



## **S3E2: Beyond Food Distribution with Second Harvest of Silicon Valley**

**Colby:** A quick note before we begin. Since recording this episode, due to budget constraints, the Client Innovation Team led by Olivia Teter has been eliminated from Second Harvest of Silicon Valley. We want to acknowledge her meaningful contributions to the organization and thank her for sharing her insights with us.

With that, we are excited to share this conversation with you.

Thanks for joining us on *Stocking the Pantry*. I'm Colby D'Onofrio, and today I have a very special co-host joining me, Leah's Pantry executive director Adrienne Markworth.

**Adrienne:** Hi everyone. This is my first time on the podcast since the very first episode when I was Colby's guest, so thanks for having me, Colby.

**Colby:** We are so excited to have you back, Adrienne, and I am honored to be here to support your hosting debut.

For today's episode, we are joined by Olivia Teter and Alex Navarro. Olivia is the Head of Client Innovation and Alex is the Director of Community Nutrition at the Second Harvest of Silicon Valley food bank in San Jose, California. Many of us know Silicon Valley for its abundance of tech companies, Stanford University, and affluent communities, but like all communities, Silicon Valley is still affected by food and nutrition insecurity.

Second Harvest of Silicon Valley is also a longtime partner of Leah's Pantry and is dedicated to integrating a trauma-informed approach into all aspects of their organization. We're gonna dive into all of that in just a moment, but first, I would like to welcome our guests, Alex Navarro and Olivia Teter.

You both have been at the food bank for a long time, so could you tell us a bit about each of your roles at Second Harvest and how they have evolved over the years?

**Olivia:** Yes, thanks Colby. Uh, so glad to be here with you and Adrienne.

I'm Olivia Teter. I've been at Second Harvest almost nine years. I was originally hired to lead what was called the Moonshot Project, which is looking at ending the need for food banking in 25 years, and I facilitated a design thinking process in the community with

people experiencing food insecurity. It was a systems change initiative and it was very generative at the time.

We learned so much. Since then, I have transitioned into my current role as a Head of Client Innovation, where I remain focused on systems change. In my current work, I do this through trainings in compassionate service and looking at ways to create healing moments for clients and our community.

**Alex:** Thank you, I'm so excited to be here. I am Alex Navarro. I, uh, just had my ten year anniversary at the food bank, and I joke that I've had every position created in the nutrition department, but it, it is true; I actually have had every position, including starting as a volunteer. Now, I proudly oversee our Community Nutrition Education Department, where we aim to work deeper in community. So, providing essential nutrition, culinary education, implementing targeted initiatives that support positive health outcomes to those we serve, helping create a more resilient and thriving community.

**Olivia:** Our team and our organization has a fairly profound definition of customer service: our customer service definition includes trauma-informed principles. When we think about providing good customer service, we think about having clients feel supported, understood, and valued in their every interaction with Second Harvest and all our representatives.

We think about trying to create relationships of trust and loyalty. Uh, meeting clients where they are in the moment, and responding to their needs with kindness and acceptance, trying to connect them to the food and services that they want and need. And we look for ways to go beyond providing access to food, to improving the wellbeing and resilience for our clients and our community.

Over the years, our organization has changed so much as we've had to be responsive to the increased need for our services. During the pandemic, the need for our services doubled almost overnight, and the need for our services remains very, very high to this day. Currently we're serving about 500,000 people each month in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. And I find it hard to conceive that so many of my neighbors are experiencing poverty.

And of course, living with poverty means experiencing adversity, which is often traumatic and may build on other traumatic experiences from people's lives. So our response requires that in addition to providing food, we must also be focused on building community to address trauma, to help create resilience, and as an act of resistance to structural inequities.

**Alex:** Now, we have a very small team of four, so this would not be possible without the help of our robust volunteer program. That's our dedicated health ambassador

volunteers, and, of course, our three amazing nutrition managers. We've really evolved in the way that we share information and expand our reach.

You can say that the silver lining of the 2020 pandemic was that our Nutrition Center was born. And what the Nutrition Center is, this is an online platform created with our neighbors and our partners in mind with easy, flavorful recipes, health and food safety tips, inspiring client stories rooted in family, community, and love for cultural foods.

