

For release: March 1, 2022
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LIVINGSTON FOOD RESOURCE CENTER EXPANDS BAKERY, FIGHTS POVERTY THROUGH BREAD

LIVINGSTON, MT—The Livingston Food Resource Center (LFRC) is more than a food pantry. It's an economic development driver, job training ground, and nonprofit aspiring to lift people out of poverty.

"Our vision is to try to fight the root cause of hunger, which is poverty," according to Executive Director George Peirce. "The whole idea is to meet the needs of the community and to provide this beautiful, healthful bread."

The LFRC recently expanded its Community Bakery through funding from the Gianforte Family Foundation, Kendeda Fund, and other private foundations and individuals. The bakery now employs nine full-time staff, including two bakery apprentices, in creating artisan bread and baked goods. Retail sales in turn support food pantry operations and allow the LFRC to provide fresh, locally sourced, whole-wheat bread to Livingston residents as well as other food pantries in Montana.

The bakery also supports the state's wheat industry, which supplies the raw materials. "Everything we do supports economic development and job creation. The bakery supports Montana farmers and millers," says Michael McCormick, the LFRC's founder and executive director emeritus.

"The bread—everything we bake—is made by hand," Peirce adds. "It's as nutritious as food can be, unlike mass-produced, commercial white bread. And we have the capacity to share it."

Peirce understands nutrition; he joined the LFRC late last year after serving as a chef for 15 years. His team includes perhaps Montana's only full-time food pantry dietician, Kelsey Tanner, who came on board in 2017 as program director after graduating from New York University and completing a Dietetic internship at MSU.

Their experience results in healthful foods. "I have a passion for food, especially farm to table," Peirce says. "We're fortunate to have support from the community to offer soups, pasta sauce, produce, and frozen foods through the food pantry."

The food pantry serves 400 households each month, and Peirce envisions further expansion. "We're always prepared to support any food pantry in Montana that needs help," he says. Peirce and McCormick would like to see the LFRC model replicated within Montana. "Our mission is to provide the support and the tools necessary to help people lift themselves out of poverty," McCormick comments.

According to the LFRC, approximately 16 percent of Livingston households live below the poverty level and suffer from food insufficiency. An LFRC survey showed that a high percentage of their clients have chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. "This is exacerbated by poor nutrition," McCormick says.

The food pantry is open weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., offering curbside pick-up Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Community Bakery is open Tuesday through Friday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m.- 4 p.m. More information is available at livingstonfrc.org or 406-222-5335.