



MERCY  
BROWN BAG  
PROGRAM  
SENIORS HELPING SENIORS

# IMPACT REPORT 2025

*Focused on serving low-income, food-insecure  
adults, aged 60+, across Alameda County*

# From the Director's Desk

Janice Roberts, Executive Director



## Innovation. Resilience. Teamwork.

Our **43rd year** of serving Alameda County's older adults has been punctuated by some major wins in the face of serious environmental and social challenges.

The Mercy Brown Bag mighty team of 10, augmented by a fantastic core of **600 dedicated volunteers**, have worked hard to serve an estimated **43% of Alameda County food-insecure older adults**.<sup>\*</sup> Always, with a focus on healthy, delicious, and free groceries on a regular basis.

In doing so, Mercy Brown Bag **canceled no routes**, and we also never closed our CommonSpirit Health Grocery Store (open Monday-Friday except for Thanksgiving and Christmas weeks) and only two half days to conduct inventory.

## Major milestones in FY25 included:

- For the first time, serving over 10,000 acutely low-income older adults in Alameda County on a regular basis (2X each month) across 82 distribution sites
- Celebrating our first full year of Inventory Management at scale, faithfully tracking 2.4 million pounds of food and the 8800 households who received our food
- Passed a full single audit conducted by the US Department of Agriculture with flying colors
- Selecting and developing a second warehouse site, located on Chapman Avenue in Oakland, which provides an additional 20% capacity, needed to absorb a growth cycle that has taken us from 6000 to 10,000+ served in the last five years
- Re-establishing a Brown Bag Advisory Council, providing strategic input and adding further functional stability

With mounting pressures from federal policy impacting our food supply, the impact of inflation, and the fragility of SNAP benefits driving over 800 new registrations in the last 6 months, we are initiating new programs to combat challenges: Food Recovery is becoming much more structured for us, and we hope to increase the output from new partnerships in the coming year.

In 2025, Mercy Brown Bag turned to our partners and the community, and together with your help, we know we can successfully feed our hungry, elderly neighbors in need.

Yours in community,

*Janice*



<sup>\*</sup>Based on 2022 Census estimates of 25,782 food-insecure seniors in Alameda County

# Community Impact 2025

**2,349,022**

**Pounds of Groceries Distributed**

**155,070**

**Bags of Groceries Distributed**

**80**

**Distribution Sites**

**8,559**

**Households Served Monthly**

*Non-Duplicated*

**0**

**Canceled Distributions**

*By Mercy Brown Bag*



# Shifts in Government Support

## *700,000 pounds of food and \$4.5 million of Federal donations at risk*

As the need in our community continues to rise, more seniors are quietly facing the difficult reality of choosing between food, health, and basic necessities.

- **Our services have grown by 65%** in the past five years, with demand accelerating even further in 2025 as more older adults seek support
- **The on-site CommonSpirit Health Store** has become a trusted source of nourishment and dignity, now serving over 2,200 seniors each month with fresh fruits, vegetables, and proteins they might otherwise go without
- **At the same time, food access is becoming increasingly fragile**, as rising grocery prices and federal budget cuts make it harder for vulnerable seniors to secure consistent, healthy meals
- **Of our \$5.6 million budget, just \$1.1 million comes from community donations**, reflecting how much of this work depends on uncertain funding streams
- **The remaining \$4.5 million** — including SNAP funding, Feeding America support, and USDA food — is now at risk, creating real concern for the stability of services so many rely on