However, it's important to note that our work didn't always look this way, and this conversation today, like Olivia mentioned, is really a, full circle moment for us here, for both Olivia and I. It was around seven years ago that we attended a California Association of Food Bank Conference where you, Adrienne, were presenting this concept of trauma-informed nutrition ed.

And that was such a powerful aha moment for us that really had us questioning how we show up in their community, which to this day is something that I'm so grateful for. We've moved away from this cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to really redefining our nutrition and culinary education to bring more inclusive and equitable programming to our communities, and really to show up not as experts, rather to show up with the intent to learn and understand these health barriers that our individuals are facing, and to find the knowledge in the room and to start conversations around food in a way that celebrates one's identity.

So though our vision for community health and nutrition has evolved over the years, and particularly the last ten years that I've been here, one thing has always remained: that our commitment to ensuring our clients have consistent and equitable access to nutritious foods, and that our clients feel inspired to find new ways to prepare their groceries, whether for themselves or for their families.

**Colby:** I'm so excited to dive a little deeper with both of y'all today because you have such a wonderful view of seeing how the landscape of hunger has changed over the last decade plus from your vantage point at Second Harvest of Silicon Valley. Alex, you mentioned that COVID gave you an opportunity, actually there was a silver lining there to reinvent, reimagine some nutrition services and make things stronger, more accessible and more exciting.

It's interesting, though, because Silicon Valley is often thought of as being full of wealthy tech elites.

You know, it's one of those places that people might say, oh yeah, hunger happens, but we don't have that problem in our community. And this is actually pretty, like, close to home for me, because I grew up in Marin County, which is on the other side of San Francisco, and also has a reputation for being full of wealth and money and people who are very well off.

But I grew up nutrition insecure, and it can be really invalidating to see so much wealth around you and know that something as simple as food is still a challenge to achieve every day, every afternoon, every morning for your family. So I'd love to hear a bit more about what does nutrition and food insecurity look like in a place that is known for such abundance and such wealth that is Silicon Valley.

**Olivia:** That's such a great question, Colby. I think most people don't realize how much need there is in, uh, such an affluent area as Silicon Valley. One in six people in our two counties come to us to get food each month. And despite so much wealth in our area, in fact largely because of the wealth of the area and income inequality, food insecurity is higher here than the national average.

Some people have the mistaken belief that we mostly serve unhoused folks, and while we do serve people who are experiencing homelessness, most of our clients are actually working families, and they're struggling to make ends meet. Many of our clients are working multiple jobs. So despite low unemployment in Silicon Valley, working parents, students, seniors, who are often on fixed incomes, are under intense financial pressure. And when money gets tight, one of the first things that people give up is food. Because if you have to choose between rent and food, you're gonna choose rent. And so sadly, food is one of the things that people will go without.

And if you think about people who are growing and picking our food, people who are serving our food, working in restaurants, if you think of delivery drivers, teachers and administrators and the people who work in hospitals, there are so many different types of jobs and walks of life where people are experiencing food insecurity. And it's often hidden. You may not walk down the streets and be able to notice, but it's very prevalent.

We're really counting on our community to help us to do what we can to reduce food insecurity and nutrition insecurity in our community.

**Alex:** I always say that there's no one face to food insecurity, and I think Olivia really shed a light on the diversity of individuals and groups affected by hunger.

In our two serving counties, in one of our most recent client surveys, it showed that nearly 90% of respondents with children in the household worry about running out of nutritious food. And nearly 60% of employed respondents can't cover their monthly expenses. It is critical that we aim to not only address food insecurity, but also nutrition security.

So we are providing fresh, wholesome fruits and vegetables, which are 60% of the pounds distributed; protein and dairy items, grains, and other pantry staples. Providing this variety of nutritious foods is so essential if we want our communities to thrive.

These groceries are free of charge to more than 400 local nonprofit agencies and at over 900 food distribution sites. So this includes local food pantries, schools, churches, and meal programs.

