Background and methodology:
Gather, a non-profit organization based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has been addressing hunger for over 200 years and is dedicated to making New Hampshire’s Seacoast a hunger-free community. Gather’s Meals 4 Kids (M4K) is a mobile program delivered in six locations that provides fresh and nutritious food for school-aged children who are eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch at schools in communities throughout the Seacoast. Typically, in non-pandemic times, M4K distributes 10 meals per week per child during the summer and over school vacations. It is also designed to expand the variety of foods kids eat, and support them in making nutritious food choices, gaining self-sufficiency skills related to selecting and preparing healthy foods, and learning how food choices affect their health.

In 2019, Gather secured funding to extend M4K to the rural city of Rochester and evaluate its ability to achieve M4K’s desired outcomes, as well as document the processes involved in achieving those outcomes.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rochester children were educated remotely beginning in March 2020. M4K’s markets opened in mid-March of that year, rather than waiting until summer. Gather offered mobile markets continuously in Rochester through the end of the evaluation in August of 2021 to help feed children whose access to food would be affected by the physical closure of schools. While Gather has had a constant presence in Rochester throughout the pandemic, the evaluation focused on its summer M4K markets, which operated morning and afternoon markets each Tuesday in Rochester at two different locations in 2020 and 2021.

The Year 1 evaluation of the market began in late May and continued into early fall of 2020. In Year 2, the evaluation resumed in May and concluded in the fall of 2021. The evaluation involved a comprehensive literature review, created in 2020 and updated in 2021, and review of the M4K operations manual and other relevant documents. Additionally, the evaluator developed data collection tools for each of five separate data collection efforts: a survey and interviews with parents/guardians who use M4K, interviews with community partners who have some role in marketing and/or implementation of M4K, interviews with Gather staff involved in M4K, and post-market debrief sessions with Gather staff. Each of these tools was updated for use in 2021. Qualitative data were analyzed for common and divergent themes and quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS. The full evaluation report provides detailed findings from each data collection effort. Below, a summary of the key findings and recommendations is offered.

Major findings from the outcomes evaluation:
The outcomes evaluation measured M4K’s progress against three desired outcomes for children in Rochester. The first outcome was “400 eligible children will receive weekly distributions of healthy food at the weekly M4K markets during the summer.” A total of 739 unduplicated children utilized the market at least once over the summer (June 9 – September 1, 2020), thus exceeding the target of 400. In the summer of 2021 (June 14 – August 23), the target was “500 eligible children will receive weekly distributions of healthy food at the weekly M4K markets during the summer.” In all, 624 unduplicated children benefited from the M4K because their families shopped at the mobile market and another 38 benefited by food drop-offs made by M4K to families at the Rochester Child Care Center. In all, in the summer of 2021, 662 unique children benefited from M4K. The evaluation found that M4K was effective in achieving its desired outcomes related to the number of Rochester children served by M4K during the summers of both 2020 and 2021.

The second outcome was “Greater than or equal to 70% will report improvement in one or more of the following: (1) Making more nutritious food choices; (2) Expanded variety of food selected/consumed;
In both summer of 2020 and 2021, the majority of parents/guardians agreed that their children were eating healthier foods (80.3% and 80.8%, respectively) and a larger variety of foods (81.9% and 91.3%, respectively). Most (77.8% in summer 2020 and 75% in summer 2021) also indicated that their children understand how food choices affect their health and offered agreement (70% in 2020 and 71.8% in 2021) that the health of their children improved thanks to M4K. Only 55.4% of parents/guardians surveys in 2020 indicated that their children were cooking and/or preparing food more frequently for themselves. The interviews with parents and guardians revealed that some felt their children were too young to prepare their own food. Others explained that their children were already actively involved in meal preparation prior to use of M4K. In the 2020 and 2021 interviews with parents/guardians, those who identified a difference in their children’s involvement in food preparation reported that the children were helping with shopping at M4K, washing and cutting produce originating from M4K, preparing microwavable meals from recipes and/or ingredients they got at M4K, and were more interested in learning to cook since the family started using M4K. **The evaluation found that M4K successfully achieved the second anticipated outcome of “greater than or equal to 70%” reporting improvement in “one or more” of the outcomes for their children.**

The third outcome for summer 2020 was **36,000 pounds of fresh food will be gleaned/rescued and distributed to children in need.** Over the summer, Gather rescued 36,416 pounds of perishables foods (i.e., dairy, meat, produce) to feed Rochester families and met its anticipated target. Gather also rescued 10,984 pounds of non-perishables foods (i.e., packaged goods). In all, Gather prevented 47,400 pounds of food from going to waste and being added to local landfills. In the summer of 2021, the target was to rescue or glean 48,000 pounds of food. Severe weather, labor shortages, and new market opportunities for local farmers; a combined market model (with M4K and other families shopping simultaneously in Rochester), and several other M4K markets operating in the Seacoast area meant that there was less fresh rescued/gleaned food available in the summer of 2021 overall and that those foods were distributed to a larger audience than just Rochester M4K families. In the summer of 2021, Gather provided 64,014 pounds of food to M4K Rochester families. However, more of that food was purchased in 2021 than rescued or gleaned. Of the food M4K Rochester families received in the summer of 2021, 21,545 pounds of the perishable foods and 7,897 pounds of the non-perishable foods were rescued or gleaned, 29,442 pounds in total. **The evaluation found that M4K was successful in reaching its target for gleaned/rescued fresh foods in the summer of 2020, but not in the summer of 2021.**

Given the negative impact of parental stress on children’s health and well-being, Gather decided to use the summer 2020/2021 evaluation of M4K Rochester as an opportunity to test whether M4K helps to alleviate parental stress related to finances. Most parents/guardians (90.3% in 2020 and 92.6% in 2021) reported that they felt less stress about how they would feed their families nutritious foods and most (86.3% in 2020 and 92.5% in 2021) indicated that they had more money available for other expenses, such as rent, utilities, and/or transportation, because M4K helped them to save money they would have otherwise spent on food. While M4K could do little to mitigate parental and child stress associated with the pandemic, **the evaluation suggests that M4K did have an impact on parental stress related to finances and their ability to feed their children.**

Major findings from the process evaluation:

The process evaluation assessed whether M4K was implemented as planned or, if not, how it was modified to reach its objectives. Findings related to seven process components are summarized below.

(1) Recruitment and maintenance refer to the effectiveness of Gather’s strategies for identifying, recruiting, and maintaining partners, and for reaching, engaging, and retaining families. Although an array of partners was engaged in Rochester before implementing M4K, their roles related to the market in 2020 were limited primarily to providing a location for the market and/or extending information.
about the market to eligible families. It seems that Gather’s approach, particularly to the community’s food programs, could have been more effective, given its interest in transitioning the market to a community agency in the future. While Gather received a positive reception from some agencies, a few of the local food programs were worried about having to compete with Gather and that M4K would create demand and expectations, and then Gather would leave the community. By the fall of 2021, Gather had strengthened relationships with these programs, proven its commitment to the Rochester community, and provided additional food and fundraising support to the local food programs. In 2021, community agencies marketed M4K, and provided space for the market, storage space for equipment, and volunteers. 2021 also saw successful “food drop off” pilots and the transitioning of some of Gather’s operations for other mobile markets in Rochester to other partners, which demonstrated that local agencies could assume more responsibility for the program. In retrospect, a different approach may have facilitated trust earlier on and a different kind of partnership in the summer of 2020, but ultimately, Gather gained footing in Rochester and the hope that it can ultimately transition some of the responsibility for M4K to the community.

Its visible location and social media were important marketing strategies. However, the most effective vehicles for engaging families in M4K are word of mouth via a trusted friend or family member and/or a community agency. While sending reminders via Textably.com was effective, keeping families engaged in M4K seems to primarily depend upon it being a positive experience. The mobile shopping model; the variety and quantity of foods, including produce; and consistent, kind, and engaging staff and volunteers are all important elements that make it a positive and valuable experience. Ensuring low barriers to enrollment is also important.

The most common reason for low utilization of M4K in 2020 was that families did not learn about it until after it had been in operation for several weeks. And while true in 2020 as well, in 2021, increased food security was the most common reason for low utilization. Lack of transportation and scheduling challenges appear to have presented challenges for some families. Gather’s efforts to mitigate these factors included holding the market in places already frequented by families with children and allowing market users to shop for others who could not attend M4K. Parents who were managing several children also faced challenges in shopping at M4K. Based on a 2020 recommendation, M4K piloted the use of pull along wagons in 2021. However, the wagons were never returned after use. Their replacement was not deemed a good use of M4K resources.

Although some Spanish-speaking participants use the M4K, it is not clear how many others do not. While in 2020, a bilingual member of Gather’s staff occasionally attended M4K in Rochester, that was not the case in 2021. Keeping the model simple, facilitates use for those with limited English.

Parents and guardians indicated that M4K offers options for vegetarians and those with allergies to gluten and dairy. The Gather staff try to observe shoppers’ needs and preferences and stock accordingly. However, it is useful to assess such needs and preferences at intake. Upgrading registration and check-in to an electronic system aid in tracking M4K utilization and dietary needs and preferences.

(2) Context refers to the larger social, political, and economic environment and how they influenced M4K implementation and success. The concerns some local food programs had about Gather’s arrival in Rochester in 2020 were alleviated by 2021. Gather assured partners of their shared interest in serving the community, extended resources to support the local food programs, and, over time, proved itself by delivering on a highly successful model for addressing food insecurity in Rochester.

Job losses during the pandemic exacerbated food insecurity in Rochester. Remote learning meant the loss of daily access to the Free and Reduced Price Breakfast and Lunch Program at school. Use of federally-sponsored summer meals program were challenging due to pandemic-related health concerns, challenges getting to the site each day, and limited variety and food choice. M4K’s outdoor market felt safer from a health perspective and provided choice and variety. Both summers brought extraordinarily
hot and humid days, which Gather addressed with tents and cold water. Among the safety measure Gather introduced, social distancing slowed the pace of shopping and caused longer wait times. Through trial and error, the staff found ways to achieve greater efficiency.

**3) Resources** refers to whether adequate food, space, materials, staffing, partners, roles, etc. were available to achieve the project objectives. The ideal circumstances (i.e., when M4K worked best) included plenty of staff and volunteers, good communication among staff and volunteers, and the ability to manage timing and achieve efficiencies through use of checklists and proactive planning, and plenty of truck space for transporting food and trash. In both 2020 and 2021, the staff generally found themselves managing without all of the elements of an ideal situation. Problems included limited warehouse and refrigeration space in 2020 and mechanical problems with trucks and having too few certified drivers were problems in 2021. Additionally, in 2021, a staffing loss left one person to manage greeting and the check-in process. Despite these challenges, M4K achieved all of its expected outcomes in 2020 and two of the three in 2021.

M4K’s model (which allows families to select what they want and need) and approach (which is responsive to what families need and will use) were influential in reducing food waste among participating families. Over both summers, parents/guardians used most of the food they took from the market. Increased demand for local food due to the pandemic and weather and workforce issues affecting farmers affected both the supply and demand for produce that could be gleaned/rescued for M4K. While Gather was able to reach its rescue/gleaning target in 2020, it was not in 2021. However, Gather was able to secure enough food to feed all M4K families in both summer 2020 and 2021.

**4) Fidelity** refers to whether M4K was the program implemented and what, if any modifications occurred and whether those changes affected the project outcomes. While M4K was implemented in Rochester as in other locations, it was modified to incorporate social distancing, improve the flow of the market, and provide relief from the summer heat and humidity. In the summer of 2021, Gather piloted a project with the Rochester Child Care Center and in doing so provided food to 38 additional children in the summer of 2021 with little extra effort for M4K staff and volunteers. Gather also combined two mobile markets (one exclusively for M4K families and one for other families) into a single market to improve access by extending the time for shopping for all users. The M4K elements most important to families remained intact: The mobile aspect of the program, the “shopping” experience that allowed families choice of the foods they want, and the low threshold to qualify for the program. Additionally, M4K continued to provide sufficient quantity, quality, and variety of healthy foods.

Gather uses quality improvement (QI) approach generally, trying new things to address identified problems and observing and recognizing what is needed, appealing, and acceptable in a particular community. It will be important for Gather to use a QI approach to address dissatisfaction related to the waiting line (i.e., smoking, “cutting in line” and disruptive children) and hard feelings regarding limits on quantities (i.e., some families appear to take more than they need). These issues could impact user satisfaction and word-of-mouth marketing so should be addressed.

**5) Initial and continued use** refers to the utilization of the M4K and its offerings. In 2020, an average of 278 children (range 205 to 354) used M4K each week of the summer and 739 unduplicated children used M4K at least once. M4K use ranged from 1 to 18 times with a mean of 8.7. Low utilization in 2020 was primarily related to parents/guardians learning about M4K late into the summer, although some did not need M4K at points through the summer. In 2021, 662 unduplicated children benefited from M4K (624 at the mobile markets and 38 at the Rochester Child Care Center). On average, 199 children benefited from the M4K per week with a range of 113 to 267. In summer 2021, 234 unique kids visited M4K just once and did not return. Most (82.6%) of parents/guardians surveyed indicated that they attended M4K more than half of the weeks it was offered. For most, low M4K utilization was explained by improved food security as many returned to work and/or experienced increases in SNAP and WIC benefits.
Gather interviewed 77 families about their limited or discontinued use of M4K and found that improved food security was the primary reason, although some faced issues with work schedules, transportation, health concerns, and child care.

The pandemic interfered with M4K food tastings. However, most (84.1% in 2020 and 71.6% in 2021) families rated M4K’s recipes excellent or very good. M4K also provided prepared foods; the 2021 assessment found that 77.5% of parents/guardians rated them as excellent or very good.

(6) **Confounders and contamination** refers to the extent that other interventions influenced M4K’s project outcomes. While early in 2020, some existing food programs in Rochester worried that they would have to compete with Gather for resources and/or sales, the issues were generally resolved by the end of summer 2020 and did not affect M4K’s outcomes. In the summer of 2021, these partnerships were strong and collaborative as evidence by the marketing of M4K to eligible families, space, and volunteers provided by partners. Collaboration on an event at the Rochester Opera House to raise funds and food donations for three Rochester food programs and Gather’s ongoing provision of food to these programs over both summers, helped solidify the relationships. Partnerships with local programs did not hinder M4K, rather, they enhanced the success of M4K by providing support for marketing and operations. Notably, the pilot project with the Rochester Child Care Center ensured that an additional 38 children received food through M4K in 2021.

(7) **Transition and sustainability** refers to how prepared partners are to continue the program with decreased involvement of Gather. While in 2020, there was no organization or collaborative prepared and equipped to take over operation of M4K, occurrences in 2021 offer hope that someday M4K operations may be transitioned to a local partner(s), at least in part. The Community Action Program of Strafford County and the Share Fund each assumed responsibility for operating mobile markets in Rochester (Meals for Seniors and the winter market at Cold Springs, respectively). With ongoing support from Gather to provide food to these locations, the partners demonstrated that it is possible for them to provide operational support for mobile markets. Whether and when a partner(s) will assume responsibility for M4K remains to be seen, but these 2021 changes offer reasons for optimism.

**Recommendations:** Based upon the evaluation findings, Gather should consider the following:

1. Retain M4K’s mobile shopping model, level of service, the variety and volume of food available, and the low barrier to enrollment.

2. As word of mouth marketing is so integral to recruitment for M4K, implement an effort to encourage word of mouth marketing (e.g., “tell a friend” flyers and incentives) and maximize communications via partner agencies by disseminating flyers and other means.

3. At intake ask families about any dietary preferences or allergies for use in planning and ask them to specify who referred them to the market (to support the referral incentive described above).

4. Test strategies for addressing frustrations related to waiting line, namely smoking, “cutting in line,” and disruptive children. Such strategies might include distributing numbers at check-in, which would allow some who smoke to move to a designated smoking area while they wait and reduce “cutting in line.” Gather might also offer activities to engage children while they wait, perhaps in partnership with another child-serving organization in the community.