**USDA Food  
700,000 lbs**

**At Risk**

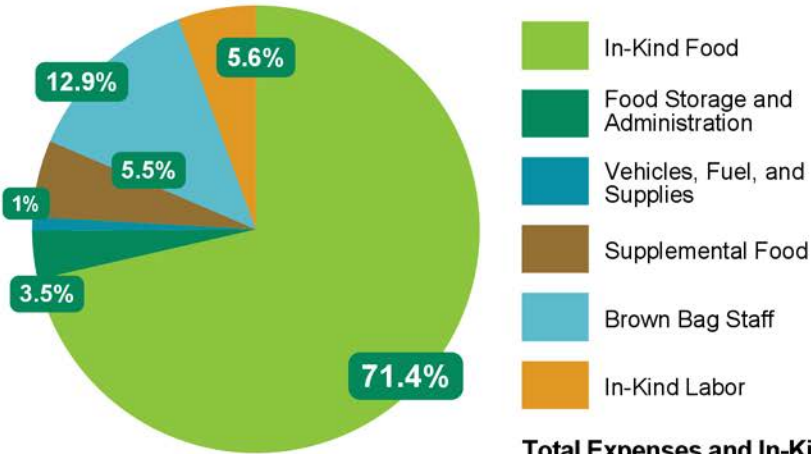
**Non-USDA  
Food: 70.9%**



# Budget and Funding Breakdown Fiscal Year 2025

## Brown Bag Budget

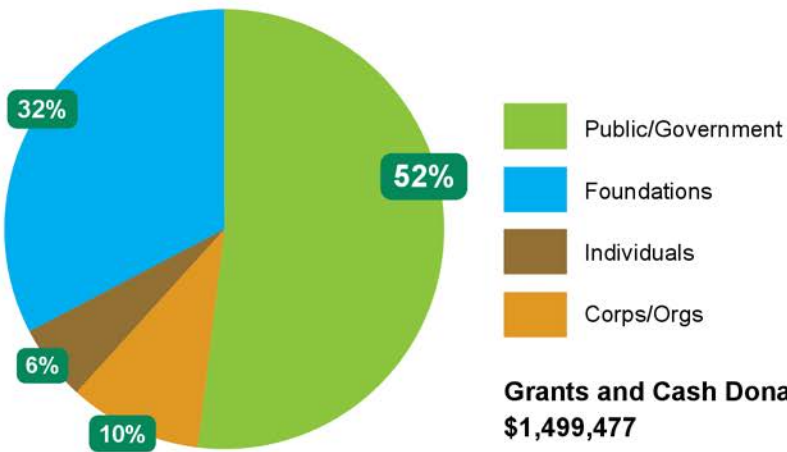
July 2024 - September 2025



- In-Kind Food
- Food Storage and Administration
- Vehicles, Fuel, and Supplies
- Supplemental Food
- Brown Bag Staff
- In-Kind Labor

**Total Expenses and In-Kind Food/Labor : \$5,885,179**

## Brown Bag Funding



**Grants and Cash Donations: \$1,499,477**

*\*In order to transition to a new fiscal year beginning in October 2025, the statistics reflect a 15-month reporting period*

# Providing Essential Food and Comfort for Lillian



*Lillian M smiles in front of the Mercy Brown Bag mobile grocery truck, where she shops twice a month to find a nice selection of health foods*

Lillian spent over 30 years working as a secretary in El Salvador before moving to the United States in 1996. She came at her mother's urging—her last daughter still living back home—and with the hope of building a safer, brighter future. What she didn't expect was how isolating the language barrier would feel.

Still, Lillian refused to give up. After long days adjusting to a new country, she attended adult school every evening in Santa Clara, determined to learn English. Her perseverance paid off, and she eventually became fluent enough to work her way into an office manager role.

***“I depend on these groceries,” she told us.  
“They help me stay healthy.”***

Today, Lillian is a devoted mother and grandmother to five. But rising costs and health challenges have made it harder for her to access the nutritious food she needs. The groceries she receives from Mercy Brown Bag are not just helpful—they are essential.

# Food Recovery Efforts

As we look toward the future and navigate an increasingly challenging food landscape, one of our primary goals is to **protect our food supply by expanding our food-recovery efforts**. This commitment has been part of MBBP's work since 1982, when local businesses donated groceries that volunteers packed for low-income seniors. As demand grew, our founding elders sought new ways to supplement our food sources, even traveling to the Central Valley to glean excess produce.