In fact, almost every nonprofit providing charitable food in Silicon Valley is likely getting it from Second Harvest free of charge. And not only are we here to connect people to grocery distributions in both of our counties, we also provide enrollment support for federally funded food assistance programs like CalFresh.

And we have a multilingual food connection hotline for people to call. So you can see there's so many ways that we are assisting our community in accessing the foods that they need, the foods that they prefer, and the foods that they enjoy.

**Colby:** Those are some really astounding numbers, and I think it's definitely a surprise to a lot of people that, like we said, a county that is known to be as affluent as Silicon Valley has a higher rate of nutrition and food insecurity than the national average.

Something you mentioned, Olivia, was income inequality. And it's really interesting because I think when we have such affluence, it can hide the challenges that are truly happening in a community.

My mom, for example, was a nurse practitioner. She worked at Zuckerberg General in San Francisco, and you would think that someone who's almost a doctor in the family would never have an issue getting food on the table.

But because the cost of living is so high in areas like Silicon Valley, and for me in Marin County, it is amazing how quickly money runs out. So as you mentioned, many of the people you are serving are working multiple jobs.

As the numbers you shared with us show, it's people from all walks of life coming to access support. And as we know, nutrition and food insecurity is heavily related to poverty, and poverty is an adverse experience itself. So adversity and trauma are not siloed to the typical groups of people that we would "think" experience poverty.

It's really widespread.

**Adrienne:** So, I'd like to get a little more specific about some of the ways that you all at Second Harvest are trying to navigate all of this complexity. And I think when you all heard me give that talk at CAFB a hundred years ago, we were still in our infancy as an organization of understanding the potential of using a trauma-informed lens to talk about nutrition security.

But I think the opportunity to work with your organization in the way that we did really allowed us to see it also as a way to just navigate organizational complexity and community complexity in a way that really crosses sectors and settings. So we were approached by, Olivia and Alex, your predecessor in your role, and the ask seemed simple in the beginning. Like, okay, let's take the presentation that you've done and then let's just real quick, translate it into something that we can deliver internally to our staff in thinking about what those different groups might need.

So it seems simple and it ended up being a really interesting process. Give us a little bit of a narrative of how that ended up rolling out at the food bank.

**Olivia:** Yeah, that's a great question Adrienne. And we were so excited by your team's presentation at California Association of Food Banks. And we, we were all abuzz and talking about it and thinking like, okay, what can we do with this information? We wanted to walk away with an action item.

And so we took it upon ourselves, to reach out to Adrienne and see about creating a workshop. And as you said, it was initially intended just for our internal Programs and Services Team, which is now our Impact Team. And so we offered that workshop. The process of creating it was really fascinating and rewarding in itself.

And of course, the process also requires that we look at our own relationship to trauma in our own lives, and sort of build on that and invite other people to do that. So it's, it's deep level work right from the beginning. We felt that people had a really positive response, really learned a lot.

And we decided that we wanted to adapt it for our partners and volunteers as well to reach out into the community. So we have over 400 partners. We have thousands and thousands of volunteers who all come to us with the best of intentions, but who may have been experiencing trauma themselves, who may not always be able to show up as their best selves, even though their intentions are good.

Training volunteers and staff and partners to be able to use trauma-informed principles when out in the field, interacting with clients, was very, very powerful to help them be their best selves and to help create healing moments in the community.

My team has now built a lot of trauma-informed principles into our ongoing workshops. We have many, many different workshops. The standard ones are Self-Care for Client Care, which just looks at how we need to address our own suffering and having compassion for ourselves in order to continue to do this really deep level of work.

Another one is called Creating Safe and Welcoming Space for All, which is looking at our own internal biases and how we can prevent ourselves from making assumptions

about people, whether it's about how they look, their cultural heritage, but also assumptions of wealth that may not be true.

I've heard this over and over from people in my community. My neighbor said it to me recently. You know, people see someone drive up into a distribution in a fancy car and they may think, oh, what are they doing here?

And the truth is that we know of at least one client who was sleeping in their Tesla. you borrow cars. You might have bought a car and then lost your job. We can't make assumptions about people just by looking at them.