5. Determine a way of communicating to users the rationale for not setting limits on the amount of food families can take and clarify that some families are permitted to shop for others that cannot attend the market in person. It is not recommended that Gather change its approach to limits, but addressing hard feelings associated with the issue could be important to satisfaction, retention, and word-of-mouth marketing.

6. Provide recipes in a visible location (i.e., at M4K’s check-in table) and on Gather’s website, a recommendation made in 2020 that has not yet been implemented.
(7) Seek resources to support more reliable trucks for food transport and to develop an electronic registration/tracking system to replace M4K’s inefficient and cumbersome paper system. Also, ensure that more staff and volunteers are certified to drive the transport trucks to prevent shortages.

(8) Continue to track M4K’s impact on parental stress associated with finances and parents’ ability to feed their families nutritious foods to support fundraising efforts, especially among funders with an interest in the impact of toxic stress on children’s health and wellbeing.

(9) With regard to sustainability of M4K in new communities, think strategically about the role that is feasible and desirable for Gather and proactively reach out to engage partners, particularly those serving children. To support the ultimate transitioning of M4K’s operations to a community partner, consider a community organizing approach, bringing together stakeholders invested in food security and children’s health and well-being to learn about their work and challenges, assess whether/how M4K can address gaps in services related to food insecurity, and create buy-in. New partners should be involved in constructing a plan for piloting and transitioning the model over time. Gather may need to provide ongoing support for grant writing, food sourcing, etc. Lessons learned in Rochester should be shared with other prospective partners elsewhere.

(10) Although it is unlikely that, for M4K to continue, Gather will ever completely disengage with its operations in Rochester, it seems possible that a partner or partners there may, in future, be positioned to take over some responsibility for operating M4K. To do so successfully, Gather should be prepared to provide ongoing support from the sourcing, storage, and transport of food; collaboration around fundraising; and consultation for program planning and quality improvement.
I. Background and Methodology:

Founded in 1816 to feed the families of local fisherman, Gather has been addressing hunger on New Hampshire’s Seacoast for over 200 years. Today, Gather has dedicated itself to a mission of making the Seacoast a hunger-free community. It does this by distributing nourishing food to people who do not have enough to eat; taking a leadership role in building an equitable and sustainable food system; and galvanizing support for ending hunger. Gather is the Seacoast’s only preventative health-focused food pantry with its commitment to meeting the hunger needs of the community through the provision of fresh, healthy and nutritious food.

In addition to Gather’s Pantry Market (open shopping model five days each week), Gather provides innovative mobile programs (Meals 4 Seniors, Meals 4 Kids, Mobile Markets), a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, support to smaller food pantries, gleaning, referrals/community outreach and a food re-purposing project. Gather serves more than 2,800 individuals each month through its Pantry Market. With the help of our 200+ volunteers, Gather has provided nearly 2 million pounds of food to the community in the last year.

To support smaller pantries and ensure healthy food reaches all hungry residents, Gather has also taken a leadership role in the region and made the reduction of food waste a priority. Gather currently leads the activities of NH Gleans and facilitates the activities of the Food Providers Network (FPN). The FPN (a Gather project) is comprised of local food pantries and soup kitchens working together to share excess food and resources to ensure residents have barrier-free access to nutritious food. NH Gleans is a network of organizations working to reduce food waste and increase the availability of fresh and local produce that is distributed to those needing it most. Because of Gather’s partnerships and existing capacity, it regularly provides fresh produce and other food to dozens of smaller area food pantries.

Over the past year and a half, Gather has experienced an unprecedented influx of individuals and families in need of fresh healthy food. Individuals using Gather’s Pantry Market increased 30% year over year, and the number of children using the mobile Meals 4 Kids program increased by 52%. Due to the pandemic, mobile food programming was provided from March 2020 to the present and resulted in a nearly 300% increase in the number of visits (to pick up food at mobile locations) compared to the prior year. At the same time, Gather significantly increased its efforts to create fresh healthy meals using food that otherwise would have gone to waste. Gather now produces 1,000 meals per week from rescued food and provide this to families in need through our Pantry Market and mobile programming; this figure represents a 250% increase from the prior year. The food insecurity needs in this region have remained at critically high levels.

Gather’s Meals 4 Kids (M4K) mobile program is designed to ensure that Seacoast children are food secure 365 days per year by providing food when school is not in session. Delivered in six locations and using a shopping model, M4K provides fresh and nutritious food for school-aged children who are eligible for free and reduced-priced school lunch in communities throughout the Seacoast. In non-pandemic times, M4K distributes food for 10 meals per week per child during the summer and over school vacations. It is also designed to expand the variety of foods kids eat, and support them in making nutritious food choices, gaining self-sufficiency skills related to selecting and preparing healthy foods, and learning how food choices affect their health. Through its summer program, M4K reaches just over half (51%) of eligible children in Hampton, Seabrook, and Portsmouth; a participation rate three and one-half times the national and state participation rates for traditional summer meals programs.

In 2019, Gather secured funding to extend M4K to the community of Rochester and evaluate its ability to achieve M4K’s desired outcomes, as well as document the processes involved in achieving
those outcomes. Gather engaged Hope Worden Kenefick, MSW, PhD to conduct outcomes and process evaluation of the Rochester M4K.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rochester children were educated remotely beginning in March of 2020. Originally intending to offer weekly M4K markets to Rochester residents over the summer, Gather opened weekly in mid-March to help feed children whose access to food would be affected by the physical closure of schools. Gather had a presence in Rochester throughout the year, since its opening of M4K in March of 2020. However, the evaluation was limited to its summer M4K markets in 2020 and 2021. Those markets operated morning and afternoon (two different locations) each Tuesday in Rochester. The evaluation of the market began in late May and continued into early fall of 2020 and resumed again in May of 2021 and concluded in the fall of 2021.

The evaluation involved a comprehensive literature review, developed in 2020 and updated in 2021, and review of the M4K operations manual and other relevant documents. Additionally, the evaluator developed data collection tools for each of five separate data collection efforts: a survey and interviews with parents/guardians who use M4K, interviews with community partners who have some role in marketing and/or implementation of M4K, interviews with Gather staff involved in M4K, and post-market debrief sessions with Gather staff. Each of the five data collection efforts is described in more detail below and each was updated in 2021 based on changes to the M4K model and experience using the tools in summer 2020. Gather staff also provided data on weekly market attendance and the weight of gleaned/rescued food distributed at M4K.

• **Parent/Guardian Survey:** In the summer of 2020, participants at the two Rochester M4K locations were asked to complete a seven-question self-administered survey on July 14, roughly 18 weeks into M4K’s 2020 weekly operation in Rochester. In the summer of 2021, the survey involved 10 questions and was conducted on August 10 and 17, the ninth and tenth weeks of the summer market, which ran from June 14 through August 27. Both summers, an evaluation intern approached M4K participants while they were waiting in line to shop at the market and requested their participation in the survey. Participants were told that the survey would help Gather to understand what people like about M4K and what could be improved, their responses were anonymous and participation was voluntary. In the summer of 2020, survey participants were entered into a drawing to win one of ten $50 supermarket gift cards. In the summer of 2021, they were eligible to win one of five $25 supermarket gift cards. The intern also offered to assist with survey completion, if desired. The survey tool relied primarily on multiple choice, true/false, and Likert scale questions, although open-ended questions were added in 2021 with space for participants to state, in their own words, the value of M4K to them and to offer suggestions for improving the market. The wording of questions was adjusted for lower literacy. In all, 87 market participants completed the survey in 2020 and 81 completed the 2021 survey.

• **Parent/Guardian Interviews:** To supplement and elucidate the survey findings, a 17-question semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit information from parents and guardians of children who used M4K in Rochester in the summer of 2020. Of the M4K participants who were asked to participate in a telephone interview to evaluate M4K, 75 provided contact information and indicated a willingness to participate. The evaluator randomly selected (every fourth person on the list) as potential survey participants. Twenty-six parents/guardians (22 English-speaking and four Spanish-speaking) were contacted and 17 of those (15 English-speaking and two Spanish-speaking) ultimately completed interviews. Each interview participant was mailed a $50 supermarket gift card after completing the interview. The tool was revised in 2021 and two

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1 It became clear in summer 2020 that an incentive of $50 was not necessary to secure survey participation and that a lower amount ($25) and fewer cards (5 in all) would be sufficient to incentivize participation while saving Gather money at the same time.
additional questions were added. At the time of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to be contacted for an interview; 68 agreed. Every third person was selected for an interview. Of the 23 people contacted to participant, 11 individuals were interviewed (all English-speaking) each was entered into a raffle to win one of three $50 gift cards.

**Community Partner Interviews:** During the summer of 2020, an 11-question semi-structured interview guide was used in interviews with employees of four community organizations in Rochester (i.e., Community Action Partnership of Strafford County, Grace Community Church, the Rochester Recreation Center, and the Rochester Child Care Center). The partners, identified by Gather staff, were asked to provide feedback about how Gather engaged them and what their role was related to M4K; how satisfied they have been with their partnership with Gather, what worked well, and what could be improved; the barriers to and strategies for reaching, engaging, and retaining eligible families in M4K; adequacy of resources for operating M4K; factors that either facilitated or posed challenges to M4K’s success in Rochester; whether the original M4K model was implemented with fidelity or modified and why; and how likely M4K could be sustained if Gather’s involvement were to decrease over time. In the summer of 2021, the tool was modified to include nine questions (two eliminated because they pertained to start-up activities that occurred in the summer of 2020). Gather staff identified five organizations for interviews and reached out to all to ask for their participation. Staff from four of the five programs (and six individuals total) completed interviews; these individuals represented the Community Action Program of Strafford County (CAPSC), Grace Community Church, The Share Fund (formerly Gerry’s Food Pantry), and the Rochester Child Care Center (RCCC). The participants from Grace Church and the Rochester Child Care Center were interviewed in both 2020 and 2021. Different staff from CAPSC participated in the 2020 and 2021 interviews. The Share Fund was new to the interviews in 2021.

**Gather Staff Interviews:** In the summer of 2020, a 12-question semi-structure interview guide was used to interview five individuals (i.e., three staff, one Board member, and one intern) who work at Gather and have a role in M4K in Rochester. The Gather interviews offered perspectives on partner recruitment and engagement; the barriers to and strategies for reaching, engaging, and retaining eligible families in M4K; adequacy of resources for operating M4K; factors that either facilitated or posed challenges to M4K’s success in Rochester; whether the original M4K model was implemented with fidelity or modified and why; and how likely it is that M4K could be sustained if Gather’s involvement were to decrease over time. While similar, two questions were omitted from the 2021 tool (as they were related to start-up activities that took place the previous year). Four staff participated in the 2021 interviews.

**Weekly debrief calls:** In the summer of 2020, over ten weeks (June 16 through August 18), the evaluation intern conducted weekly debrief calls with Gather’s Associate Executive Director and/or a senior intern who coordinated and staffed M4K in Rochester. The debriefs were used to learn about what worked well each week, what did not, and any quality improvement plans to address identified problems. In the summer of 2021, in consultation with the Associate Executive Director, it was decided that two debrief meetings would suffice (one mid-summer and one at the end of the summer season) and would involve the person responsible for managing M4K and a long-time, senior volunteer who worked at Rochester M4K each week of the summer.

Qualitative data were analyzed for common and divergent themes and quantitative data were analyzed in Excel and SPSS.

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2 No Spanish-speaking participants were among those who agreed to be contacted for an interview.
II. Literature review

Our search of the existing literature yielded findings about the prevalence of food insecurity and how the pandemic has exacerbated the problem, as well as the types of programs available to address food insecurity, including the utilization rates and effectiveness of such programs. Descriptive and demographic data on Rochester is also offered.

A. Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life,” affects families around the world, and the United States is no exception. In 2018, approximately 11.5% or 13 million United States households reported some level of food insecurity, including about 2.7 million households with children. In total, about 37 million Americans were food insecure in 2018. There are several levels of food security, ranging from very low to high. Food insecurity also varies between rural and urban areas. (USDA ERS - Key Statistics & Graphics, n.d.). In 2018, 12.7% of individuals in rural settings, 10.8% in metropolitan settings, 13.2% in principle cities (e.g., New York City, Los Angeles), and 8.9% in non-principle cities (e.g., Memphis, St. Louis) experienced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen, 2018).

According to Feeding America, food insecurity in the United States rose during the COVID-19 pandemic. These rates are projected to drop from 2020 to 2021, however, they will likely still exceed the rates of food insecurity experienced prior to the pandemic. It is estimated that 45 million people (1 in 7), including 15 million children (1 in 5), may have experienced food insecurity in America in 2020. Feeding America projects that 42 million people (1 in 8), including 13 million children (1 in 6), may experience food insecurity in 2021 (Feeding America, 2021). According to The World Bank, The Agricultural Commodity Price Index is at its highest since 2013, and as of June 15, 2021, was approximately 33% higher than in January 2020. Cereal prices are 43% higher than in January 2020. (The World Bank, 2021).

The Brookings Institution, based on data from two nationally representative surveys, reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity in the U.S., especially in households with young children. While 1 in 5 households in general experienced food insecurity since the onset of the pandemic, 2 in 5 households with mothers with children age 12 and under were food insecure. The 2020 Survey with Mothers of Young Children showed that the increase in food insecurity is accompanied by an increase in childhood hunger; 17.4% of mothers with children ages 12 and under reported that the children in their household were not eating enough because the family could not afford enough food. The rates of food insecurity were higher than at any other point in time for which comparable data are available (i.e., 2001 through 2018), including the Great Recession. (The COVID-19 Crisis Has Already Left Too Many Children Hungry in America, n.d.).

Locations that already had higher prevalence of food insecurity than the national average, and those that rely heavily on the tourism economy are expected to experience the greatest increases in food insecurity (i.e., North Dakota, Minnesota, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Hawaii) as a result of the pandemic. About 40% of those who are expected to become food insecure are people who have never had to use food assistance before; they include people who are recently unemployed, sick themselves, and/or helping sick loved ones. Donations, including monetary and food goods, have increased across the country to help those newly experiencing food insecurity as a result of the pandemic (“Record Levels” of Food Insecurity in the U.S. Because of COVID-19 - Marketplace, n.d.).
B. Programs Addressing Food Insecurity

There are many food assistance programs in the United States, both publicly and privately-funded. Neither the private food assistance programs described in this section (i.e., mobile markets, food pantries, and food banks) nor the public programs (i.e., SNAP, the NSLP, and WIC), are designed to be an individual or family’s sole food source. Rather, they are intended to supplement regular food purchases. By using both federal and private food assistance programs, low-income individuals are more likely to meet their monthly food needs than by relying on one source or the other (Hunger’s New Staple: Who Uses Food Pantries? / Feeding America, n.d.). Below, the various types of programs and their eligibility requirements are described, including data on utilization and impact when available.

1. Government Food Assistance Programs

Government food assistance programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Women Infants and Children, and the National School Lunch Program; all are widely used throughout the nation.

a. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP)

Among the federally-funded programs, SNAP utilization is the highest (Food Assistance / USAGov, n.d.). In 2018, approximately 20 million households, or 40 million individuals, received SNAP benefits (i.e., monthly monetary allowances to support their food purchasing (Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Introduction - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.). Of the federal nutrition assistance programs, SNAP has the least restrictions on what one can purchase with his/her benefits. Essentially, recipients may purchase any food products they wish, except alcohol or ready-to-eat/prepared foods (What Can SNAP Buy? / USDA-FNS, n.d.). Any U.S. citizen may apply for SNAP by completing an application and interview. Eligible individuals are those with certain gross and net monthly incomes based on their family size (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) / USDA-FNS, n.d.), and they must apply through their state office. In 2017, approximately 50.1 million Americans were eligible for SNAP, with 84% participating. Data show that SNAP participation is higher in rural versus urban environments, 90% vs. 82% of eligible individuals, respectively (Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Introduction - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.). SNAP participation was steadily decreasing since 2016, likely due to the improving economy following the 2008 recession (SNAP Caseload and Spending Declines Have Accelerated in Recent Years, 2019; SNAP Data Tables / USDA-FNS, n.d.).