While our model has evolved, our dedication to a strong food-recovery network remains constant. Today, **we partner with over 9 organizations to ensure surplus food reaches seniors**. Last year alone, Pleasanton Costco donated 31,000 pounds of food, and Grand Bakery provided \$49,689 in baked goods. Food recovery bolsters our operations and safeguards our supply of nutritious food at a time when threats to the safety net are increasing. Strengthening this system is essential to sustaining our services and meeting rising demand.



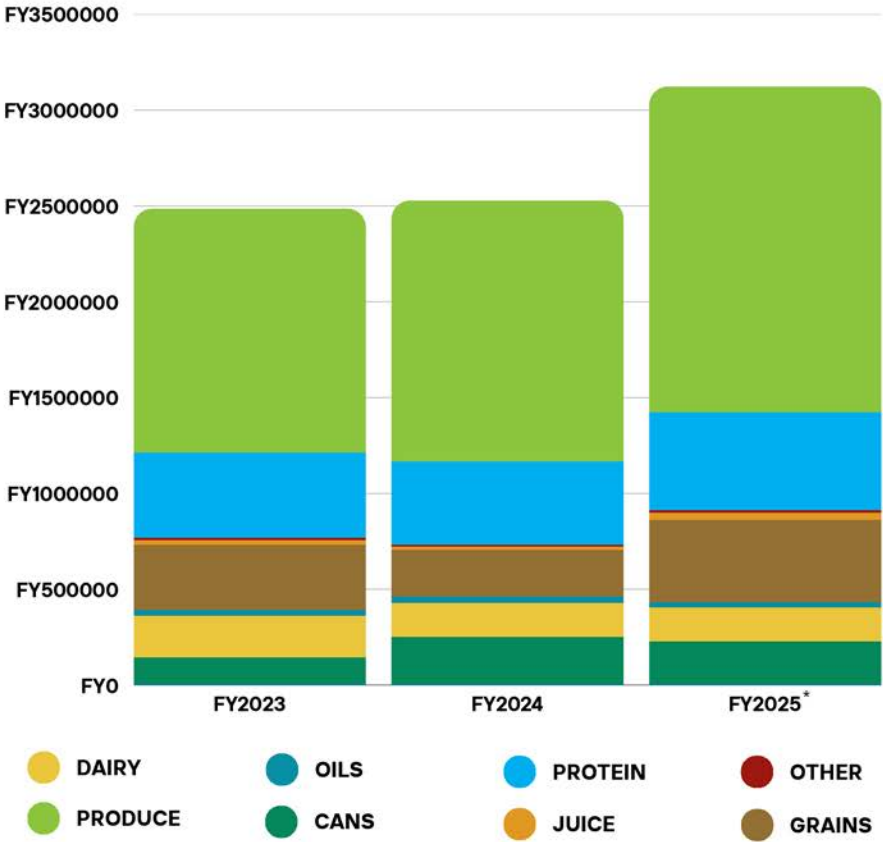
As need grows and potential funding cuts loom, **expanding food recovery is more critical than ever** to ensure every senior who depends on us stays nourished. Our founding elders believed no senior should go hungry. By expanding food recovery and protecting access to healthy groceries, we can continue honoring that mission and supporting the growing number of older adults who rely on us.

*Grand Bakery generously donates delicious whole grains to our seniors*



# Contents of a Bag

How our Bags Have Changed Over the Years  
 Fresh produce is now 57 % of each bag.