So the Creating a Safe and Welcoming Space for All really seeks to address that. And then we have one called Navigating Challenging Situations, which, you know, given that we serve 500,000 people and so many different cultures, so many different languages, and people are showing up in a moment of true vulnerability, there's a lot of different conflict that can come up. And so having the emotional intelligence to address these kinds of situations is trauma informed and also really can create healing in our community.

In being trauma informed in compassionate customer service, clients are received in a dignified and respectful way. This has been increasingly offered throughout our system, our, the network of people we reach in our communities.

We now feel like we have a shared language with a lot of people at our organization who understand what we mean when we talk about trauma informed. We've done staff gatherings, lunch and learns. We presented to the HR team and to senior leadership.

All of this is by way of affecting, in my mind, systems change. So when you look at wanting to change a large complex system like the food system, which of course interacts with the health system and environmental systems, these systems are very complex and it's hard to think about changing them.

But there's a number of ways that you want to be addressing systems change. You want to be looking at processes, policies, and resource flows, which of course is the natural things we do at the food bank. But at a deeper level, we want to be building connections and relationships that help build networks of support and looking at addressing power dynamics.

How do we redistribute power so that it's not all consolidated? And fundamentally at the deepest level, we wanna be changing mindsets so that in the future, someday it'll be inconceivable that our neighbors should go without food.

I have an example of when we had a transgender client call us to say that they were being misgendered at one of our distributions. They gave out free clothing, and this

person was being denied the clothing. And so we created a workshop on welcoming our transgender neighbors, and we created it in Spanish and English because this was largely a Spanish speaking distribution.

So when we presented that workshop, all the volunteers said they really, they were very engaged and they learned a lot, and they can relate it to their own lives and to people they knew.

And it was very, very effective in changing the outcomes at this distribution. And furthermore, we shared it with the Feeding America Network on their learning hub. And so it's accessible for all of Feeding America's network partners , and we feel like this is one example of changing hearts and minds.

**Adrienne:** As you, as you did this deep integration of trauma-informed principles across your organizational ecosystem, were there any times of tension or places where you really needed to come in and offer an explanation or clarify a misconception?

Over the years, I think we've heard them all, you know, oh, we're not therapists, we can't do trauma-informed work. What did you hear as you did this? Anything to kind of help other organizations who may be thinking oh gosh, I don't know if my CEO would go for this?

**Olivia:** That's such a great question, Adrienne. You know, I feel like we came up against a lot of hurdles. The progress has not been linear in terms of integrating trauma-informed principles in our organization. And what we tried to do is like, go where the open door was.

It didn't mean that we didn't push sometimes. It took us a really long time to get approval to be able to present about trauma-informed principles to the all staff. We had to go through the HR team. And the other thing we really grappled with was whether the word trauma itself was triggering.

There were times when we felt just kind of overwhelmed by all the different places that these principles could be applied. But again, I think we focused on where is the invitation, where is the opening, so that we could move forward with less friction and have it be well received.

And gradually, you know, my manager recently used the word trauma-informed multiple times in the context of some work she was doing. And I was, just felt so gratified by that because, again, we have a shared language and that's really powerful, just having that ability to talk about that openly. It integrates with the work we're trying to do about equity and inclusion and belonging. It intersects with health and nutrition.



So there's a lot of different points of intersection that are mutually reinforcing that allows it to be more well received and woven into the fabric of our work.

**Adrienne:** That's awesome. We feel that way too at Leah's Pantry in terms of the intersections, you know. Alex, let's move over to the nutrition department specifically, because obviously that's where we started with, , trauma-informed nutrition security.

And so how does a trauma-informed approach impact the way we understand our relationship with food? How we talk about nourishing food, right? How we address thorny issues like weight and diet and access and all these messy things, right, that make up this space. Tell me a little bit about how you lean into this approach in your current role, and a few specific examples where we would really recognize the integration of trauma-informed principles into your nutrition education programs.

**Alex:** Yeah. Thank you Adrienne. Like I mentioned earlier, we did have to take a step back and really redefine our approach. Now, this approach, , this framework of ours, really consists of three core values, that is cultural centered, integrative focused, and trauma informed.