SNAP has been associated with positive health outcomes. For example, children who use SNAP have significantly better health and well-being than those who do not (“The Positive Effect of SNAP Benefits on Participants and Communities,” n.d.). As previously stated, no single food program can meet all of a household’s food and nutritional needs. A 2016 study using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that families would require an additional $30 per month to increase vegetable and meat purchases and decrease fast food purchases. Whole grain, legume, and milk purchases would also increase. They found that this $30 increase was also associated with a small, but statistically significant decrease in food insecurity (Anderson & Butcher, n.d.).

b. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)

After SNAP, the NSLP is the most widely used federal food assistance program in the country. The NSLP mission is “to improve child and adolescent health and well-being, especially for those who are food insecure” (“Benefits of School Lunch,” n.d.). Any student can partake in the program and pay full
price, but those who already use SNAP or are at 185% of below the poverty level qualify for free or reduced priced breakfast and lunch. As with SNAP, participation in NSLP has declined in recent years due to the improving economy (USDA ERS - National School Lunch Program, n.d.). In the 2017-2018 school year, the NSLP served almost 22 million low income children each day, which equated to approximately 74.4% of total meals served to students that year ("National School Lunch Program," n.d.). Elementary students were the most likely to use the program, and high school students were least likely. The program complies with the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including reduced sodium content, 50% whole grains, and low-fat milk (Child Nutrition Tables / USDA-FNS, n.d.). Research has shown that kids who utilize the NSLP consume more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and milk and have a better-quality diet overall than those who bring lunch from home, regardless of their eligibility for free or reduced meals. The NSLP has been associated with a 39% decrease in poor health among low-income children enrolled in the program as well ("Benefits of School Lunch," n.d.).

The goal of the School Breakfast Program is to increase regular, healthy breakfast consumption among school aged children and adolescents. The SBP has considerably less use than the lunch program, with 30.4 million children served in 2016 or 46.6% of all public school students in the U.S. (Cullen & Chen, 2016; K-12 Enrollment Statistics [2020], n.d.; Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Introduction - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.; USDA ERS - National School Lunch Program, n.d.). As with the NSLP, the SBP must also meet federal nutrition guidelines, and the program has been associated with healthier eating habits and reduced nutrient deficiencies among participating students (Bhattacharya et al., 2006).

The NSLP tracks the concentration of low-income students within schools. “High poverty schools” are those in which 75% of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch and breakfast. As of 2016, 40% of all students in urban schools were in high poverty schools vs. 15% of students in rural schools (The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions (National Center for Education Statistics), n.d.). These data indicate that the concentration of low-income students (i.e., students who are eligible for the program) is greater in urban schools than in rural schools, and that urban students are more likely than rural students to attend schools where the majority of their classmates are eligible for the NSLP.

Many of the students who depend on school breakfast and lunch as their primary source of nutrition lack access to regular nutritious meals during the summer months. Thus, the NSLP also offers the Summer Meals Program (SMP). A 2015 impact analysis found that summer meal programs help reduce adolescent weight gain, cognitive decline, and learning loss in the summer months. The analysis also found that participation may contribute to increased graduation rates and reduced susceptibility to chronic diseases later in life (Summer Meals | Center for Best Practices, n.d.). Most SMPs operate through community organizations, such as schools or libraries. Like other federal meal assistance programs, participation is declining (Orovecz & Pincus, n.d.). In 2018, only 1 in 7 children who qualified for free or reduced lunch took part in the SMP, equaling 2.9 million students. In 2019, SMP utilization dropped to 2.7 million children served daily (USDA ERS - Summer Food Service Program, n.d.). Several barriers to participation in the SMP exist. No Kids Hungry found that most low-income families (68%) were interested in the SMP, but only 40% were aware of the locations where they could access the program locally and, ultimately, only 1 in 4 families that are knowledgeable about the program participate in it (Summer Meals | Center for Best Practices, n.d.). In rural communities, transportation is a major barrier to participation, especially if the parents work (Phillips, n.d.).

c. Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WIC serves low income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women; infants; and children up to age 5 (Federal Food Assistance Programs | Feeding America, n.d.). WIC serves a smaller, less inclusive
audience than SNAP and the program is more restrictive in terms of the foods that can be purchased (e.g., fortified cereals, milk, vegetables, fruits, and whole wheat bread). WIC also requires participation in nutrition education and counseling at its local offices throughout each state. Like SNAP, individuals must apply and are accepted based on income eligibility (WIC Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) | USDA-FNS, n.d.). Also like SNAP, WIC participation declined as the U.S economy improved following the 2008 financial crisis (USDA ERS - WIC Participation Continues To Decline, n.d.). In 2017, approximately 14.1 million Americans were eligible for WIC assistance. However, only 51% (7.19 million) of eligible individuals enrolled in the program (Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Introduction - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.). In 2018, WIC enrollment decreased to 6.87 million women, infants, and children (WIC Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) | USDA-FNS, n.d.). There is a slight difference in rural versus urban use of WIC. In 2017, 46% of eligible people used WIC services in rural areas, compared to 42% in urban areas (Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food Introduction - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.).

A study conducted by the University of Georgia looked at WIC underutilization in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia and found that families who enrolled in another assistance program such as SNAP or Head Start were more likely to participate in WIC, as were those with children in public schools. The authors concluded that families engaged in these other programs were more likely to learn about WIC and, therefore, had higher rates of WIC utilization (Hardin et al., n.d.). Despite low enrollment, extensive research showed that for those WIC serves, it is an invaluable program that leads to healthier babies and improved maternal and childhood health (WIC Participation and Costs Are Stable, 2015). WIC has been shown to improve children’s and mothers’ diets, including increased nutrient intake and decreased iron deficiency anemia, through healthy food choices (About WIC - How WIC Helps | USDA-FNS, n.d.). WIC participation is also associated with improved adolescent intellectual development and behavioral health (WIC Works, 2015).

2. Privately-funded Food Programs

a. Food Pantries

Food pantries address food insecurity by providing food directly to food insecure individuals and families (as opposed to SNAP and WIC benefits, which participants utilize when shopping for food at participating grocery stores and farmer’s markets). Food pantries are often run through non-profits (e.g., community-based agencies, faith-based organizations) and vary in size and what they serve. Data on the types of food distributed in rural versus urban meal programs is limited. The quality and quantity of food provided in food banks depends on the food sources, rather than location (What’s the Difference between a Food Bank and Food Pantry? | Feeding America, n.d.). For example, some pantries rely heavily on food drives, so they may be more likely to carry non-perishables, such as processed, canned, or boxed foods. Others may receive produce from local farms, so they can offer more produce and other fresh foods (Tips for Visiting a Food Pantry, n.d.). To increase their effectiveness and healthy food consumption among their users, many food pantries are incorporating nutrition and cooking education into their models (What’s the Difference between a Food Bank and Food Pantry? | Feeding America, n.d.). Food pantry usage steadily increased from 2001 to 2014, but, since 2017, has been declining. In 2014, food pantry utilization peaked at 5.5% of all U.S households, or 28.2% of food-insecure U.S households, following federal program utilization patterns (USDA ERS - Food Pantries Provide Emergency Food to More Than One-Quarter of Food-Insecure Households, n.d.). Although food pantries operate independently of each other, many are associated with the national network, Feeding America. Over 200 food banks and their 60,000 food pantry partners make up the Feeding America network. Feeding America serves nearly every community in all 50 states by securing food donations from community partners and facilitating the distribution to food banks who need it most. These food banks then send
the donations to independently operated food pantries (How Do Food Banks Work? | Feeding America, n.d.). Feeding America’s food banks also offer programming to alleviate food insecurity, such as nutrition and culinary education to customers, community education about the importance of food security and to encourage healthy eating, advocating for legislation and policy changes, and working to ensure 69% of its food complies with the USDA Dietary Guidelines. (Our Work Providing Healthy Foods | Feeding America, n.d.).

b. Farmer’s Markets

Unlike food pantries, farmer’s markets are not often associated with serving low-income and food insecure individuals. The Farmer’s Market Coalition (FMC) defines a farmer’s market as “a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives selling the food they produced directly to consumers.” There are over 8,600 markets registered by the USDA, and the number grows each year (About Farmers Markets, n.d.). They exist in a variety of settings ranging from rural to urban communities, but no data are available indicating that they are more likely to exist in one area over another. Farmer’s markets removed the middleman so farmers receive a larger portion of the profits from their sales to customers. Farmer’s markets also serve to stimulate local economies and offer consumers the benefit of learning where their food comes from. They support the consumption of fresh foods, especially fruits and vegetables; many markets have a wide variety of such offerings. Through an arrangement with USDA and the FMC, thousands of farmer’s markets across the country now accept SNAP benefits enabling SNAP recipients to access fresh, local food (About Farmers Markets, n.d.). Many markets have also enacted “double dollars” or “double up food bucks” for SNAP recipients, which means that when participants use their SNAP EBT cards at a participating farmer’s market, their spending is matched so they can purchase additional produce. The double dollars initiative, typically run locally or state-wide, has been proven to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among SNAP beneficiaries, who may not otherwise be able to afford enough produce for their households (Granite State Market Match – You SNAP. We MATCH., n.d.; How It Works Campaign Landing Page – Double Up Food Bucks, n.d.; Polacsek et al., 2018). In the past five years alone, the number of SNAP dollars spent at farmer’s markets has nearly tripled. A few thousand markets accept WIC vouchers as well (About Farmers Markets, n.d.). The FMC also has a program to promote fruit and vegetable consumption among children called the Power of Produce (POP) Club. Educational activities and shopping vouchers encourage kids to learn about nutrition and their local food system. Farmer’s Markets across the country can access the toolkit resources for POP if they are members of the FMC. Case studies conducted by the FMC indicate kids enjoy learning about their local food system and healthy eating, and parents appreciate the voucher system as a way for their kids to try new foods. It is free for community members to participate, further reducing barriers to fresh food access and nutrition education (Power of Produce, n.d.).

c. Mobile Markets

Mobile Markets increase food access, particularly to fruits and vegetables, and reduce transportation and cost barriers to healthy eating by transporting foods directly to low-income areas where residents may have trouble reaching stores or paying for produce (Rural Food Access Toolkit - Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.). The model is particularly effective in “food deserts,” communities that lack access to affordable and/or nutritious food and where the closest food pantries, farmer’s markets, and grocery stores are a considerable distance away. Food deserts often experience higher poverty rates as well.
Several studies have explored the effectiveness of mobile markets in reducing barriers commonly experienced by underserved communities. In a series of focus groups conducted in urban North Carolina, participants identified transportation as the main barrier to food access. The flexibility of mobile markets, including location and time, differentiates them from programs such as food pantries which may not be accessible to those who lack transportation. The same study compared community gardens, farmers’ markets, and mobile markets and showed greater preference for mobile markets among users. It also showed that mobile markets were associated with fewer barriers, greater variety and quality of food, and better access to fruits and vegetables (Haynes-Maslow et al., 2015). While traditional “brick-and-mortar” stores are generally associated with increased fruit and vegetable consumption, mobile markets make fruits and vegetables accessible while also being cheaper to operate (Widener et al., 2012). It is unknown how many mobile markets currently exist in the United States, but they are becoming more common due to their success in increasing food access (Zepeda et al., 2014). As of 2016, there were mobile markets operating in about 50 U.S communities, but the number is expected to grow (Robinson et al., 2016).

Research showed that mobile markets facilitated healthy eating in both urban and rural food deserts, if they operate at consistent times and have adequate variety of foods each week (Zepeda et al., 2014). Mobile markets are more common in urban settings, but rural communities are adopting the model as well, and it is proving to be an asset in both settings, giving out thousands of pounds of fresh food each week (Robinson et al., 2016).

Seacoast Eat Local, a Southern New Hampshire organization, operates several successful programs to increase food access and implemented the first mobile market in the state, serving three counties on the rural New Hampshire Seacoast (“SAMM,” n.d.). Mobile markets can vary in the number of families they serve and amount of food they give away. Second Harvest, a mobile market based in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho gives out approximately 8,000 pounds of fresh produce and other groceries to about 250 families each week (Second Harvest > Mobile Market, n.d.). Through its mobile market and partnership with local organizations, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier serves roughly the same number of families as Second Harvest but disseminates up to 15,000 pounds of food each week throughout several counties in New York. In 2019, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier gave out 13.3 million pounds of food through all of their programs; 3.4 million pounds of that food were distributed through their mobile markets alone (Food Bank Programs | Food Bank of the Southern Tier, 2018).

Several mobile markets across the country have created toolkits to enable other agencies to adopt and implement their models. Although they differ in the location and geography served, there are many commonalities among the toolkits. Engaging the local community and community partners is essential. Prior to implementing any program, a needs assessment and thorough research of the community is recommended. Often focus groups, surveys, and/or interviews are conducted with residents and local organizations to determine what community members want in a program. A critical step in the planning process is to establish partnerships with community organizations, such as community centers and low-income housing developments, which will host and support the markets. In terms of marketing and advertising, community partners may be the best way to reach potential customers for the mobile market (Ylitalo et al., 2019).

Logistical operations should also be considered, which include obtaining an appropriate vehicle (i.e., truck or bus), recruiting and training volunteers, and securing food sources that will meet the needs identified in the needs assessment and enhance the nutrition and health of low-income communities. Food sources will likely be needed to provide fresh foods, especially produce. Any community-specific barriers, such as local laws and regulations, should also be addressed.

Once the mobile market is an established asset in the community, it should be evaluated to ensure long-term success. This can be done through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with customers, or other, more quantitative methods (How to Run a Mobile Food Pantry – Feeding America West Michigan
In addition to the published toolkits, several studies on mobile markets offer insights into the characteristics of effective mobile markets. For example, to reduce transportation barriers, markets should be in the same, safe, and central location at the same time each week. Ideally, the stop would be in a public space, such as a community center or school parking lot, for ease of access (Haynes-Maslow et al., 2015). A study conducted by Hsiao et al. found that the most valued aspects of mobile markets to community members were location and produce variety, further emphasizing the importance of these two components (Hsiao et al., 2019).

Even though mobile markets excel at reducing barriers to healthy food access, some customers may still lack knowledge to prepare the available foods. A study conducted on the “Veggie Van” mobile market suggested providing education on nutrition, cooking skills, and food safety to increase the market’s effectiveness (Ylitalo et al., 2019).

C. Gleaning

As sustainability becomes a focal point for many food assistance programs, gleaning has been increasingly adopted as another method to reduce food insecurity. According to the USDA, gleaning is the process of “collecting excess fresh foods from farms, gardens, farmer’s markets, grocers, restaurants, state/county fairs, or any other sources” to be donated to those in need, particularly in food deserts. Often the foods obtained in this way include fresh produce (mainly from farms) and meats and dairy products (from grocery stores). Gleaning was first created as a solution to the 100 billion pounds of food waste each year in the United States. Every year more food assistance organizations, realizing the immense benefits of gleaning, adopt it as a source of food for their programs. According to the 2006 Farmers Market Survey, 23.9% of markets across the country were involved in gleaning. Also known as food rescue or food recovery, gleaning has been a strategy since at least the 1990s, when the USDA produced a guide on the topic for individuals and organizations (National Gleaning Project: Gleaning Laws, Resources, & Organizations, n.d.). Gleaning is considered a solution to both mitigating food insecurity and improving the environment. Each year, 40% of all edible food in the U.S is thrown away. Gleaning helps reduce this waste while simultaneously increasing fruit and vegetable intake among the food insecure, helping mitigate two problems at once (Lee et al., 2017).