\*The statistics in FY2025 reflect a 15-month reporting period



# Aging Well with Mercy Brown Bag: Ketema at 102 Years Young



*Ketema Joba Bekalo (right) shown here with his son*

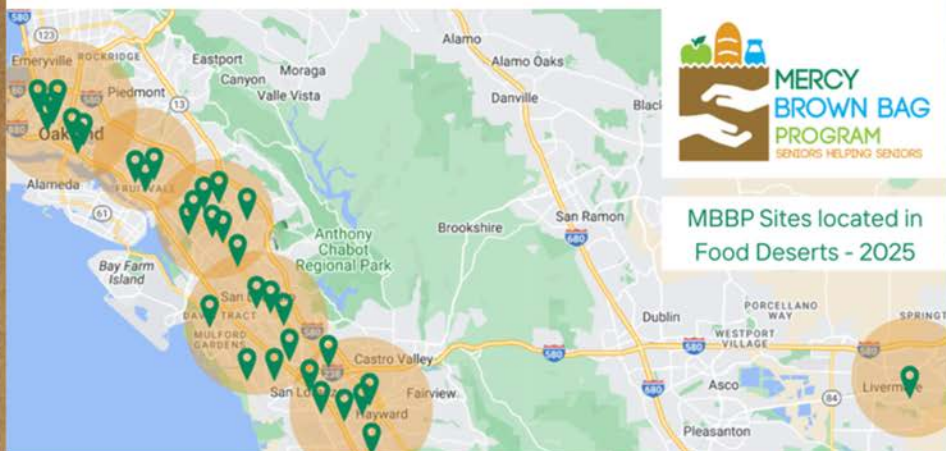
**Centenarian Ketema Joba Bekalo**, a grateful recipient of Mercy Brown Bag for four years, is known at the Rose of Sharon senior apartments in Oakland as “Shambel,” an affectionate reference to his early days as a Navy Captain, serving as personal bodyguard to the Ethiopian emperor.

After the monarchy was deposed, Ketema joined his family in the United States, working security and becoming an American citizen over twenty-five years ago. A widower now, after being married for 70 years, Ketema still walks the building everyday and turns 102 in May. He is **one of 25 centenarians Mercy Brown Bag serves** across Alameda County.

Ketema’s caregiver for six years, Saba, is a great cook and he loves the meat, fish and vegetables she prepares from our bags. The groceries help Ketema be both healthy and financially independent, using the savings afforded from free groceries to purchase his medicine.

Katema’s favorite activities are the three exercise classes he attends weekly at Rose of Sharon. He takes pride in his appearance, dressing up daily, and also loves visiting with his three kids. He cautions them “Don’t make big mistakes; do little things today that shift your life in a big way for the future.” Advice that can benefit all of us.

# Providing Fresh Groceries in Food Deserts



Mercy Brown Bag serves older adults across 33 food deserts in Alameda County—communities where access to affordable, healthy groceries is extremely limited or nonexistent. Many seniors in these neighborhoods face long travel times, inadequate transit options, and rising food costs, making fresh, nourishing food difficult to obtain. By bringing produce, protein, and pantry staples directly into these underserved areas, Mercy Brown Bag ensures that older adults can age with health, dignity, and stability, no matter where they live.



*Our CommonSpirit Health Grocery is located in Oakland's Fruitvale district and serves over 2200 shoppers monthly in this food desert*

# Nutrition Education

This year, we expanded our nutrition education programs to help seniors make the most of the food they receive. Two major initiatives led the way: the launch of our Mercy Brown Bag Nutrition Cards - created with support from Eli Cruz, MS, Lifespan, Nutrition & Dietetics - and a 6-week cooking and nutrition class offered in partnership with local nonprofit 18 Reasons.

## Brown Bag Nutrition Cards

These easy-to-use cards provide recipes, preparation tips, health benefits, and culturally relevant information for the foods we distribute - often highlighting proteins and seasonal produce found in our grocery bags. Available in seven languages (Amharic, English, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Spanish), the cards are shared monthly across our 80 distribution sites and can also be downloaded from our website.

## Hands-on Cooking and Education

This summer, clients participated in a vibrant 6-week class where they practiced healthy cooking techniques, strengthened kitchen skills, learned to read nutrition labels, and explored how thoughtful food choices can support conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure. Recipes such as almond-blueberry flax smoothies, strawberry spinach salad, and black bean quesadillas with fresh guacamole and mango salsa made each session both educational and delicious. Participants loved the experience - many wishing it could continue. As one attendee, Catherine DeBose, shared, "This class has inspired me and given me a new way to cook and eat."

Inspired by this year's success, we plan to expand our nutrition education offerings even further next year to continue supporting the health and well-being of our seniors.