So with this holistic lens of ours, this allows us to show up with the intention to best serve our clients and build out these really robust programming that meet the needs of each individual, kind of meets them where they're at and recognize that this is very complex. It is very complex. It is very personal.

We need to understand that diet, behaviors and health outcomes of those we serve really can be a result of this stress and the trauma from adverse experiences that they're facing, which make it so difficult to adopt a healthy eating habit.

We're working towards building protective healing factors into our programs. And that can be really simple. It can be stuff like mindful eating and food journaling. We've started to add gentle movement into our classes, which have been really fun for, for our seniors.

We are honoring cultural traditions and sharing food memories. It really sets the stage to share without shame or guilt. There is also so much power in human connection, when you think about cooking together and eating nourishing meals together, this can be done really simple during the cooking class or even with a simple food demonstration.

Our community engagement is really meant to provide this safe space, this secure and dignified experience, and these interactions, they're meant to be fun, they're meant to be joyful, but they're also meant to really nourish and restore and bring joy in cooking with the foods that our members know and love.

Now, what we are seeing in the community, however, is that trauma really does complicate one's quest for health. Food becomes more than just about diet and nourishment. It's also about seeking safety and craving comfort and desiring control. I do want to share a quote from a previously unhoused client of ours. They say, I was homeless for seven years, and now I find it difficult to be indoors. So to keep myself in the house, I cook a lot for others. Many times I don't even eat what I cook, but I prefer to share it. I'm very grateful to have a home, but it's difficult to adapt.

This is a heartbreaking reality. And this is just one example of many of how one may use food or food behaviors to have some stability and some control in their lives.

Also, food, trauma and in particular cultural food trauma, which we're learning a little bit more about, this can also be really overlooked, which can cause harm even without realizing it. So adapting to a new country, removing traditions and cultural foods; when you're at a pantry setting, receiving unfamiliar foods.

A few years ago we did have an influx of Colombian immigrants and we noticed that they were declining many of our purchased food bank staples. So after conversations, we learned that these canned foods were not a familiar staple in their diet. So that drove us to purchase less canned items and continue to survey our diverse clients on food preferences .

So providing autonomy to allow members to choose the foods that they prefer, we really make a conscious effort to ensure that our recipes are culturally diverse and our nutrition advice considers background, food traditions, and religious beliefs, and overall food preferences. And I think this is all working towards having more of a dignified experience as well. We've learned firsthand that food trauma shows up in ways we would have not imagined.

I do wanna take a moment to share a client story of a gentleman who was very apprehensive to an ingredient that we were using at one of our recipes during our cooking class. This ingredient is a canned food item. But what the client shared with us was that this dislike of this particular food came from a negative childhood experience of being constantly forced to eat it, being punished and physically harmed if he didn't. You know, when we hear these stories, the critical importance of approaching all community interactions with empathy and with compassion and really recognizing the many factors that influence someone's food choice and behaviors around food.

We also wanna empower our health ambassador volunteers with tools and resources to best equip them to thoughtfully engage with our members who may have experienced adversity. So, we host quarterly trauma informed nutrition trainings for our health ambassador volunteers, our interns. And we did recently send out a survey, and one of the questions that I asked was, how has this training shifted the way you think of community nutrition education? So I do want to share a couple of these quotes.

One volunteer says, it has changed my mindset when thinking of community nutrition. Each person is an individual with different emotions and associations with different foods. It's important to recognize this. So when we're sharing nutrition information, we're doing it in the most compassionate and empathetic way possible.

Another volunteer says. I've come to appreciate the holistic nature of community nutrition education. Nutrition ed is not just knowledge about food and nutrients, but also about understanding the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence dietary choices. This means considering language barriers, literacy levels, and providing resources that are easily understandable and relevant to diverse populations.

**Adrienne:** This is great. Some folks are going, okay, where is this all written down, right? And the other piece of this is that, about the same time we launched this podcast, we also started working on an open source journal to try and gather not just stories and anecdotes, but also, is this being systematized and researched, and are we really able to uplift trauma-informed principles as an evidence-based strategy for community health, nutrition, and physical activity?