D. Rochester, New Hampshire

New Hampshire’s overall food insecurity rate in 2018 was 7.8%, lower than the national average of 11.1%, and in fact, the lowest in the country (Coleman-Jensen, 2018). However, cities and towns throughout the state are at particular risk for food insecurity due to their economic and demographic make-up. Rochester is one such city. Located in Strafford County, Rochester’s estimated population in 2019 was 31,526 people. In 2010, the population per square mile was 655 people, with a total land area of 45.4 square miles. Approximately 6% of citizens are under 5 years old, 21% of citizens are under 18 years old, and 18% are over 65 years old. In terms of education level, 89% have at least a high school degree, and 20% possess a bachelor’s degree or higher. In 2018, the median household income in Rochester was $58,427 compared to $74,057 for New Hampshire and per capita income over the preceding year was $30,996 in Rochester vs. $38,548 for the state (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, n.d.). As of May 2021, the unemployment rate in Rochester was 1.5%, down from 16.8% in April of 2020. The current rate is also lower than the pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 2.8% (Granite Stats, 2021).
Rochester is considered a medically underserved community by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), meaning there are too few primary care providers, a large elderly population, and/or high rates of poverty or infant mortality (Map Tool / HRSA Data Warehouse, n.d.). As of July 2019, an estimated 10.5% of U.S. households were living in poverty, compared to 10.4% of Rochester households (United States Census Bureau, 2001). Although precise data on the number of households with children in Rochester that are food insecure are not available, in the 2013-2014 school year (the most recently available data), 45.9% of children in the Rochester school system were eligible for free/reduced-priced school lunch vs. 28.3% statewide. (Free/Reduced School Lunch Eligibility / KIDS COUNT Data Center, n.d.).

E. Parent Stress and Toxic Stress in Children

Financial hardship has been shown to have negative outcomes for children’s health, as well as their academic achievement; it is particularly damaging to younger children (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan, Ziol-Guest & Kalil, 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2005). Research has also long shown that income instability affects parental stress, as well as parent-child relationships (McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd, Jayarantne, Ceballo & Borquez, 1994). When children experience prolonged financial hardship, they may have a “toxic stress” response that can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment. While responsive relationships with caring adults can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress (Center for the Developing Child, nd). Parents dealing with long-term financial hardship may be less available to provide such support to their children due to work obligations and emotional strain. In other words, parental stress associated with financial hardship and the difficulty low-income parents face in providing support for their children have deleterious effects on children’s well-being.

In a review of the literature on pandemics (i.e., Spanish flu, COVID-19) and epidemics (H1N1, SARS, Ebola, AIDS), Antes de Araújo and colleagues (2020) found that concerns for health and social disruption and isolation contribute to stress among both children and parents. The studies reviewed describe a range of mental health consequences for parents (e.g., severe anxiety or depression) and children (e.g., acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, and depression), all of which are related to adverse childhood experiences and an increased risk for toxic stress in children. The more adverse experiences, the greater the risk of developmental delays and health problems in adulthood, such as cognitive impairment, substance abuse, depression, and non-communicable diseases.

III. Findings

A. Market utilization data

Each week of the summer 2020 (June 9 – September 1), an average of 278 children (range 205 to 354) were provided with food to feed their families for a full week. The total number of unduplicated children who benefited from M4K in 2020, whether they attended only once, every week, or something in between, was 739.

The mobile market model was changed in 2021 to improve access for the community overall. Previously, when the mobile market opened each Tuesday, it was exclusively for M4K participants (i.e., parents/guardians shopping for the children in their care). Then, later, the market was available to the community at-large who needed it. In the winter of 2021, the two were combined so that anyone, regardless of whether they were shopping for children or not, could attend at the same time. The move
expanded the times during which anyone could use the market. Because the combined model worked well to improve access, it was continued into the summer of 2021.

Despite the combined model, Gather continued to track participation of those shopping for children at M4K over the summer of 2021. Between June 14 and August 23, an average of 199 children (range 113 to 267) per week used the market. In all, 624 unduplicated children benefited from shopping at M4K in 2021. However, additional Rochester children also benefited from M4K. Over the summer of 2021, M4K piloted an effort with the Rochester Child Care Center because there were children enrolled in summer programming at RCCC whose families were not taking advantage of M4K. In the past, the families of these children would have had to shop at one of the M4K locations. In the summer of 2021, Gather dropped off groceries to the RCCC for the staff to package up for the children. The pilot meant that additional children were provided access to foods without their families having to attend the market itself. These children are thought to represent an additional 38 unique beneficiaries of M4K. Thus, 662 unique children are estimated to have benefited from M4K over the summer of 2021, exceeding the target of 500 for the summer.

The number of unique children dropped from the summer of 2020 to the summer of 2021, from 739 to 662. Based upon staff and partner feedback, parent/guardian input, and a separate data collection project conducted by Gather, it seems that the need for the M4K declined a bit in the summer of 2021 with increased WIC and SNAP benefits and people returning to work. Consistently, parents/guardians indicated that they do not use the market unless they need it, with some suggesting that it is important to them to ensure the foods are available at M4K for families who may need them more. Improved food security is the most desirable reason for decreased M4K utilization. And while many families didn’t use M4K in the summer of 2021, significant food insecurity still exists in the community as evidenced by the families of over 500 children using M4K to feed their families.

B. Gleaning/food rescue data

Over the summer of 2020 (June 9 – September 1), Gather rescued or gleaned 36,416 pounds of perishable foods (i.e., dairy, meat, produce) to feed Rochester families. Additionally, Gather rescued 10,984 pounds of non-perishables foods (i.e., packaged goods). Along with 67,668 pounds on other food provided to Rochester families, the summer M4K market in Rochester provided 115,068 pounds of food to children and families while preventing 47,400 pounds of food gleaned/rescued from local farms and grocery stores from going to waste and being added to local landfills.

The summer of 2021 saw changes in how Gather procured food for its markets in Rochester. Farmers, who the previous year, had provided substantial amounts of produce to the markets, were not able to contribute as much. While weather and labor shortages hampered their ability to produce and harvest food, they also found new markets for the food they were able to grow. While M4K provided 64,014 pounds of food overall to Rochester children over the summer of 2021, only 21,545 pounds of perishable foods and 7,897 non-perishable foods were rescued or gleaned. Because of the combined market model, rescued or gleaned foods also went to non-M4K families. Additionally, Gather was operating M4K in other communities, where they too benefited from the gleaned and rescued foods Gather procured. So while Gather provided more food overall to Rochester residents (M4K and non-M4K families) in the summer of 2021, less of it was rescued or gleaned overall and less of the rescued and gleaned foods was provided to families with children. That is not to say that M4K families were unable to access sufficient quantities of food for their families. More food was purchased in 2021 to ensure that families with children would have sufficient food to meet their needs. So, while the total pounds of food provided to M4K families in the summer of 2021 exceeded the target of 48,000, the portion of those foods that were rescued or gleaned (29,442) fell short of the target for the summer of 2021.
C. Parent/guardian survey

**Marketing and outreach:** Gather used several means to alert families about the mobile market in Rochester prior to and during the summer of 2020. Of the 82 individuals who provided data about the source(s) from which they learned about the market, the most common source was from a friend or relative (48.8%). Nearly 15% reported that they heard about the market from another agency (e.g., housing authority, school, another food program/pantry). Four individuals (4.9%) indicated that they learned about the market from two or more sources. Of the participants who indicated that they learned about the market from some “other” source, most (n=7) reported that they were passing by the market and stopped in to see what it was. The rest learned about it from a market volunteer, Facebook, text messages, and the Rochester farmer’s market.

Over the summer of 2021, 81 parents/guardians reported about how they learned about M4K. The results were similar to the previous summer with the most common sources being via word-of-mouth from a friend or relative (44.4%) and from another agency (18.5%). Those who learned about the market from some “other” source listed their workplace, from another food program, or by driving by as ways they learned about M4K; two did not recall where they learned about M4K.

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**Utilization and barriers to use:** In the summer of 2020, survey respondents were asked to estimate the number of times (out of 18 weekly markets) that they used M4K. The mean reported use was 8.7 times with a range of 1 to 18. As shown in the Figure below, the largest proportion (15.3%) of survey respondents used the market for the first time on the day the survey was administered.
For most of those who completed the survey in 2021, their first visit occurred prior to the summer of 2021. Over half (64.2%) reported that their first visit to M4K was just prior to COVID (43.2%) or over the winter/spring of 2020 when the pandemic began (21%). Only 13.6% reported that their first visit was during the summer of 2021. The rest (22.2%) starting using M4K during the summer of 2020 (12.3%) or in the fall/winter of 2020 or winter/spring of 2021 (9.9%). In the 2021 survey, parents/guardians were asked to use a scale to indicate how often they used M4K since their first visit. Just over 21% use it all the time/every week, 36% reported that they used M4K most weeks, rarely missing a week, and another 25% said they use it fairly regularly, attending more than half the time.

In the summer of 2020, 45 (52.9%) survey respondents used the weekly market less than half the time that it had been in operation in Rochester (i.e., eight visits or less). In 2021, far fewer respondents
had low M4K use. In fact, only 14 respondents (17.6%) used the market occasionally/half the time or less or rarely/hardly ever. The figure below shows the reason(s) for low utilization over both summers. The most common reason in the summer of 2020, was that the participants did not hear about the market until weeks after it had started (73.8%). By 2021, the market had been in operation for many months and most had been using it for a long time. Of the remaining reasons for low market use, the most common reported over both summers was that participants received food from other sources and didn’t need M4K each week. Transportation posed a challenge to slightly more people than the M4K schedule in 2020, whereas the two were equally challenging to those with low market utilization in 2021. While fewer unduplicated children overall used M4K in 2021, more families used M4K on a more consistent basis than in 2020. And, for all the reasons that families might have low M4K utilization, the least concerning was also the most common in 2021 and second most common in 2020 -- that they had food from other sources so didn’t need M4K every week.

**Satisfaction:** Survey participants were asked to rate the variety and quality of foods at the market, the recipes and food tastings, and the market overall using a five point scale (i.e., Excellent, Very Good, Average, Fair, Poor). None of the respondents selected poor to describe any aspect of M4K. In fact, the ratings indicate that market users are satisfied with all aspects of M4K. The graph below shows that the majority (between 78.5% and 95.5%) rated each aspect of the market and the market overall as excellent or very good.

Although the initial plan had been to evaluate food tastings that took place over the summer, the pandemic caused M4K to suspend them. While the item was still included in the parent/guardian survey, it is unclear how to interpret the findings. Some participants may have reflected back on food tastings they had prior to their suspension. However, some survey participants who began using M4K after tastings were suspended also provided feedback; it is possible that these participants confused ready-made meals for food tastings.
In 2021, the proportion of those who rated M4K overall as excellent or very good (94.8%) was close to the proportion rating it as such in 2020 (95.5%). In both 2020 and 2021, 92.5% of survey participants rated the variety of foods as excellent or very good. Most also rated the quality of the food as good or very good in 2021; at 82.1% the proportion was slightly higher than in 2020 (78.5%). While, 84.1% of survey respondents rated the recipes provided at the markets at excellent or very good in 2020, that proportion fell to 71.6% in 2021. There were no food tasting at the 2021 market due to COVID. However, prepared foods were offered and most (77.5%) rated them as excellent or very good. The vast majority of M4K participants who provided survey responses were satisfied with the market overall and with the various aspects of the market, especially the variety and quality of foods.

The table below shows that 100% of the 2020 and 98.7% of the 2021 respondents who answered questions about whether they’d use M4K the following summer and whether they would recommend M4K to other families indicated selected “true,” indicating that they would do both things.
Survey participants selecting "true" about their plans related to M4K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2021 (n=79)</th>
<th>2020 (n=68)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I plan to use M4K next summer too</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend M4K to other families</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2020, survey respondents were offered the opportunity to provide comments or suggestions for improving M4K; 30 individuals provided feedback. The majority of the comments (n=24) were positive in nature, specifically describing the value of the market to themselves, their families, and the community. These comments reflect user satisfaction with the market.

“I think this program is very beneficial for the community.”

“You all are awesome! Thank you for helping my family and all the other families in need.”

“My family loves mobile market!”

“Thank you. We appreciate all you do and all the help you have given our family.”

A couple of participants described specific aspects of the market that they appreciate.

“Overall, great and helpful program; I like being able to pick and choose what my family will want or need.”

“I like how you have to line up and only one person at a time is at each station/table. That way, people are not over-crowding the stations.”

Some also expressed their appreciation for the staff and volunteers at the market.

“Amazing people run this market. It is so important to my family and worries are becoming less each week. Thank you for your time and energy to keep this going.”

“Just thank you. I love it. Also, I am always impressed by the patience and good cheer on the part of the staff members. Thanks again!”

Several individuals offered recommendations for improving the market. A few comments suggest that some would like to see limits placed on the time and amount of food some families take at the market, as well as suggestions for improving the overall environment.

“Add a no smoking line. Children under 12 need an older person [with them] as they run all over the place and hit each other and bump into the adults.”

“Maybe after Corona Virus settles down, the line could go [faster] with two or three people at a station at a time. Just an idea.”

“Limit time spent at snack stations.”
“I wish all participants would be kind and only take what they need for their family.”

A few described other products they would like to see Gather offer at the market, including personal hygiene products, baby food and formula, and hand sanitizer.

In 2020, only two individuals offered specific concerns about the food offerings at the market, specifically the expiration dates and packaging and preserving of foods.

“I have occasionally worried about expiration dates on products.”

“The pre-made meals are not properly sealed (shrink wrap); have had problems with them. Also, direct sunlight is bad for food and veggies; they should be in a cooler.”

In 2021, when asked if there was anything else Gather could do to improve M4K, 33 provided comments; 14 of those were complimentary in nature, like the following.

“I love Gather and the people there. They don’t make you feel ashamed for need help.”

“No, nothing. You do a great job providing for families in our community. Thank you for being so amazing.”

“Keep up the good work!”

“You are doing great work. I appreciate all of you and the program.”

The others offered suggestions for improving M4K in some way. A few requested more snacks and drinks, a couple wanted more and additional variety in the produce (e.g., avocados, limes, lemons, papaya) and dairy (e.g., gouda cheese, gallons of milk, yogurt) and frozen items. Two wanted special foods for those with lactose and gluten allergies/sensitivities. One person would also like to see Gather expand beyond food to offer more household items and clothing. The most common type of comment pertained to the quality of the food.

“The produce could be fresher at time.”

“You better check dates on milk. It sours quickly. Also check veggies, fruit, and bread for mold.”

A few of the 2021 participants described operational concerns at the market, most notably the line in which they stand while waiting for and using M4K.

“I don’t like lining up on the road at Grace Church.”

“I like it when there is something for the kids to do while standing in line.”

“Expedite the line. Volunteers chat too much and it prevents the line from moving.”

“I don’t know if there is something else you could do while people are waiting in line...maybe provide access to other services.”
A few of the 2021 participants also suggested Gather place limits on the quantity of food M4K participants can take.

“Limit meat. I hear people saying they take more than they need because they see other people do it.”

“Give numbers as people arrive to prevent butting in line. Some people have 5 or 6 other people join them.”

“I’d like to see a non-smoking line.”

One 2021 interviewee suggested that Gather offer a “drive through” option for families with children because shopping with the children is difficult.

In general, the comments across the two summers reflect the same types of themes in terms of appreciation (e.g., for the staff and volunteers, the food and service to the community, for making people feel welcome) as well as possible improvements (e.g., the line, limits, and the quantity, freshness, and variety of foods).

**Expected outcomes:** In 2020, survey participants were asked to use a Likert Scale (1=Completely agree to 5=Completely disagree) to indicate the extent of their agreement with seven statements about M4K’s impact on their families. In 2021, one statement (i.e., about their kids participation in preparing meals) was removed because, in the previous year, it did not prove useful in evaluating the impact of the market on participating families because many respondents indicated that their children were too young and/or that they did want their children involved in meal preparation. The remaining six statements reflect the desired outcomes of the M4K market. As shown in the table below, a majority of participants in 2020 (between 70% and 90.3%) and in 2021 (between 71.8% and 92.6%) expressed agreement (i.e., completely agree or somewhat agree) with each of the statements, which indicates that M4K is having success in reaching its desired outcomes.

The market is successful at achieving two outcomes related specifically to parents/guardians. In both 2020 and 2021, the vast majority of survey participants indicated that they feel less stress about how they will feed their families nutritious foods, 90.3% and 92.6%, respectively. In 2020, 86.3% indicated that they have more money available for other expenses because they save money on food; in 2021, 92.5% completely or somewhat agreed with that statement.