*Brown Bag partnered with 18 Reasons to offer senior nutrition classes*

# Heart in Action

## *Doug's Commitment to the Community*

**Volunteer Doug Vierra** came to Mercy Brown Bag after retiring from a long and successful career in education and coaching at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland. Seeking meaningful ways to give back, his commitment has become a cornerstone of our community and operations.

Several times a week, Doug can be found stocking shelves at our Fruitvale store or packing and unpacking fresh produce at the Chapman warehouse. Importantly, twice a month Doug delivers groceries to one of our low income senior residences in North Oakland - thirty bags at a time to the older adults who depend on him at Sojourner Truth.

What stands out to Doug is the encouragement he's received from the team and fellow volunteers. The daily collaboration among everyone - clients, staff, and volunteers (across multiple languages!) - creates a true sense of shared purpose and ensures that every senior receives the care and support they deserve.

Doug often says that the work here feels like "a mini-workout," but the impact goes far beyond the physical. For him, volunteering at Mercy Brown Bag is a powerful reminder of what community can look like when everyone shows up for one another. Doug's presence strengthens our mission every day, and we are truly thankful to have him!



*Doug, thank you  
for your generous  
commitment to  
our community*

# 600 Amazing Volunteers

This year, Mercy Brown Bag has reached a remarkable milestone—partnering with over 600 incredible volunteers! Their passion and commitment are the driving force behind our ability to distribute nutritious groceries to seniors in need. We're incredibly grateful for their support—without them, this work simply wouldn't be possible. Together, we're making a tangible difference, helping seniors thrive with the food they deserve.

## Food Drives

Food drives are one of our favorite ways to come together with the community to support Mercy Brown Bag clients. We're grateful to the many partners who stepped up this year—among them St. Felicitas Catholic School, St. Paul Lutheran Church, BART, Pure Barre Oakland Uptown, St. Monica Catholic Church, and Corpus Christi Catholic School. Their collective generosity not only filled our shelves but strengthened the spirit of community that sustains our work all year long.

## Corporate Partners



The Clorox  
Company

This year, we expanded our corporate volunteer days, bringing in team members from partner organizations to support our food-distribution efforts.



Target employees from all over Alameda County join us to pack dry goods at our Chapman warehouse

# Thank You to Our Amazing Donors

The impact of Mercy Brown Bag is fueled by a powerful community of supporters who believe that no older adult should go hungry. This past year, that support showed up in many ways—through steady monthly gifts, generous foundation partners, and critical public funding. Each contribution helped us move more food, reach more of our neighbors, and respond to growing need with dignity and care. Your support makes this work possible, and we are truly grateful to stand alongside you in this mission.

## Friends of Brown Bag – Up to \$250

Ackerman's Servicing Volvo's • Alex Handlers • Alfred F. Cordano  
Amalie Sorenson • Barbara Dahlquist • Barbara Lee Souza • Bernard Wroblewski  
Brian Willits • Carl Arnout • Carmen Rodriguez RSM • Cynthia A.W. Puppione  
Cynthia Darbo • Doris N. Seyranian • Edith H. Christensen • Edward Lucchesi  
Elizabeth Anhorn • Fred J. Cattaneo • George T. Pohley III • Gerald Brusher • Gisele D.  
Gregory Lemos • Hendrika Hoogenbosch • Hope Krauskop • Jacqueline O. Jackson  
James Manning • Jean B. McCamman • Jeanne Knott • Jeannette M. O'Sullivan  
Joan A. Porter • Joanne V. Goheen • John F. Morgan • Juanita Hall • Kathleen Nichols  
Lenore Gunst • Linda Vick Davis • Lisa Thompson • Lorraine Heinemann • Louis Labat  
Lynn Prime • Madeline C. Smoley • Margaret Mills • Margo K. Logan  
Marian Clare Valenteen RSM • Marilyn McCabe • Marilyn Stallone • Mark D. Patty  
Martin DePorres Coleman S.N.D. • Mary Anne Ryle • Mary Croughan • Mary Dang  
Mary Lemionet • Mary Maloney Roberts • Mary Mockel • Maureen Lyons CSJ  
Meredith Bradshaw • Michael Zabriskie • Michele M. Dana • Miranda Melone  
Patricia McFadden • Paul Wuerstle • Paulette Anthony • Pauline Borghello RSM  
Rebecca Hunter • Rebecca L. Anderson • Robert A. Docili • Robert J. Grassilli  
Ronald F. Coffman • Sanjeev Chakard • Sharon Sharon Flower • Sheridan Adams  
Sherry H. Smith • Simon Mazzola • Steven J. Meyer • Steven K. Edlen • Susan Tierney  
Teresa Friend • Tracy Jensen • Trudy McCulloch • United Way of the Bay Area  
Vicki Scott • Webster McBride • William R. Christensen

