Colleen’s Story

Sometimes the path is not always straight even when you have done everything right. This is the story of a family knocked sideways by an illness, and their journey back with help from The Open Door.

You should know, on paper I did everything right. I graduated with honors from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1988 with a BA in German and received my Master of Arts in Teaching from Boston University in 1993. I started teaching and spent twenty wonderful years living the dream I had since Kindergarten to become a teacher. I met and married my husband, and we had two wonderful children.

Then, about five years ago, just before the first snow, I became too ill to work, or even keep up my share of the bargain on most home tasks. This was devastating for me personally because I absolutely loved my job and caring for my family. The love and support I received from friends and family during this dark time saved my life. Period.

My husband is an incredible man by the way. Most people would have walked away. Not all illnesses bear visible signs like a major surgery or a broken leg. I could point to no physical scars. No stitches. No cast. But, I was broken. Had I been sidelined for a visible reason, it would have been easier to come back and claim my place when I started to recover.

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Because I had been the primary wage earner for my family this wasn’t just a tumultuous time, it was a financial disaster for us.

For over a year, it was just one foot in front of the other, when finally one day I felt strong enough to take a big step. That first big step was walking through the entryway at The Open Door in Gloucester. Their motto is “Feeding people. Changing lives.”

“When I walked through that door, the whole atmosphere felt like a warm embrace. For so many months I had huddled away from the world, hiding from everyone, at well below rock bottom.”

Being able to augment our meals with fresh produce, eggs, milk, cheese, meat, bread, pasta, as well as canned food items from The Open Door was a huge boost for my morale. Our own pantry was looking pretty depleted. The fresh produce brought smiles and joy to the kids. The celery for snacking, fresh lettuce and tomatoes for salads, one of my daughter’s favorite foods, while my son truly enjoys cucumber slices.

When I come home with a bag of fresh fruit and veggies and my daughter can pick from fresh strawberries, kale, grapes and the like, she is like a kid in a candy store and doesn’t know where to begin. Fruits and veggies are healthy and delicious, but they are also extremely expensive. My son has peanut butter on his toast every morning. Having those options at The Open Door available to the kids makes them worry less about our financial situation as well.

What The Open Door did for me was make me realize that even though I had lost everything for which I had ever worked so tirelessly, I was still worthy of a warm smile. A hot cup of soup, and a strong belief in everyone’s eyes that I could still “change” the world.

“This is the monumental part about The Open Door. Sometimes some things that are immensely important can’t be seen, or even tallied on a spreadsheet. It never in the end really comes down to just how many pounds of food they distribute, or the close to 8,000 people they serve. It comes down to the impact on a single life--my life."
Greetings!

This year we mark our fortieth year of service to the community, and it is time to say THANK YOU!

From its humble beginnings in the basement of Brown’s Mall 40 years ago, YOU have helped The Open Door grow into a best practices food resource center that serves 1 in 6 Gloucester residents and those residents, from 9 surrounding cities and towns, who need a little help making ends meet.

It is YOU who helps provide consistent and adequate access to nutrition in a socially acceptable environment.

It is YOU who helps us strategically place our Mobile Markets and services in areas of greatest need to directly improve the health and welfare of our local citizens.

It is YOU who makes it possible to offer full-choice food pantries in Gloucester, and now Ipswich, where we help “make the healthy choice the easy choice” and 34% of each distribution is fresh fruits and vegetables.

At the heart of a community, we want to find a place where we matter. Much more than calories and much more than food on a plate, our human spirit must be recognized, nourished and connected to others.

For the 7,747 people who received 1.5 million meals through our programs last year, it was YOU who helped make that place at The Open Door.

Now coming into the months when we as Americans celebrate and give thanks, there are families in our community who are struggling to make ends meet.

Family traditions start in the kitchen. By donating, you will give the precious gift of family traditions. The gift of memories. And, most of all, the gift of hope to a family this holiday season and beyond. You are investing in tomorrow for this community.

Your support is needed for the holidays and for the weeks and months after the hustle and bustle has died down. YOU can help make sure the shelves are full and the coolers are stocked. YOU can help make sure the table is set and needs are met. Thank you!

With a grateful heart,

Julie LaFontaine, Executive Director

Thank you to all of our Thanksgiving Food Drive donors and more than 350 volunteers that helped pack bags, boxes and collect 20,387 pounds of food from our five Community Thanksgiving Food Drive sites!

Congratulations to our Autumn Breakfast Awardees

Helen Muise Community Service Award
Jeffrey and Nancy McKeen, Food Pantry
Janice Nottle, Family Supper
Chris Pitman, Second Glance

Charlotte Pope Service Award
Ben Steele, Community Meals

Outstanding Community Partner
Addison Gilbert Hospital, Lahey Health

Unsung Hero
Sheree Zizik, Beauport Hospitality Group

THANK YOU!

Maximize your donation!
Many employers match their employees’ charitable donations. Please check with your employer’s HR department.

Join our Good Egg Club with a monthly donation. Donate online at foodpantry.org/donate. Choose your amount and select Monthly for Donation Frequency.

Would you consider donating to The Open Door in your will? Please contact Sarah Grow, Director of Advocacy and Development, sarah@foodpantry.org for more information on bequests and other planned gifts.