Based on the proportion of agreement offered, it also seems the market is also successful at influencing outcomes related to children. In both 2020 and 2021, the majority indicated that their children are eating a larger variety of foods (81.9% and 91.3%, respectively) and healthier foods (80.3% and 80.0%, respectively). With regard to the impact of M4K on children’s overall health, 70% of the 2020 participants and 71.8% of the 2021 participants believe M4K has had a positive influence. In 2020, 77.8% of survey respondents reported that their children understand how food choices affect their health, whereas 75% agreed with the statement in 2021.
Agreement (completely or somewhat) with statements about M4K by survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) eat a larger variety of foods. (n=84)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) are eating healthier foods. (n=82)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) understand how food choices affect health. (n=84)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The health of my child(ren) has improved. (n=82)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I save money on food, I have more money available for other expenses (e.g., rent, utilities, transportation) (n=86)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less stress about how I will be able to feed my family nutritious foods. (n=84)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While in 2020, a number of survey respondents had limited experience with M4K at the time they were completing the survey, that was not true in 2021. To understand if 2020 survey participants responses to the outcomes-related questions were associated with their length of utilization of the market, results were examined for first time users versus all other users. The figure below shows that consistently lower proportions of first-time M4K users offered agreement with the statements, which perhaps suggests that insufficient time had passed for M4K to have a noticeable difference on children’s behaviors, nutrition, and/or health, as well as its ability to offer financial and stress relief to parents and guardians. The 2021 data and the 2020 data for those with more than one M4K visit suggest that M4K has had a positive influence on these outcomes for both children and their parents/guardians.³

³ To examine whether other patterns existed between the frequency of one’s market use in 2020 and agreement with the statements, survey respondents were grouped into five categories based on the number of visits they made to the market: first time users; infrequent use (2 to 4 visits); intermittent use (5 to 9 visits); frequent use (10 to 14 visits); and very frequent use (15 or more visits). No clear trend were identified between the frequency of market use and the proportion of parents/guardians who offered agreement with the statements (with the exception of first time users as described above).
In 2020, in response to the option to provide additional feedback or suggestions about M4K, some survey respondents indicated how critical the market has been to their ability to feed their families. Such comments suggest that the market has been effective at achieving its intended outcomes.

“It is awesome being able to get fresh produce and items we couldn't otherwise afford.”

“Thank you. We can now eat all week.”

“Definitely a huge help on providing food for my family with times being hard.”

“This has been a true blessing for our family. I have six children under 10 years old and Gather has been vital to how we provide quality food each week. I have been impressed by the quality of offerings. Thank you so much!”

“I just want to say a huge thank you for all involved in this. Blessings will be coming your way. We were literally down to Raman Noodles before finding you. God Bless.”

This kind of feedback led to the addition of an item on the 2021 survey, namely: “Please finish the sentence below: Without M4K...” In response to this survey items, 60 respondents offered information about how their lives would be different with M4K. Several described the specific items they would go without.

“I would not have milk in my house because of how much is used in a week and it’s expensive.”

“I wouldn’t be able to feed my family fresh vegetables or fruits.”

“We would not have fruits and veggies on a regular basis or be able to afford my kids allergy diets.”

“I would not be able to provide plenty of fresh veggies, meat, and dairy.”
Some described the impact on their health and diets in broader terms.

“We would have way less food and money is tight with income and everyone is definitely eating healthier.”

“I would suffer looking for food.”

“My kids would go hungry.”

“I would be under 100 pounds and go without because food is for the kids meals.”

Other focused on the impact M4K has on their finances.

“We wouldn’t be able to pay other bills. Thank you so much!”

“I wouldn’t have money for other bills (gas, electric).”

“I would need to spend more on food and struggle with bills.”

“I would have a hard time managing monthly expenses. I am glad I don’t have to spend as much on food.”

For some, their comments indicated that M4K helps to alleviate stress.

“Things would be tough for us.”

“I wouldn’t know what to do.”

“Things would be so much harder. Thank you so much.”

“I would struggle.”

“There would be nothing.”

The quantitative data as well as the open-ended comments provided in both 2020 and 2021 by survey respondents suggest that M4K has made an appreciable difference in people’s lives in terms of the variety of healthy foods they consume and their overall health, as well as their stress about finances and ability to pay their bills.

D. Parent/guardian interviews

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**Marketing and outreach:** In 2020, most of those interviewed lived in two-parent or -grandparent households, although there were two households with both parents and grandparents living under the same roof and no single parent households. Collectively, the parents/guardians were caring for 51 children, 45 of those children were school-aged and six were younger. The average age of the children was 9.75 years and the range was 6 months to 18 years old.
In 2021, five households were headed by a single adult and six households had two adults. One of the interviewees was a grandparent. The others were parents. The interviewees, collectively, were caring for 30 children, eight of whom were not yet school-aged. The average age was 7.6 years old and the range was 1 to 16.

The primary difference between the participants in 2020 and those who were interviewed in 2021 was that there were more single-parent households included in the 2021 interviews, which could influence the amount of income available to support their households.

Because the number of interviewees both years is small, it is not possible to draw conclusions about how effective various means of marketing M4K were based simply upon how many interviewees identified one avenue of learning about the market versus another. However, in both years, word of mouth was an important source of information about M4K as were other community agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>2020 (n=17)</th>
<th>2021 (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another community agency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Gather in Portsmouth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the internet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On social media</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw the M4K in Rochester</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I went with a friend and it felt great, especially because there was a Spaniard there. She made me feel comfortable speaking Spanish.” (2020 interviewee)

“Last year, I was at the food place at Rochester Commons using my EBT card and another woman saw I was using WIC and EBT stamps and she suggested M4K because it is free. She was a stranger.” (2021 interviewee)

“When I stopped getting child support, which was my food money, I contacted some food banks. Gerry’s told me about Gather. I went there for a cake for my son’s birthday because I couldn’t afford to make one.” (2021 interviewee)

In both 2020 and 2021, all interviewees were asked what they would tell friends and family about M4K. In both cohorts, several interview participants reported that they had already told friends about the market and urged them to use it. Several described the staff and volunteers in positive terms.

“They are wicked nice. You don’t have to touch anybody. And I’d tell them about the variety.” (2020 interviewee)

“It is just a great experience. The people are not condescending. They are very friendly people there. I am so appreciative of it.” (2021 interviewee)

Others commented on the variety and quantity of foods.

“It’s really great program. Every week you go, stand in line at a couple of different sites and every week they have different things.” (2020 interviewee)
“I explain that it’s not like a food pantry. You bring your bags and pick your own stuff and take as much as you need or want. It’s not all canned goods. You can get fresh eggs and milk.” (2020 interviewee)

“It is worth it. You get a variety of fruits and veggies and all of your staple items. They are there every week for you.” (2021 interviewee)

Some also talked about the model and what it offers.

“It’s a good, organized program and a huge help to families to get the food they need.” (2020 interviewee)

“I just call it a farmer’s market. I explained it to my boyfriend as a free farmer’s market.” (2021 interviewee)

**Utilization and barriers to use:** The parents and guardians involved in the 2020 interviews used the M4K market an average of 13 weeks out of 20, with a range of two to 20 visits. For those who did not attend all or most of the weekly markets, the most common reason was that they had other obligations (e.g., work, medical appointments) that conflicted with the M4K schedule in Rochester. A few explained that they did not learn about the market until it had already been operating for several weeks. The parents/guardians offered a range of other reasons as well, including using the market only as needed (i.e., when food is running low), transportation challenges, and skepticism based on previous experience with food pantries. Some of the 2020 participants offered the following insights.

“I don’t need it all the time and don’t want to take from others who do.”

“My husband and I share a car and sometimes that is a challenge.”

“I learned about the market a bit earlier [than when I first used it], but worried about getting food I can’t use, stuff we won’t eat. We eat a lot of variety, but I have gotten stuff from food pantries I can’t use. We have to pay to have our trash taken away so I can’t afford to have a lot of stuff go bad or for stuff we just can’t use and will have to throw away.”

In the 2021 cohort, all but one person reported that they used M4K either every week or most weeks. The remaining individual explained that, because she uses other food assistance programs, she only uses M4K for fresh produce. Although none of the 2021 participants face barriers that prevented their use of M4K, a few of them described waiting in line with children, busy location, and parking as stressful elements.

“Grace Church is right on the road and I have to watch my kids closely.”

“It is a stressor to have to bring the kids to the market and stand in line.”

“Parking is tricky for me so a location with better parking would be convenient because I carry a lot of food.”
In both years, interviewees were asked if they know of any families who are eligible to use M4K but who do not use it and why; most did not know anyone who qualified to use M4K who did not already use it. A few indicated that they had told others about the market and that those people now use M4K.

“I referred a couple of people. My aunt has gone a couple of times.” (2020 interviewee)

“All I know is, I tell a lot of people, and I think they all use it. Most of my circle use it.” (2020 interviewee)

“We brought our neighbor with us last week to M4K because she has a daughter and we thought the little bit of extra food would help her out and she really liked it. I think she will go back next week.” (2021 interviewee)

Among the 2020 interviewees, some were aware of families who were not using M4K who have school-aged children and who could be using it. Transportation, lack of awareness, and pride were identified as obstacles to market use. Some of the 2020 participants shared the following:

“Yes, I do know some who could use it. I assume they aren’t aware of it.”

“I have a friend who doesn’t use it because she doesn’t have a way to get there.”

“Yes, she [the person who doesn’t use M4K] may be too proud to use food assistance.”

Some also noted that managing children at the market is challenging.

“Yes, I know some. A lot of it is getting it [the food] back to the house and managing small kids at the same time. One has a four year-old and it is hard to manage him and the food. Shopping carts might help with little ones because you can keep them in the cart while shopping.”

“...If you could pre-order your food and just have them load it in the car, it would be awesome with kids.”

In both 2020 and 2021, all of the interviewees reported that they use most of the food they take home from M4K each week.

“We definitely use it. Everything goes. I told my kids it is a privilege to have food on the table, especially that you enjoy eating. When I was a kid, we were poor. We didn’t have these programs when I grew up. My kids were taught to appreciate what they have. They voice their opinions, but they eat what I put in front of them. They appreciate it.” (2020 interviewee)

“I use absolutely everything...[or at least] 99.7% of everything is used as long as is not spoiled. I have planted a pineapple top and it has grown back up.” (2021 interviewee)

Those who have found they have excess food have shared it with others, taken less in subsequent weeks, or found ways to creative ways to use, dispose, or preserve it.

“We use all of it. I dehydrate what I haven’t used so I can use it later. I got a case of plain yogurt last time. I took peaches from my tree and pureed them and the kids liked it. I don’t let anything go
to waste. I am nervous that the market may stop when school starts so I am saving and preserving things now.” (2020 interviewee)

“I am super conscious of what I have left. For example, if I have six tomatoes left, I will use my WIC cheese and go pick basic and make bruschetta.” (2021 interviewee)

“We use most of what we get. I am very selective, however if I have something left I sometimes share it with a family I know that has eight kids.” (2020 interviewee)

“Yes, we use most of it. If I have something left over like eggs, I don’t take more of that item the following week or I might give leftovers to my sister and I get fresh stuff at the market.” (2020 interviewee)

“I only take what we like and will eat. If not, I compost it.” (2021 interviewee)

“I try not to let any go to waste, but the lettuce or cucumber may go soft, so I feed it to the rabbits or chickens.” (2021 interviewee)

In each cohort, a few participants reported that they used one or more recipes provided at M4K. Several others explained that they have collected and kept some or all of the recipes and intend to use them, although they have not yet used them.

“The recipes are easy to follow and I have a folder that I keep them all in so I can go back and make them again” (2021 interviewee)

“I have pretty much tried them all or my kids have. They are simple enough that the kids can do it and amend them.” (2020 interviewee)

“Yes, I tried the chili with vegetables. It was good because all of the ingredients were there [at the weekly market].” (2020 interviewee)

“We have used the soup recipe and enchiladas. They were pretty good. I like getting new ideas because it takes us out of our normal routine of what I usually make.” (2021 interviewee)

“I got the recipe for watermelon popsicles so my son could try it, but I haven’t yet. We are excited to try it. More recipes would be great. Recipes are always good to have.” (2020 interviewee)

“We loved the granola. It was amazing and we will try to make some ourselves. We also got a burrito recipe that sounds really good, but we haven’t tried it yet. We keep all of the recipes in case we need something new.” (2021 interviewee)

In both cohorts, some indicated that they had not used the recipes nor did they plan to do so.

“I looked at them but they haven’t appealed to us. I think it’s cool and others use them.” (2020 interviewee)

“My husband went to culinary school so we don’t really need them.” (2020 interviewee)
“I’m a working dad. I barely have time for anything.” (2020 interviewee)

“My husband is a good cook using the ingredients we have at home.” (2021 interviewee)

“I usually use my own recipes in my head because I like to use whatever we have at the house.” (2021 interviewee)

“No, I know what my kids will and will not eat. They won’t eat the recipes that are provided.” (2021 interviewee).

One 2021 interviewee explained that she is homeless and therefore does not have access to an oven.

“No, [I don’t use the recipes] because I do not have access to an oven or stove because I am homeless. I would like to be cooking but I just can’t. I throw the veggies together in a salad.”

In the 2020 cohort, one person said she did not realize recipes were available each week and suggested they be made available at the first station at M4K where snacks are provided. Another noted that it would be helpful for the recipes to be provided on the Gather website so people could access them in the future. One also suggested that Gather set up a “bin” where M4K attendees could contribute their own recipes. In the 2021 cohort, a couple of interviewees indicated that the recipes should be more visible.

Interview participants were asked about whether they utilize other government food programs, such as SNAP, WIC, and the federal summer meals program to determine whether use of those programs affects use of M4K or vice versa. They were also asked about their experiences with and barriers to use of other food programs to understand whether and how programs designed to address food insecurity collectively support families during the summer and in the midst of the pandemic. A couple of participants indicated that their household income was too high to qualify for such programs. Several participants did qualify, however, and had utilized government food programs in the past. Most had discontinued their program involvement for a range of reasons. Of the few in the 2020 interviews who had utilized WIC, one indicated that her children aged out of the program and no longer met its requirements (children ages birth to age five). Another said she did not feel safe shopping in grocery stores due to COVID-19 so opted not to use her WIC benefits. Another indicated that the required visits and wait times at WIC were “a hassle” with multiple children.

“I used to use WIC but we stopped before we would have had to because it was too much hassle getting all four kids there for weights and stuff. The appointments would be like two hours long.”

Among the 2020 interview participants, WIC participants (current and former) indicated that the program is helpful but does not provide enough benefit to feed a family or to provide a variety of foods.

“I like WIC, but it is not that much and not enough [food provided through WIC benefits]. The mobile market is better because it offers a larger amount and more variety.”

“WIC is fantastic, especially during COVID-19, but WIC doesn’t give out a lot of the benefits. They are given only once every three months and then they expire if they aren’t used.”
“WIC and the school programs give you food for the time being, but it doesn’t cover enough. Without the mobile market, we’d be stuck.”

Among the 2021 interviewees, there was a difference in how people described the value of WIC to their families. It is possible that the increase in WIC benefits for fruits and vegetables that occurred over the summer of 2021 as part of the American Recovery Act may be reflected in the comments below. While it seems that the 2021 interview participants believe WIC afforded them the ability to buy more food, they still appreciate what M4K offers to them in terms of variety and choice. For some, M4K supplements what they buy through WIC. For others, WIC supplements what they can get through M4K.

“I don’t need M4K each week because I have a little bit of extra money each week from WIC. I use the M4K for produce and fresh stuff.

“M4K is my main source of getting food. I plan what I eat for the week at M4K and then use WIC to get foods to supplement those meals. Because of WIC, we are eating healthier than we would because it allows us to afford fresh veggies.”

“I can buy whatever I want with my WIC money. I always know that what I get will be fresh. But they only supply very specific items. For example, WIC provides a certain amount of items that are 100% whole wheat. So I get excited when M4K has other types of bread like oatmeal or cinnamon raisin.”

While several parents/guardians among the 2020 cohort indicated that they utilize SNAP benefits in addition to their use of M4K, a few had discontinued their use of SNAP because the benefits were insufficient and/or proving eligibility was too cumbersome. Some noted that their SNAP benefits were limited and did not provide enough to feed their families.