**Colby:** Yeah, I think that's a great question, Adrienne, where is this all written down? How can people find this and follow? Because it's wonderfully messy, both what you shared, Olivia and Alex, peels back layers, and once you start peeling back layers, oh my God, there's more layers. And with the little help, with a little nudge, with a little framework, we can all adopt a trauma-informed approach that opens up such a greater capacity for connection, and allows for those experiences and stories and quotes like y'all shared.

So we've been partners with y'all for quite some time. We're getting more intertwined with y'all once again with our Journal of Trauma-Informed Community Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity, also known as J-TICH for short.

So I know that y'all are working on a submission right now that helps write some of this out, define some of what y'all have been doing, and we are really curious. Could you give us a bit of a sneak peek into what you're working on in the journal to share with our audience?

**Olivia:** Yeah, we've been very excited to be included in this process.

It's not common to get invited to contribute to a peer review journal. And it is honestly, hard to demonstrate the impact we're having. You can know you're having an impact, you can witness it, but demonstrating it and sharing it and encouraging others to join along requires some real deep thinking and some support.

And so we've been really grateful for the support of the J-TICH team in trying to prepare for our submission. We're gonna be submitting under the community impact category.

When we think about impact, it includes building relationships of trust, creating safe and welcoming spaces for people to get food, which helps us at Second Harvest to fulfill on our mission of ending hunger in the community.

As staff and volunteers, we want to move away from the perspective of being heroes serving the needy, so that we can meet other people and our clients and everyone in our community as equals. This we see as a system to move us towards nutrition security in our community, but also building meaningful supportive connections as an antidote to structures of inequality.

This is the kind of impact we wanna demonstrate in J-TICH. They helped us through the process and it's been, again, not linear. But in the end, we feel really comfortable about the direction we're moving and, having really a lot of support from the team in submitting to a peer reviewed journal.

**Alex:** We are so excited. Most importantly, to see what our final submission is actually gonna look like as it's really evolved this past year, like Olivia mentioned. And really our hope is that with this submission, we inspire other food banks to really reflect on their own practices and see the value in sharing their work. During this whole trauma-informed journey that Olivia and I have been on for many years, there has been times where we've had to stop and question our work. And, really after talking to the J-TICH team, we left feeling really good about it.

We felt like, you know, we've done the hard work. The easier part is going to be the submission. So we will see.

**Adrienne:** Yeah, I would just encourage you all to think about, what's the process evaluation here, right? Olivia was talking about, okay, it's really hard to show these outcomes, I think there's also value to understanding the process. For us we were super interested in other organizational processes that came from other settings and sectors because this just wasn't happening in nutrition security organizations when we started doing this work. But it was happening really, really well in other places, right?

So we just had to figure out, okay, what can we learn from these different organizational structures, and translate over. And I mean, even among food banks, right? You've seen one food bank, you've seen one food bank; there's just so much diversity within your sector. And we've worked heavily with Feeding America National on trauma-informed care and are actually doing a full training for their staff this year.

And it's just so humbling to see the scope of the need, how much hustling has to happen behind the scenes at food banks, but then how much sophistication and thoughtfulness is able to exist right next to all that hustling. I think that's probably one of my favorite things about food banks.

So I look forward to your submission and I look forward to having J-TICH play that role for other organizations as well. People that are really excited about their work and wanna crow about it a little bit, rightly so. The last thing I'll say, there is just this idea of gray literature becoming increasingly welcome in academic spaces, when it's really coming from the community, that there seems to be this like deep hunger for kind of the real deal, you know, what's really happening.

**Colby:** I'll kind of reiterate what Adrienne said about that, like, gray area in research. As the stories and quotes you guys have shared with us today, and as a trauma-informed approach gladly accepts, we're not black and white. The human experience is not black and white, and data can feel very black and white sometimes, which is hard to pair those two things together when we're looking at numbers and a lot of acronyms. It doesn't feel very human centered.

So I'm so excited that J-TICH is bringing more human centered research and that y'all are part of that. We'll have links to J-TICH in our show notes so people can start checking out a bit of what's been done there, and then they'll know where to look when y'all's article and submission comes to fruition.

