**

This spring, volunteers from MRC began training in our Call Center. Each week, MRC sends between three and five volunteers who are interested in trying out this new learning track. Their workplace development coach, John Tidd, models the behavior and teaches participants how to use our database and phone system. As their confidence builds and they hone their skills, participants will begin taking calls. John provides a calm, guiding presence to ensure that participants feel supported and KLF clients receive the best service possible.

When MRC is working in our Call Center, you can hear the teaching and learning taking place in real time.

Excited voices call out when a transfer has been completed successfully for the first time. John congratulates every successful appointment and every new achievement someone gains. Participants who have been on the learning track a little longer are happy to share their knowledge with newer participants and will answer questions if John is helping another volunteer.

It's easy to witness program success through the smiles of both KLF staff and MRC participants. High fives are regularly exchanged. Participants are eager to share each new development and every new milestone. Staff are grateful and excited to work with MRC to fill previously vacant volunteer positions. One participant who has been involved since the early days of this program is now confident enough that he's seeking employment. Since gaining experience and advancing his skill set, you can often see this individual helping mentor other participants. Recently, he's been

working with one of the MRC Employment Training Specialists to ensure he's ready to enter the workforce.

Ultimately, what stands out the most from this partnership is the feeling of comradery. **We are not just two separate organizations that share a common goal; we are coworkers, ensuring our community has the food resources it needs.** The feeling of belonging and pride is unmistakable among the participants, and our staff are grateful to be part of the participants' growth while also gaining dependable new partners as we continue to experience record high demand for food assistance.



Host a Food Drive with a Theme!

Check out our themed food wish lists at kzoolf.org under **Host a Drive**:

Kid-Friendly Foods

Healthy Choices

Ready-to-Eat Foods

Vegetarian Staples

Culturally Inclusive

Holiday & Seasonal

Pantry Essentials

Or come up with your own theme!

Have fun with it. Every item of food donated makes a difference, especially as we enter the busy holiday season.

TRIBUTES

Generous donations made to KLF in someone's **HONOR** or **MEMORY**. Donations made 6/1/2025 to 7/31/2025.

IN HONOR

**The Adult Bmitzvah
Class of 2025**
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Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes will feed hungry people and engage our community in the fight to end hunger.

Our Values

Respect
Diversity & Inclusion
Stewardship & Accountability
Integrity
Collaboration
Urgency
Service

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



HELP FUEL THE FUTURE

Our **Weekend Food Pack Program** is designed to bridge the weekend food gap for students who rely on school meal programs for much of their nutrition. Food items are kid-friendly and do not require extensive preparation.

During the most recent school year, the Weekend Food Pack Program grew significantly, due to both need and growth to additional schools and districts. **For the 2025-2026 school year, we are providing weekly packs to over 1,600 students at 24 different school buildings.** This is a 78% increase in packs distributed over the previous school year. Packs are provided to Kalamazoo, Portage, Comstock, Climax-Scotts, and Parchment Public School districts as well as Paramount Charter Academy.

Do you, your congregation, or employer want to support this important program? Contact **Greta M. Faworski, Associate Director**, at **269-488-2617 x208** or **greta@kzoolf.org** for more information.

MANY THANKS!

to the following groups who support this program:

Advia Credit Union, Maple Hill Auto Group,
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FALL 2025

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