“We stopped getting SNAP because they offered us like $30 per week and that wasn’t enough to make it worth it.”

“We don’t use SNAP. It just takes too much work to qualify.”

Among the 2021 participants, it was apparent that it is still cumbersome to apply for SNAP, but that several families attempted, as reflected in the statement below.

“We try to get food stamps, but we keep getting denied because we have documents that we need to get from the bank. We are in the process of getting those records. It has been frustrating applying but people from Welfare are helpful in the process.

Primarily though, 2021 participants, described being over-income and thus not qualifying for SNAP.

“They say I make too much money to qualify for food stamps. I don’t understand how that is the case though. I can’t afford grapes for $2.99 on what I make.”

My daughter works at Market Basket, so when I applied for food stamps, her money put us just over the threshold.”

4 https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/media/pr/2021/06042021-wic.htm
Among the 2020 interview participants, while several reported that they utilize Free and Reduced Price Breakfast and/or Lunch during the school year, none of them use the federal summer meals program. One had never heard of the summer meals program. Another cited health concerns for her child, noting that his underlying health condition put him at risk for COVID-19 and thus she was limiting his exposure to others. A few of the 2020 participants described the program as inconvenient because it requires taking one’s children to the local community action program to get food each day.

“We did [use Free School Lunch] during the school year, but it is too hard during the summer. It doesn’t work for us now. It’s too hard to get there.”

“It’s too many people to get in the car to go get meals and get over to the location. And with COVID, it’s just too much.”

“We were invited, but I have to work during the distribution times and I don’t want the kids going alone.”

Among those interviewed in 2021, were some who described how remote learning made it more difficult to feed their children because their children were not receiving free and reduced lunch at school. Although they used the program when the schools were open, some still find the program’s offerings to be limited.

“She [my daughter] has not been back to full in-person school since March of 2020. She was home doing online school so it helped having the extra food in the house from M4K so she could have breakfast and lunches.”

“The free and reduced-price meals at school are okay for my daughter. She is picky. It does not affect how often we use M4K. That [M4K] is where I get her snacks for school.”

Most of the 2020 interviewees who opted not to use the summer meals program talked about the limited variety of the foods provided by the program and indicated that they prefer a model where they can choose the foods their children eat. Some also indicated that M4K provides healthier and more palatable foods than the summer meals program.

“The food is bland [at the summer meals program], ham and turkey sandwiches. I have picky children. I like the mobile market because you can go and pick what you like.”

“We tried the summer meals program but, for the first two weeks, we got the very same food so we stopped going.”

“The problem was, the kids don’t like the food [at the summer meals program] so a lot of it got wasted.”

“There’s so much milk and we can’t use it and I feel badly about throwing it away so we stopped going [to the summer meals program].”
Among the 2021 interviewees, sentiments about the summer meal program were similar, reflecting that the hours, selection of foods, and lack of choice may limit participation in or satisfaction with the program.

“I do CAP’s [the summer meals program through the Community Action Program]. My daughter is very picky so sometimes we get stuff she won’t eat. She gets chicken nuggets, sandwiches. With M4K, I can get a variety of stuff and can choose what I want. I prefer that rather than just being given food.

“We went to the CAP Program at Cold Spring. The kids didn’t like the foods in the bags they handed out. They got yogurt, apple sauce, raisins, gummies, and a milk. It wasn’t really a meal. M4K has more variety, which I like.”

“I would use CAP’s program more if it was at a different time. They go at 12:30, which is right at nap time. It would be convenient if it was at 11:30 or if they allowed prepared meal pick-ups for the week at one time…”

In both 2020 and 2021, for most, access to government food programs did not substantially reduce reliance on M4K for food.

**Satisfaction:** While several participants expressed general appreciation and thanks for M4K, most identified specific things about the market they most appreciate. Both in the 2020 and 2021 interviews, participants described the M4K staff and volunteers as helpful and welcoming.

“Everybody is welcoming. When you need help and you go to places [other food programs] to find what you need, they are not really happy you are there. Gather is not like that.” (2020 interviewee)

“I like how friendly and welcoming they are. I don’t feel like a second class citizen.” (2020 interviewee)

“The people working the markets are the most helpful, courteous, non-judgmental people ever. They know me by first name basis and that is nice.” (2021 interviewee)

Among the 2020 participants, several parents/guardians described the locations and schedule of the market as convenient and expressed appreciation for how efficiently the market is run. Some described the simple sign-up process. Some offered that Gather had done a good job of ensuring the market runs safely during the pandemic.

“I like that the line is always moving.”

“It’s run very well, very fast. It’s well organized and stocked up. And they have set up social distancing with tents for every table.”

“I feel safer shopping there than at the crowded grocery store. People are distanced, outdoors, only touching what they need.”

In 2021, none talked about the set up of the market as providing safety during COVID or about how efficiently run M4K is, but several talked about the schedule and locations of M4K as convenient.
“The location is great. I go to Grace Church and Cold Spring Manor...both have worked well for us. They are very accessible and parking is fine.”

“I like the locations. Having two options is nice. The times work for me for most times.”

“The schedule is great and I don’t have issues getting there in the middle of the day.”

In both 2020 and 2021, most of those interviewed discussed the variety and quantity of food available through M4K, noting that the market offers a wide selection of foods and that it is possible to get enough to feed their families all week long. Several described the produce, dairy, meat, and snacks as helpful to them, stating that those are expensive items their families cannot easily afford when shopping in grocery stores. They also appreciated the opportunity to “shop” weekly and pick what they want and need for their families.

“It’s not all one thing. I like that I can get enough to make a variety of dishes.” (2020 interviewee)

“It’s not the same things every week and I like that. If I go two weeks in a row, I know we won’t eat the same thing.” (2021 interviewee)

“I like the variety of vegetables. My kids like the chicken nuggets. I like that you can get your staples at M4K and then save money at the store because you are buying less.” (2021 interviewee)

“I like the variety and amount of food and being able to pick what my family will use.” (2020 interviewee)

“As far as food, beggars can’t be choosers. There is food there that I typically wouldn’t buy, such as Annie’s products, which is nice. They almost always have the staples like bread, milk, and eggs. I like the beans, rice, sweet potatoes, and squash. I have used the pancake mix from the market before to make bread.” (2021 participant)

“We have dairy and gluten allergies in our household and there are still options for us [at M4K].” (2020 interviewee)

“My kids love getting those snack bags. We use them to reward the kids.” (2021 interviewee).

“I like the setup of the market. It feels like you are actually shopping rather than receiving a box of food with food that you don’t pick out yourself. It feels like a normal shopping experience.” (2021 interviewee)

A few of the 2020 and 2021 participants discussed the recipes and prepared foods offered at the market as aspects of M4K they particularly like.

“They were handing out parmesan chicken. That was delicious! I like that there is something like that, pre-made meals. I had been working a long day and I was like ‘they [the family] are getting this for dinner. I hope it’s good.’ And it was so good!” (2020 interviewee)
“The recipes they give out that are at the market that day, I think that is a smart idea. Pantries don’t do that. You get food and ideas for what to do with it.” (2020 interviewee)

“I liked the small macaroni salad they had once and took the recipe...” (2021 interviewee)

“We always grab those [the prepared meals]. The kids loved the pasta salad, the granola, and one of them liked the salsa.” (2020 interviewee).

“We loved the granola. It was soft, and I have no teeth so that was nice. There was a recipe with it and I will have to try it.” (2021 interviewee).

When asked if there were things about M4K that they do not like or that do not work well, a few people in each cohort of interviewees said they’d like to see greater variation and more consistent offerings week to week.

“The meat selection is off and on. We don’t eat a lot of stuff they have, like hot dogs. The choice is limited.” (2020 interviewee)

“I’d like more fruit. Every time I go, it’s banana, apples, and oranges.” (2020 interviewee)

“We would like to see actual hamburger instead of ground turkey. Gallons of milk instead of half gallons.” (2021 interviewee)

“There haven’t been many juice boxes lately and we miss those. My daughter looks forward to those but I don’t complain about things that are given to us for free.” (2021 interviewee)

“Some weeks the snack selection is worse than others. Some weeks they don’t have them at all. We would like more consistency with packaged snack foods. They are very expensive at the grocery store.” (2021 interviewee)

While the M4K times and locations work well for some, others, in both 2020 and 2021 found them inconvenient. Waiting in line on days with extreme weather also presented challenges for some.

“I like the location [at Cold Spring] but I wish it was a little closer because I have to walk [to M4K].” (2020 interviewee)

“Parking at Cold Spring is a bit challenging and you may have to lug stuff a long way, but the volunteers are amazing. And, shade and water. Those are things they could do. This week, we went and we were there for 20 or 25 minutes and we were really thirsty.” (2020 interviewee)

“Sometimes the line can get a little out of control and messes with the flow of traffic in the neighborhood and I wish people would keep a better eye on their kids.” (2020 interviewee)

“Grace Church is right on the road and I have to watch my kids closely.” (2021 interviewee)

“Parking is tricky for me so a location with better parking would be convenient because I carry a lot of food. Maybe a parking lot that is not being used would be a better location, for example, the old Family Dollar Store in Rochester.” (2021 interviewee).
“If the market was earlier in the morning, that would be more convenient for me.” (2021 interviewee)

In both years, several participants called for limits to be placed upon how many items a person can take.

“The only thing I see is a lot of people take what looks like more than they need.” (2020 interviewee)

“The only thing I don’t like is, a couple of families that go, one household in particular, took almost everything off the candy rack. I was eighth in line and we didn’t get any. It would be good if there was some monitoring of those who take excess.” (2020 interviewee)

“I get there early because there’s a group of people that come in and wipe everything out before anyone else can get anything. If you don’t get there early, you don’t get bread, pastries, and some of the goodies that the kids like.” (2021 interview)

However, in 2021, there were a couple of larger families for whom limits presented a problem.

“There have been a few times when there has been a limit placed on certain items, which was aggravating. With six kids, I really need a certain quantity of milk or meats.”

The most common complaint in both 2020 and 2021 was about expired or spoiled foods.

“I have noticed some expired foods, like yogurt or eggs. So I look at the dates before I take something.” (2020 interviewee)

“Sometimes I have seen some moldy fruits, mostly strawberries, and that made me wonder about the freshness of the other produce.” (2020 interviewee)

“Sometimes the produce is not good. Everything Trader Joe’s is great but some of the Hannaford’s stuff, like deli meats and cheeses, have gone bad. The ground beef sometimes smells a little funky...sometimes the frozen foods seem like they have been in the freezer a really long time.” (2021 interviewee)

“Sometimes there’s no expiration date on the carton of eggs, which is a pain to figure out.” (2021 interviewee)

**Expected outcomes:** Interview participants were asked to comment on whether and how M4K has contributed to positive outcomes for children and families. Specifically, they were asked if M4K has helped to expand the variety of foods children are eating and whether M4K has contributed to their children eating more nutritious foods, and whether their children were preparing more foods for themselves as a result of M4K.⁵ The majority of interview participants reported that their children are eating a wider variety of foods and healthier foods, particularly a wider variety of fruits and vegetables.

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⁵ There was a recognition in 2020, that children may be too young or not allowed to participate in meal preparation, and thus the question was removed from the parent/guardian in 2021. However, because the
“My kids are eating more fruits and vegetables than they wouldn’t have gotten before.” (2020 interviewee)

“Yes, for sure, they are eating more veggies. Eggplant was one. They didn’t think they liked it. They ate it and have been eating it since.” (2020 interviewee)

“I usually get regular lettuce, like romaine, at the grocery store. But M4K has other greens and stuff so the kids have tried spinach, arugula...The younger kids don’t like veggies, but they ate the cauliflower linguini and didn’t notice a difference.” (2020 interviewee)

“My oldest son is trying new foods and the kids in general are eating more variety. They wish M4K would offer strawberry smoothies again!” (2020 interviewee)

“It has expanded [upon] the foods that my husband typically buys. We got some frozen salmon and ground turkey from M4K that we had never cooked with [before].” (2021 interviewee)

“One of my grandchildren asked for a handful of coconut to add to the muffins the other day. She never knew what that was before, but she had a yummy coconut cream pie from M4K.” (2021 interviewee)

“They are eating healthier, fresher foods. My son has tried carrots because of the dip that was offered at M4K once. There was a veggie platter there once that he ate from. He wouldn’t have eaten it if I had prepared it at home.” (2021 interviewee)

“It has given my daughter and I healthier food choices. It is cheaper to buy junk food, so it is nice to get healthy foods at the market.” (2021 interviewee).

In both years, the few who indicated that M4K has not influenced the variety of foods or nutrition children have consumed, explained that their children either already ate a wide variety of healthy foods prior to the family’s use of M4K or that their children are very “picky eaters.”

In both years, with regard to whether children are preparing their own meals, some children, their parents/guardians explained, are too young to be preparing their own meals. Others were already actively involved in meal preparation prior to use of M4K. There were some, however, who have noticed a difference in their children’s behaviors related to food selection and preparation, including helping with shopping, washing and cutting produce, preparing microwavable meals, and learning to cook.

“My 13 year-old does some cooking and the youngest washes fruits and vegetables.” (2020 interviewee)

“My granddaughter likes cutting up the vegetables we get at the market.” (2020 interviewee)

“M4K provides simple foods that my son can prepare for himself such as peanut butter and jelly.” (2021 interviewee)

Interviews allowed parents to provide context for their responses, the question was retained in the interview protocol and asked of parents and guardians in 2021.
“My daughter helps prepare meals all the time and M4K makes the food available for her to do that.” (2021 interviewee)

One 2020 interview participant offered a suggestion for how M4K could help children to prepare more of their own food. She noted that, if M4K offered more sandwich meats and microwavable meals, her child would make more of his own meals. In 2021, one suggested the following:

“If there was a tutorial including videos and/or photos that may help the kids learn to help prepare meals, a hands-on/visual aid my help the children.”

Another 2021 participant suggested M4K could offer cooking lessons to help teach families how to prepare healthy options from ingredients at the market.

“Classes on how to prepare foods [would be helpful]. For example, how to use a chicken carcass when it is done. Or, there’s a lot of apples at the market a class on how to make an apple pie would be helpful. Even if it is when we are standing in line. We are there long enough that they could do it in the line.”

The parents and guardians described a number of ways in which M4K has influenced the health of the children in their care, including providing healthy snacks, healthy pre-made meals, and a produce, all things the families could not afford without M4K. M4K also seems to have influenced children’s interest in and knowledge about food and nutrition.

“They understand better what’s good and what’s not.” (2020 interviewee)

“The kids like to cook with new foods [we get at the market]. They are asking more questions and are more curious.” (2020 interviewee)

“They wouldn’t be eating as many nutritious foods because they would eat the junk food that is cheaper at the store.” (2021 interviewee)

Some of the 2020 parents and guardians also explained that, by providing a variety of healthy foods and sufficient quantity for a week’s worth of meals, families are preparing healthier meals at home and eating better as a result. Some indicated that, as a result of better eating, their children are healthier.

“We are eating 80 to 90% better. We don’t need to go to the store as often and are cooking way more at home, which is helping the family eat better.”

“Healthy food is expensive. Fruits and veggies they need cost a lot.”

“If I was going to the store, I’d probably get easy snacks like chips or crackers. But, at the market, I can get really healthy stuff like apples, oranges, grapes, so the kids are eating better food…”

“Milk and eggs really make a difference on that front [eating healthier].”

“She is drinking more juice and we are eating less fast food. I believe my daughter is stronger.”
The same thing was echoed in the 2021 interviews.

“They [my kids] are eating fresh, home-cooked meals. Before, I didn’t have as much fresh food to cook with.”

“M4K has helped us continue to provide healthy choices on the table...Without M4K, it would be more difficult to provide these healthy choices, especially during COVID.”

“My daughter is diabetic, so having the fruits and vegetables from M4K is handy. They eat healthier because of M4K.”

“They have fewer colds, better immune systems from eating their fruits and veggies. The fruit and veggie consumption has increased by probably sixty-percent. Before, they were eating junk from Cumbies like candy bars and chips. Now they ask for the healthier things from the market like carrot sticks.”