**Adrienne:** Let's now pivot back out to the broader world here, right?

There's always a lot going on, in terms of food banks and funding, but there's definitely a lot going on right now. So you guys are pretty used to dealing with fluctuations in funding and fluctuations in staffing level, which impacts program priorities and the number of residents you're able to serve.

So when you're thinking about that instability, how do trauma-informed principles help you to navigate that landscape?

**Olivia:** Yeah, I think I've been really grateful for our trainings and ways of thinking of that is trauma informed in terms of all the changes that we've gone through in recent times.

And as we've talked about, during COVID, we doubled in size in terms of the number of people we're serving. For a little while, the resources doubled as well. We had quite a bit of money coming in, and a big uptick in volunteerism, we had a lot of community response and federal and state response that supported us, but we were, tasked with supporting our team in all the innovations that they were working on during COVID. So at one point we had a spreadsheet with 47 different innovations that were happening simultaneously immediately, like overnight, when COVID hit.

And that was a lot for people to try and navigate, a lot to manage. I worked really hard to try to support our team in navigating all these challenges and metabolizing change. My team created something called the Opposite of Stress, which was just a weekly

check-in mindfulness practice that helped people to calm their nervous systems and take a break from the constant demands of the work. We regularly checked in with team members using a trauma-informed perspective. Everyone was all in, you know, at Second Harvest, people are always all in, but the demands were so, so great.

And so people were tired, but people were committed and I think the trauma-informed work internally really helped people to manage their own experience and stay healthy and whole for the most part during that time.

we recently lost almost a million dollars worth of food from the changes to the USDA, so while the demand is so high, we really, really need our community show up and support and help us to serve the need. And there's lots of ways to do that.

**Alex:** Yeah. So the need is up and the donations are down. Second Harvest is nearly 90% community funded, which a lot of people don't know that. So now more than ever, community support is so essential. It is the generosity of our own local community that really keeps our doors open and our programs running.

if you'd like to get involved, there are numerous ways to support our food bank and to support your community. There are many volunteer opportunities that you can sign up for, and that's anywhere from helping out at the front desk; you can sort at one of our warehouses in San Jose; distribute groceries at our food distribution; or you can become an awesome health ambassador. You can also contribute financially, and like Olivia mentioned, one dollar provides enough food for two nutritious meals.

**Olivia:** One of our amazing colleagues, Sandra Price, she shared about someone who came every month to make a very small donation anonymously, a very humble person, not wearing any fancy clothes, bringing money into the food bank.

Uh, one day he came in and he gave a larger amount, and Sandra accepted the larger amount gratefully and checked in with him, because she could sense something was different about him. And he confided in her that his wife had died that day. And this is what he wanted to do on that day, was come in and make a donation to the food bank.

And because she'd built a relationship of trust with him, he was able to bring his whole self in a deep, deep moment of grief, connect with her, and, she empathized with him and stayed with him and shared a moment of deep connection.

Now he comes in regularly with a cash donation of \$20 a month. And it's just a really beautiful moment of reciprocity in the community

**Alex:** Yeah. So if you know someone who needs help, we know that it's really difficult for neighbors to go and get help. There is this intimidation or unsure about what this

support might look like. We are here, so we are here to connect people to groceries at both of our counties in Santa Clara and San Mateo.

Also, we're here to provide enrollment that supports federally funded food assistance programs like our CalFresh. So we ask you to visit our website at SHFB.org, where you can find all volunteer opportunities, you can learn about all of our programmings, you can make a donation.

And while you're there, I'm gonna put in a plug to check out our team's Nutrition Center. We are so immensely grateful for the continued support and engagement of our community and of our clients and our volunteers, our donors and partners, and especially to Leah's Pantry for giving us such an awesome opportunity.

**Colby:** Well, I'm excited to hop over there and check out that Nutrition Center, because I know y'all have been doing such great work and we've gotten to see some of the videos about trauma-informed principles that y'all have made, and they are just very accessible.

So the work y'all are doing is definitely top notch. I'd like to close us out with this question that we love to ask, what do y'all stock your pantries with, literally or figuratively?