## Nutrition Defenders – \$250 – \$499

Alvin S. Tenpo • Andrew Minear • Andrew Paul Cappelli • Anita Dolores Marquez  
Anne Marie Dolan • Brandon Biggerstaff • Burton J. Rigley • Ceil Roberts Tilney  
Claire Mara • Cora Coleman • Dale D. Wong • Frank G. Nicewicz • Hae-Sil Grace Kim  
Jackie Care • Jim O'Laughlin • Judith M. Stanley • Kim Aquino • Krista Lucchesi  
Lovella Aldridge-Barney • Maureen T. Sirhall • Misha McKinney • Ruth Poole  
Wayne Mara

# Thank You to Our Amazing Donors

## Dignity Heroes – \$500 – \$999

A.J. Johnson Jr. • Ameena Golding • Aulani Cler • Audrey Rosenberg  
Constance Callahan • Donald V. Potter • James J. Marchiano • Janet Lockwood Garin  
Janice Roberts • Jen Werner • Judith L. Martin-Holland • Katie Derrig • Laura Talmus  
Mary Louise Zernicke • Mary M. Giachetto • Matthew D. Werner • Mindy Creson  
Raja Sekaran • Raymond R. Marchetti • Tim Williams • William M. Blair

## Elder Champions – \$1,000 – \$4,999

Adriene M. Iverson • Alameda Corp • Alameda County Arts Commission • Benevity  
California Bank and Trust • Carlos M. De Luz • Claire A. Marchiano • Dagmar Serota  
Debbie Rocha • Diane C. Lawrence • Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund • Gary Gerber  
George P. Sabatte • Give Lively Foundation Inc. • Jesse Bean • John P. Ritchie  
Kevin Colvin • Lawrence P. Nejsmich • Lucille Charmaine Serwa • Mary M. Hester  
Nancy L. Sorenson • Noah Waldman • Pamela Burke • Pegeen Brosnan  
Rebecca J. Kurland • Robert P. Tieman • Ronald Courtney • Sarah A. Peterson  
Schwab Charitable • Sean Rhatigan • St. Mary Magdalen Church  
St. Monica Catholic Church • St. Paul Lutheran Church • Steven Healey  
Steven P. Burke • The Catholic Community of Pleasanton  
The Drysdale Community Foundation • Y & H Soda Foundation

## Community Visionaries – \$5,000 – \$9,999

East Bay Community Foundation • Emergency Food & Shelter Program  
Fremont Bank Foundation

## Wellness Warriors – \$10,000 – \$49,999

Alameda County Waste Management Authority • Anonymous • City Of Oakland • City of  
San Leandro Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Georgia H. Burke  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet • Target Community Impact  
The Alameda County Community Food Bank • The Koret Foundation  
• West Davis & Bergard Foundation

## Safety Net Stars – \$50,000 – \$150,000

City of Hayward • East Bay Foundation on Aging • May & Stanley Smith Charitable Trust  
Senior Assistance Foundation Eastbay • Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
The Crescent Porter Hale Foundation

## Hunger Vanguarders – \$150,000 – \$1,000,000

Area Agency on Aging-County of Alameda



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This report is dedicated to our beloved colleague Miguel Magallan, who served Oakland and Alameda County Seniors tirelessly for 35 years, and is now enjoying retirement! Miguel brought excellence and compassion to every task, and Brown Bag would not be the same without him.



*Miguel, thank you for your dedication*