When asked to imagine how things would be different if M4K did not exist, several of the 2020 parents and guardians indicated that the nutrition they could provide to their children would decline.

“They would eat less fruits and vegetables and less homemade fresh meals.”

“We wouldn’t have as much fresh fruit in the house and not as many meals with meat.”

“Without M4K, my children would be eating more bread and baked goods, more things with flour.”

In both years, the interviewees also discussed how M4K affected their family finances, enabling them to stretch their food budgets and re-allocate resources (that would otherwise have gone to pay for food) to pay for other things their families need.

“It [M4K] has definitely helped with money. The money I don’t spend on food is going in the gas tank so I can go back and forth to Boston [where my husband is hospitalized]. I cried the first time I saw what I was able to get at the market. It has helped a lot.” (2020 interviewee)

“It’s helped so much. We haven’t fallen behind on bills because we haven’t had to spend about $200 or $300 a week on food. It’s a huge relief. I had just started a job and was in training when COVID hit. I had just started having a little extra money coming in and then it went away. So the market helps so much. It costs a lot to feed four kids, especially teenage boys.” (2020 interviewee)

“It’s a huge help, especially during COVID when I’m not working outside the home. We don’t have to choose between buying food and paying our bills...Without the market, I would probably have to buy cheaper processed stuff rather than produce because it is so expensive. It is really a huge blessing for my family...” (2020 interviewee)

“If it wasn’t for the market, we just wouldn’t be eating raspberries, grapes, etc. It allows me to feed the kids healthier foods. We would be eating a lot more actual food pantry food which is a lot of cans. We wouldn’t eat much meat and our diets wouldn’t be as balanced. We would be drinking powdered milk.” (2021 interviewee)
“I would be concerned financially. We know we are going to at least eat because we have M4K. Standing in line, I know I won’t worry about buying food.” (2021 interviewee)

“There wouldn’t be another way for us to make enough money unless we were working illegally under the table.” (2021 interviewee)

Several interviewees also talked about an emotional benefit gained from M4K, describing how knowing that the market is there and that they can provide enough nutritious foods for their children relieves them of an enormous amount of stress, especially during a time of uncertainty and the additional financial strain brought on by the pandemic.

“It’s a lot less stressful knowing the kids are getting good meals.” (2020 interviewee)

“With COVID, so much is going through your head about how to protect your kids and keep them safe and healthy. I was worried about the food supply chain, but if the market is getting things, it must be okay. I have been able to pay bills on time because I’m not putting $1200 a month on food. It feels good and helps morale.” (2020 interviewee)

“The market saves me about $200 a month. I would always find a way to get him [my son] what he needs, but it does help me not to stress so much because I know they [M4K] are there are Tuesdays.” (2020 interviewee)

“I would stress big time about not being able to pay the bills or eat without the market.” (2021 interviewee)

“We would stress about how we would provide food for our family. We don’t stress about that with M4K.” (2021 interviewee)

E. Staff interviews

In 2020, five “staff” interviews were conducted with three paid staff, a member of Gather’s Board of Directors, and an intern. The interviewees are listed below. Their roles with Gather and with M4K in Rochester are also provided.

- **Deb Anthony, Executive Director** worked with the Associate Executive Director and his team to make sure M4K was on track and working like the other M4K markets Gather has implemented in Seacoast communities. She provided some contacts in Rochester and provided support as needed.
- **Seneca Bernard, Associate Executive Director** was tasked with securing food for M4K, identifying distribution methods for it, reviewing the inventory and trends, and ordering supplemental food. He worked with partners to identify a location for the market and was also charged with figuring out logistics, set up, and flow of the market.
- **Scott McKee, Board President** volunteered with M4K in Rochester. Although Board members are not required to volunteer at Gather’s food distribution programs, Scott has worked closely with the M4K program since its inception and spent most weeks volunteering with M4K in Rochester over the summer.
• **Emily Gaddis, Gleaning Program Coordinator** manages Gather’s community supported agriculture and focuses on accessing produce for Gather to disseminate. She also run a mobile market on Fridays. She provided staffing in Rochester as needed and helped make up dairy bags, staffed tables, and help manage the lines of customers.

• **Nate McKee, Meals for Kids Intern** worked closely with the Associate Executive Director and assisted in managing office and field work related to M4K. His role related to M4K in Rochester involved a range of tasks, including managing logistics and working in the warehouse getting ready for the market. He also became the regular person and familiar face checking families into the market.

Seneca Bernard and Scott McKee were among the four staff interviewed in 2021 as well. Two other staff were interviewed in 2021:

• **Mysty Shappy** who was new to the Gather staff in 2021 and who know manages the M4K markets in multiple locations.

• **Krysti Battistelli** is a volunteer who prepares the food pallets for loading before each M4K market.

In each year, one other person was approached for a staff interview, who ultimately opted not to participate. One felt she had little insight about M4K in Rochester and the other had returned to school and was unavailable. The findings from the interviews are provided below, organized around the components of the process evaluation, namely recruitment and maintenance, context, resources, fidelity, confounders and contamination, and transition and sustainability.

**Recruitment and maintenance:**

In 2020, several types of organizations were described as important to an effort like M4K in Rochester, including city leaders, including the City Manager and Health Inspector; civic groups and churches (e.g., for volunteers); the school system, recreation center, and housing authorities (e.g., places where kids and families congregate). The New Hampshire Food Bank and some paid vendors were described as critical to the provision of fresh foods in Rochester. The staff emphasized the importance of reaching out to food programs early in the process and gave themselves mixed reviews for the groundwork done in Rochester. Although there was recognition that engagement of the city leadership and the recreation and school departments helped Gather get its “foot in the door,” there was a sense that things could have gone more smoothly in the formation of partnerships and the way in which Gather approached the Rochester community. One staff member explained that an intern struggled to implement an action plan for reaching out to new partners in Rochester. A staff member with a community organizing background stepped in, highlighting how important community organizing skills are to effectively engage new partners. The pandemic was also described as largely responsible for slow progress in Rochester.

“I’d give us a seven [out of 10] and we are about a year behind on our dream. COVID is most responsible for us being behind. It’s hard to meet people. It’s hard to do this on the phone. But we have some partnerships now so we are on a good track.”

One staff member argued that the way in which Gather initially approached the Rochester community may have implications for the community’s ability to take on and sustain the program in the future.
“We went to the City and Rotary and we said, ‘we got money and want to do this [bring M4K to Rochester].’ We came in as heroes. We didn’t get buy in from others and ask others to do this WITH us rather than FOR them. Somersworth reached out to us and we said, ‘We will come show you how but we will not do it.’ Once you give it, it’s hard to ask someone to take it on.”

There was acknowledgment that community partners were skeptical of an outside agency coming into their community.

“We may have underestimated our clout with them. They needed to see proof we would follow through. They had been burned by other organizations before.”

The Seacoast Food Pantry Network provided a mechanism for identifying and reaching other food programs in Rochester.

“Via the Seacoast Food Pantry Network, we asked members and partners to come so we could talk about what we would do for them in Rochester, to build trust. We said we are here to help and not take over so then we could ask for their help.”

Community partners were also identified as critical to reaching eligible families. Gather worked with several partners and used a few different strategies to reach out to families, some described as more effective than others.

The school system was described by all as an important partner for reaching families. After reaching out to the superintendent’s office, school principals, teachers, and social workers were engaged to help in disseminating information via flyers to families. One staff member explained that the strategy worked best in the lower grades.

“All of the elementary school kids got them [flyers], some in the middle school, and no high school kids got them.”

The importance of working with partners who could reach children and who have the trust of families was emphasized by most of the staff. The Rochester Recreation Center worked with their summer camps to distribute flyers. Flyers were also distributed at the local pools and through the housing authorities. The Rochester Child Care Center spread the word to the families of the 400 children they serve. Some of the early partners ended up not being as helpful at sharing flyers or Gather’s Facebook posts, thus emphasizing the importance of outreach to and engagement of multiple partners for help in engaging families.

Word of mouth and holding the market in a visible spot were described as particularly valuable strategies for engaging families.

“…Putting on a good market so when people come, they use word of mouth. Trust is big and when a neighbor recommends it, people are likely to come. Having a very visible spot is very important too.”

“Word of mouth is huge too and social media, friends asking people to tell their friends. There’s more trust when a friend tells you [about something like M4K].”
In 2021, staffing challenges resulted in less marketing of M4K via partners. Interns were not available to disseminate flyers to multiple community locations. Schools were operating remotely at the end of the last school year and under tremendous strain just trying to meet the demands of educating students, thus they were not asked to publicize the program to children. Due to staff changes, there were fewer human resources to support the mobile markets. The staff were described as exhausted and the capacity that existed in the previous summer to conduct outreach for marketing purposes was not there in 2021. Thankfully, in its second full summer of operations, M4K was fairly well known in the community. Long-time users continued to use the market and word-of-mouth marketing continued.

In 2020, the staff identified that making M4K a positive experience for families was seen as critical to keeping them engaged. Several aspects of the market contributed to positive experience, including fresh foods; consistent, kind, and engaging staff and volunteers; and the model, which offers families variety and choice that approximate a “shopping experience.”

“This year [2020], we decided not to have different volunteers each week at the check-in desk. We wanted a consistent, familiar face there and they got to know the families. I think that worked well and really did help. The participants really knew them [the regular check-in people] and it made them feel comfortable.”

“Our commitment to bring out fresh food; it’s a big deal to the families we serve. And the stockers and staff are the same [week to week] so people feel safe.”

“Stigma, dignity, and normalize. We often call the volunteers, who are phenomenal, together to say, ‘here is what we are here for,’ and remind them that we don’t want to be TOO helpful as we want to normalize the shopping experience. Don’t shop for them. Yes, answer questions. But treat them like they would be treated in a normal store. It’s hard because the volunteers care about people in crisis...and I tell them, everyone who needs these services is in crisis and they don’t need us pushing back when they vent. They need understanding and an ear to vent to. Some of our best moments are watching the volunteers respond with ‘we are sorry and...’ They [families] trust us over time because of our response.”

“Our choice model is another [good] thing. We set up a farmer’s market and put few limitations on them. You get to choose and we have huge variety and these are important aspects to the members.”

The shopping model, described as “the hallmark of the program” and the low threshold to qualify were identified as the two critical factors for high utilization of the market in the summer of 2021.

“We hear that the shopping model is why they come to us over other places; and because we set a low bar for who can qualify. A lot of first timers look nervous and embarrassed but we normalize the experience.”

While ensuring a positive experience and continuity of staffing was still a priority, one staff member noted that, in 2021:

“There was a focus on the member experience last year. The weekly debriefs helped us pay attention to things like water, etc. This year, some of the prettiness went away.”
Another staff interviewee believes the customer service for the summer 2021 market in Rochester was still very good. He felt there were enough volunteers and enough consistency to staff the markets and ensure a good customer experience.

“The volunteers are so good. We have a lot of regulars and that makes our job easier. I think there were enough [volunteers]. We had some returning veterans and that really helped. The customer service really is so good.”

From summer 2020 to summer 2021, a change in staff, however, meant that there was only one person consistently staffing the desk and thus responsible for greeting families and managing the check-in process and paperwork simultaneously.

“We lost a staff member one month into M4K. It was expected but still hard. Mysty was still new and both the paperwork and the schmoozing fell on her so it was easy to get behind on the paperwork.”

There is hope that next year, with Mysty as head of operations and another staff member in charge of M4K and interns to manage paperwork, that things will work more smoothly. While continuous operation of markets in Rochester for 77 weeks through the pandemic took a toll on staff and volunteers, it also taught the staff a lot about what works well and what does not. It also taught them that, what makes M4K a success is its people.

“We have good systems in place now. And whatever challenges came our way, we made it work. We were flexible and our volunteers and staff, both old and new, are really hard workers. Human capital is our biggest strength.”

In both summers, Textably.com, a subscription service and web-based platform, was a valuable resource enabling Gather to send text reminder to families who sign-up to receive reminders about the weekly markets.

“Our members have a million things going on so we send out weekly reminders via text. They like the reminders and it’s inexpensive. I highly recommend it.”

“Texting has been important to remind people. This is really effective. You can remind them and advertise what you have [at the market in a given week].”

In 2020, the Gather staff identified a few potential barriers to market participation. Transportation and scheduling conflicts were the most commonly cited. The text message reminders and other steps Gather has taken are meant to mitigate the challenges, including holding the market at a consistent day and time of the week, locating the market at Cold Spring Housing Authority (where at least residents of Cold Spring can walk to the market), and allowing others to shop for friends, family, or neighbors.

“Transportation is big...we go to multiple sites to address this but this doesn’t fix it for everyone. So we let others shop for them.”

“Transportation is probably a big one, being able to get there...We let some people shop for a friend or relative if the person couldn’t come that week.”
“We extended the hours on Tuesday until 5:30pm and we go to two locations. Cold Spring residents can walk. We allow others to shop for families.”

In 2021, the locations at Cold Spring and Grace Church were though by staff to be fairly convenient for most participants. Volunteers still helped transport groceries to people’s cars and participants were able to shop for other participants who were unable to attend the market. There was recognition, however, that those shopping for friends may have been perceived by other shoppers as taking more food than they need, which is a fairly regular complaint among M4K users.

In 2020, pride was also described as an issue that could affect use of M4K.

“Pride and not wanting to need food like that [by going to a food program] so that’s why we make it feel like a farmer’s market and we don’t make barriers. It’s mostly moms [who shop] while dads stay in the car. Building community is huge so they don’t feel like they need to hide.”

“These folks face barriers most of us don’t. It is important to recognize. This is not charity. We are working in solidarity with people. With charity comes an expectation of gratitude. I told a member, ‘this could happen to any of us. Most people are a paycheck or two away from needing something like this. Most people are working but then one thing happens and they find themselves here.’ Most people don’t want to take advantage of something like this [M4K]. They would rather not be here.”

While there was less discussion of pride as a potential barrier to use in 2021, there was recognition among the staff that the welcoming staff and volunteers, their approach, described as “take whatever you need to feed your family,” and the low threshold to qualify for M4K make it feel less stigmatizing to users.

In both 2020 and 2021, market participants faced challenges such as “juggling too many kids” while trying to shop at M4K, and physical and mental health ailments. Language was also identified as a possible barrier for some, although the degree to which it prevents use of M4K is not entirely clear.

“Spanish-speakers do come, but I don’t know which don’t come. We sometimes have Spanish speakers [shopping at the market]. We certainly don’t turn them away. We can do the basics of ‘how many kids’ and from there it is easy. The market is pretty easy to navigate even if you don’t speak English.”

“Language hasn’t seemed like a big issue. Between keeping communications simple, gesturing, and guiding, we are able to help and most people have someone with them who can translate.”

“Having a Spanish-speaking volunteer [in 2020] helped so much. We don’t have a replacement. That was so huge.”

In 2021, there was no Spanish-language capacity among the Gather staff. Their impression was, though, that it didn’t pose significant issues to market use.

“The model is pretty simple. We are able to work it out [helping them understand how the market works] with gestures. Once they come once, they understand how it works.”

In 2020, Gather took steps to ensure foods are available for those whose diets are influenced by cultural, as well as dietary restrictions and preferences.
“We decided to look at dietary issues like gluten free, other types of milk. We offered more variety...We have many non-meat eaters. We finally got tofu and other non-meat proteins...At the pantry, for example, we serve more Muslims so we have lamb, but that isn’t the case in Rochester. Each community has its own populations and needs so the demand is different. Cabbage is popular in Rochester, but not elsewhere. You have to pay attention and evaluate what goes and what does not.”

In 2021, they continued to be attentive to the needs of the community, although noted that an electronic system would help them to keep better track of specific dietary issues associated with regular M4K users.