**Olivia:** Wow. So let's see. That's a, that's a very interesting question. I, you know, I love food. I love to shop for it. I love to prepare it and cook it. I love to share it and I love to eat it. Farmer's market food is wonderful 'cause you get to talk with the people who grow the food. So I stock my pantry with that. I'm lucky because I, I am able to stock my pantry and be able to serve food to people.

If someone stops by, I can always whip something up to, you know, serve tea and snacks and treats. And I feel really, really so grateful and so blessed to be able to do that, and to be able to do the work I do to help others to be able to do that as well. And then figuratively how I do it is I practice self-care and self-compassion, in order to be able to keep doing this work.

I think it's critical to have self-compassion. If we're gonna make mistakes, we have to forgive ourselves so that we can stay in the conversation.

So I think self-compassion is a real tool for that because we're just passing through this lifetime once, and how can we make it fun while we're doing the, the work that we believe in?

**Colby:** That's awesome.

**Alex:** I think my answer is pretty short and sweet. I'm just gonna go for, I'm quite the snacker. I love to have this comfort food around me. It makes me feel good. So I would have to say tea and snacks. This is food and beverages that feel good and feed my soul. You know, really being kind to myself and just reminding myself trust the process and to breathe. But definitely trust the process.

**Colby:** Y'all are definitely taking a trauma-informed approach into your own personal pantries, and it's great to see how you can apply those principles to a large organizational structure, but also how we can apply them to ourselves.

Before we say a sweet goodbye, I wanna ask y'all, how can our listeners get in touch and learn more about your work?

**Olivia:** So we would invite you to visit our website at SHFB.org, and if you or someone you know is in need of food, you can go to the website. If you go to our website, you'll also be able to access our food locator tool, which can direct you to food you can find in your neighborhood at a convenient time for you.

Our multilingual hotline number, is 866-234-3663, and we encourage people to reach out if you are in need of food. Just a real grateful reminder that we are here to support the community, to connect with everyone across the board, if you need help or if you want to donate your time, energy, money.

We really value the connections we have in the community with our clients, our partners, our volunteers, and we are here to make our little portion of the world a little better. And we appreciate the connections we have and are able to make, um, through this work.

So thank you so much and please reach out.

**Colby:** Yeah, if you have anything that you can give: money, time, love, support, this is a phenomenal organization to get in touch with. All of those links, the phone number, as well as the links to the two videos I mentioned earlier that Second Harvest of Silicon Valley has developed to give kind of an overview of a trauma-informed approach, all of that is linked in our show notes.

As Olivia and Alex have said, they are here to help. They are here to make this little slice of the world a little more welcoming and supportive for our neighbors and our communities.

**Alex:** This has been so much fun. I just wanna thank you guys again, Leah's Pantry and everyone involved, just to invite us into your space and to have these really thoughtful conversations and you guys are doing some amazing work.



So we will continue to be checking you guys out and see the wonderful work that you guys are doing and finding inspiration as we work together towards a resilient community.

**Colby:** Olivia and Alex, thank you so much for joining us today. This has been a wonderful conversation. And listeners, thanks for hanging with us, thanks for tuning in. We'll be back next time with more fruitful conversations. Until then,

**Adrienne:** Thanks for joining us today, everyone.

**Colby:** Thank you so much for hanging with us. You can find us online at [leahspantry.org](http://leahspantry.org), on Instagram [@leahspantryorg](https://www.instagram.com/leahspantryorg), or email us at [podcast@leahspantry.org](mailto:podcast@leahspantry.org).

**Carlos:** This podcast is a product of Leah's Pantry made possible by funding from the United States Department of Agriculture and their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

**Tee:** Visit [CalFreshhealthyliving.org](http://CalFreshhealthyliving.org) to learn tips on how to make the healthy choice the easy choice. *Stocking the Pantry* is hosted by me, Tanesha Atwell,

**Carlos:** Carlos Alessandrini,

**Colby:** and me, Colby D'Onofrio.

**Carlos:** The show is produced by Emma Lehman.

**Colby:** *Stocking the Pantry* invites guests with a wide variety of opinions and perspectives. Guest opinions are their own and do not represent the views of Leah's Pantry.