To assess how potential obstacles may be interfering with M4K utilization, Gather reached out to 184 families who used the market three times or less between March 19 and August 31, 2020, to understand what kinds of challenges may prevent market use and to inform quality improvement, if necessary. Seventy-seven people provided information to Gather. The most common reason for limited utilization was that their food security had improved, either because they got a job or had increased SNAP benefits. For these people, the pandemic caused food insecurity that improved over time. A few each indicated that their work hours conflicted with the market schedule, they had moved away from the area, or had health concerns and did not wish to risk exposure to COVID by attending the market. Some had transportation issues as well, either they did not have a car or their car was not working. Several described challenges related to their children, either that they had newborns and didn’t want to risk exposure to COVID or that they were home caring for their kids and couldn’t juggle the children and waiting in line at the market. None described increased household funds through stimulus checks or anything negative about the market itself as a reason for limited use. Location and bus routes didn’t appear to be a problem for these families either. A few indicated that later (i.e., evening) or weekend hours might work better for them.

Context and confounders and contamination:

When asked about whether there were particular social, political, or economic factors that influenced implementation and the success of M4K either positively or negatively, some referenced the impact of the pandemic on M4K’s set up and safety precautions. Some also talked about the need in Rochester. One explained.

“The community is really in need and while the number of people using some of Gather’s programs in other communities is declining a bit, the Rochester numbers are high, which I think means we are reaching those in need.”

While need and the pandemic remained issues in 2021, one staff member explained that families generally had access to more resources through the American Recovery Act which extended unemployment benefits and provided additional support to families enrolled in programs like WIC. Although it wasn’t clear to what extent extra resources may have influenced use of M4K, it is possible that fewer families used the market overall or that some used it less often because they were not as dependent on M4K.

In 2021, Gather’s relationship with its partners changed for the better. In 2020, most of the staff referenced the concern other food programs in Rochester had about Gather coming into their community.
“...They saw us as a threat to their model, that we’d take over, we’d give gold and take off and we’d take their funding. That’s what we had to overcome.”

Other organizations were described as “standoffish” because they wanted to see if Gather would deliver on its promises. In that way, one added, Rochester is a typical New England community where people and organizations need to “prove themselves.” The churches and religious organizations were described as the most helpful in building trust and spreading the word about M4K in the community. As one interviewee explained, Gather kept its requests of potential partners simple, kept their word, and hoped local organizations would work with them. Although it doesn’t appear that the other food programs ultimately negatively influenced M4K’s outcomes, their varying levels of skepticism affected how quickly some organizations were engaged to help spread the word about M4K. In the end, some of the staff explained, M4K likely had more of an impact on the outcomes of other food programs in Rochester than the other way around. By providing resources to local food pantries, Gather enhanced their ability to serve the community. Gather’s partnership with the Rochester farmer’s market also contributed to positive outcomes for the community.

“One of the things that was nice, we partnered with local farmer’s market group so we were on the same day. We tried to inform people that they could double their SNAP dollars if they shopped there. Those who run the farmer’s market are very committed to the Rochester community.”

“I think we have been effective [in bolstering other programs]. Rochester Farmer’s Market pushed back at first, saw us as a competitor at first. We approached them face to face and laid out how we could work with them to double SNAP benefits. That kind of engagement is what works.”

In 2021, several partnerships were strengthened. In 2021, Gather and several partners planned a program at the Rochester Opera House called “Pack the House.” Modeled after Portsmouth’s “Fill the Hall” program, a fundraising and food drive program at the Portsmouth Music Hall, Pack the House benefited three food programs in Rochester: End 68 Hours of Hunger – Rochester, the food pantry at Grace Church, and the Share Fund (formerly Gerry’s Food Pantry). The program helped garner resources for the three community programs and provided further evidence that Gather did not intend to compete with the local food programs for resources. Additionally, as described elsewhere, partners provided increased support for the market this year, including use of space for the market and storage. In one year, relationships with CAP and the Share Fund were substantially improved due to some staffing changes in those organizations and a willingness to collaborative more closely with Gather.

Resources:

In 2020, all of the staff agreed that Gather had adequate resources to ensure M4K was successful, although they described challenges they faced and things they would like to improve. There was recognition that Gather’s resources enable it to do things other organizations may not be able to do.

“We want to beef up the cooking piece. The pre-made foods lead to stronger outcomes, I think. The chef this summer worked with us using his PPP loan. The pre-made foods that include those items we have to give out [at the market] so people can see what they can do.”

“It wasn’t always easy, but we got it done. Our warehouse and fridge space are small so there is a lot of geometry involved. We rented a bigger truck this year so we could get 10 pallets on a truck
versus six, which affects the variety we can offer. It allows us to offer things like meal enhancers like ketchup, syrup, garlic. And shampoo...personal care items are big.”

“Sometimes staffing is tight. People are working long hours...it takes 10 or 12 people for Rochester.”

“Because we are Gather, yes [we had the resources we needed]. The fleet of vehicles is hugely important. Others don’t have those so they couldn’t do it. The transportation of food is huge. Also, I’m pretty good at finding free food. They would have to be able to do this if they would take this over.”

While the commitment and flexibility of staff and volunteers made it possible to deliver M4K each week in Rochester, the summer of 2021 was not easy for these personnel. The loss of a staff member, too few personnel certified to drive the trucks, and recurring mechanical problems with the trucks were the primary resource challenges facing the Gather staff in 2021. Fortunately, some things got easier and lifted some burden from the staff, including the ability to store tables and other equipment at Grace Church and in a storage box at Cold Spring.

“We were able to leave tables and some other things at both sites. That helped so much not having to pack and move that stuff every week.”

Gather took note of the recommendations made following the 2020 evaluation report. They offered a few “pull along wagons” to aid M4K users in shopping but, unfortunately, the wagons were not returned so they are not able to offer them any longer.

Because of the change in model (with M4K and other families using the market at the same time), the check-in process changed. Additionally, M4K lost a staff member which complicated the process of greeting and completing paperwork. Thus, Gather did not create instructions for market use in Spanish nor did it offer an incentive if you “tell a friend” about M4K.

Fidelity:

In 2020, the staff agreed that the M4K model in Rochester was like the M4K markets implemented elsewhere. Of course, as a few explained, the model had to incorporate measures to address the pandemic (e.g., social distancing, extra tents). One staff member argued that the Rochester model has likely had more influence on how the other M4K markets operate than vice-versa.

“Because of the need, I look at Rochester as our model now and how we can do the others better...Some of the tweaks we have made in other places are based on what we have seen work in Rochester, such as the flow of long lines when you have limited time. So we tweaked where we put the coolers. At the end of the line, they used to create a choke point with the dairy and meat.”

One staff person explained that the markets may differ based on the populations served and what the participants like or will accept. For example, M4K used to provide only retail quality food but, because people are open to it in Rochester, they can offer dented cans, which allows Gather to rescue more food. At other markets, he explained, people won’t take the dented cans. He said Gather must be flexible and responsive to the needs of different communities.

Another staff person also described the need to pay attention to the needs of the families served at the markets so that Gather can improve the quality of its services.
“We are always looking for opportunities for continuous improvement. That’s our orientation. We want people to know we are listening and changing the market to meet their needs. We talk a lot internally about what works and what doesn’t.”

When discussing whether the M4K model could be replicated elsewhere by another organization, one interviewee indicated that others may want to start with a scaled-back model while they are getting established.

“We bring a lot of food out in Rochester and a lot of variety. If someone was interested in starting a model, I’d say don’t try to do all of this in year one. Offer a bit less variety at first, good nutritious food still, but know the more variety you offer, the slower the line will go.”

In the winter of 2020/2021, M4K and the mobile market for other Rochester families were combined so that all families were shopping during the same hours (as opposed to separate hours for the two groups). The combined model continued through the summer of 2021 and offered both pros and cons from a staff perspective.

“It’s probably better not to make people wait. It’s a more dignified and fair way of doing things and logistically it’s easier. The check-in process is a little different. We did snack bags for kids…”

While the “all user” approach was different in 2021, other elements of the market remained constant. The most important of those, from the staff perspective, are M4K’s mobile shopping model, low threshold to qualify, and overall approach (e.g., consistent staffing to build relationships and trust, welcoming atmosphere, and encouraging people to take what they need versus setting limits on quantities). So while the user-mix changed, M4K participants still experienced fidelity of the elements that the evaluations (both 2020 and 2021) show are most important about the model.

Transition and sustainability:

In 2020, there were varying views about the ability of the community to take over M4K in the future. One thought perhaps someday it might be possible if Gather were to play an ongoing role.

“I think maybe at some point [someone could take it over]. I think we’d be a partner helping to support grant writing with another organization… I think it could be a clean community-run organization. I know they fear they can’t source the food. We can always be in the background, but it would allow us to move on. But you need trust. It may take three or four years, but I think it will happen.”

Another also felt hopeful that the community could take over M4K but said they would likely need to scale back a bit and not try to take it on exactly as it is now. Others were more skeptical.

“I don’t have an up close view, but by working there and what I know about Rochester, it’s not ready to step in and take over. What Gather does is a lot of organizing and resources and I don’t think there is a group or organization in Rochester that can do that right now… To have that much food, a place to store it, the staffing, the resources, the administration, and coordination. It’s hard to imagine one that could take it on.”
“I don’t think anyone has the resources and willingness to mutually partner, let alone take over. Space, yes. Volunteers should be easy, but none [of the current programs] provide volunteers [for M4K]. Money, no way. None could do this.”

One participant suggested that Gather should re-think what it asks of Rochester to create partial ownership of M4K and approach new communities in a different way.

“Instead of focusing on who will take this over, maybe we should say ‘who will partner with us on infrastructure?’ For example, can we store tables and tents in your church? Can we use your volunteers to help with set up and distribution?...We should just focus on how to get partners...I think Gather’s role going forward should be on a consulting basis. We know a lot that we can offer to other communities and maybe we can help with some resources, but we should show them what to do and how to do it – a work with you versus do it for you [approach]. I think we can better serve through helping other entities serve families.”

In 2021, there was significant progress in Gather’s collaborative relationships with Rochester organizations. Grace Church provided one consistent volunteer for M4K, storage space for market equipment, and assisted with composting. Cold Spring worked with Gather to find an alternate space for the market when the previous space was no longer available. Gather was also able to park a storage box there to leave equipment for use from one week to the next. The biggest change was in Gather’s relationship the Community Action Program of Strafford County. While in 2020, it was clear that some CAP staff had hard feelings about Gather’s presence in Rochester, in 2021 Gather worked closely with CAP leadership and has transitioned responsibility for operations of the non-summer program at the Cold Spring location to CAP. Gather will provide food while CAP operates the market at Cold Spring. Gather also worked closely with the Rochester Child Care center on a “drop and go” project similar to the way it works with CAP. Gather drops off food to RCC and the staff pack and disseminate it.

“Last year it didn’t feel so great. There was nobody to step up. It was totally different this year. Share Fund has taken over the mobile market for seniors, which showed it is possible to transition a market to a community partner...We will always do a market there [in Rochester], but we’ve learned how to do it elsewhere. We can have a presence while decreasing the time we have to be there over time. The lessons learned in Rochester have really helped inform our approach to Hampton Falls.”

As described previously, Gather conducted a pilot project with the Rochester Child Care Center over the summer of 2021. Gather dropped off food at two locations for RCCC to pack and distribute for those families who used RCCC’s summer programs. Two summers earlier, in 2019, such families would have been required to attend M4K in-person. In 2021, Gather provided them with dry goods, fruits and veggies, and meat, milk, and eggs through RCCC. Across the two sites, 38 children benefited from the pilot in 2021 and the approach worked better for Gather, RCCC, and the families involved.

Currently, RCCC and Gather are also piloting a once-a-month market at RCCC. Gather will drop off food and RCCC will operate the market. This model is similar to how Gather first worked with RCCC in 2019. Additionally, Gather will drop food to a second RCCC location for kids in the after-school program there. If successful, the pilot will expand to twice monthly markets and additional locations as a way to reach and serve more Rochester families. Gather has experienced success in “food drops” to areas with “captive audiences” in other communities as well, although the markets in those locations are open to anyone.

Over the course of time that Gather has been in Rochester, it has learned important lessons about how to initiate a project like M4K so that it can be transitioned to the community. But time itself is a
resource. Having worked alongside several partner organizations for many months, Gather has demonstrated its commitment to the community, eliminated most of the initial skepticism and distrust, and build solid working relationships.

“It [time] has helped us to build relationship to begin to transition the market [to community partners].”

Other lessons learned:

In 2020, when given an opportunity to share lessons learned, the staff offered a few recommendations to others who may want to start a program like M4K in their communities, including preparing for the work and demand, starting small and scaling up, being flexible and learning from data and mistakes, and including a community organizing component.

“There’s a lot of work that goes into the market between noon and 6:00pm, but equal amounts of work go on before the market and thereafter, so be prepared.”

“Recognize the severe need...anyone doing this should be prepared for a big response from people in need.”

“If you are going to do this, be thoughtful in setting yourself up for success. It takes a lot of energy so don’t try to go full scale. Build the plan so it allows for succession too. And ask people what they like and don’t like and be open to criticism.”

“Come up with how you want the model to be but be prepared to be flexible and change it on a dime. That is the secret to success...Keep in mind, how will you look at performance? Decide how you will grade yourself. You need indicators to watch and track. We looked at the numbers we served forever. We had to change this a bit and look at the amount of food we gave out and what we gave out. Some people didn’t come back if they had what they needed and that meant they were more food secure.”

“Getting money for infrastructure was surprisingly easy. If I was going to add anything to our recipe for success, it would be a strong community organizing component. We learn from our mistakes as well as our successes. Maybe we even learn more from our mistakes.”

These lessons are still relevant and applicable in 2021.

F. Partner interviews

In 2020, Gather identified four partner organizations and seven individuals, five were staff of the identified organizations and two were volunteers (a married couple), to participate in the partner interviews. One person each from the partner organizations agreed to participate in a telephone interview to inform the M4K evaluation. The evaluator was not able to include the views of the identified volunteers because they did not respond to her multiple attempts to reach them. The participating organizations include the Grace Community Church, Rochester Recreation Center, Rochester Child Care Center, and the Community Action Partnership of Strafford County. A brief description of each is provided below.
• **Grace Community Church (GCC)** is a non-denominational Christian church located in Rochester and Farmington. Among the services it provides to the two communities is a food pantry. Cheriene Painter, Missions and Outreach Director was interviewed for the M4K evaluation.

• **The Rochester Recreation Center (RRC)** is a city-run community center committed to providing programs, services, and facilities that promote a healthy lifestyle and foster meaningful community connections. In addition to providing a location for M4K each week, the RRC is the location of the community’s farmers market and provides space for Gerry’s Emergency Food Pantry, the largest local provider of free supplemental food resources to prevent or alleviate hunger. Assistant Director, Lauren Krans, was interviewed for the M4K evaluation.

• **The Rochester Child Care Center (RCCC)** was established in 1976 as private non-profit center with a volunteer board of directors to provide high quality affordable child care to families in Rochester and surrounding communities. The RCCC serves approximately 400 children in its various programs. The Rochester Child Care Center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program to offer nutritious meals and snacks and provides information to parents on nutrition and health topics. Cora Hoppe, School Age Program Coordinator was interviewed for the M4K evaluation.

• **Community Action Partnership of Strafford County (CAPSC)** is a non-profit established in 1965 to educate, advocate and assist people in Strafford County to help meet their basic needs and promote self-sufficiency. CAPSC provides for the basic needs of residents throughout the county, including education, child care, utilities assistance, transportation, housing, emergency shelter and access to other services. Each year, CAPSC distributes thousands of pounds of food and meals to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. One of CAPSC’s three food pantries operates in Rochester three days a week, although has been closed during the pandemic. CAPSC also operates the federal Summer Food Service Program, providing free breakfast and lunch to children up to age 18 (including babies and toddlers). Annie Schofield, Health and Nutrition Program Assistant was interviewed for the M4K evaluation.

In 2021, interviews were conducted with Grace Community Church (with Cheriene Painter), CAPSC (with Jamie Swan and Tanisha Johnson), and the Rochester Child Care Center (with Cora Hoppe). Because M4K no longer had a presence at the Rochester Recreation Center, they were omitted from the 2021 interviews and the Share Fund (formerly Gerry’s Food Pantry was added).

• **The Share Fund** was established over 30 years ago and became a registered 501(c)(3) in 2008. The organization, with its large volunteer corps, offers a food pantry, diapers, clothing, and emergency financial assistance to residents of Rochester, Somersworth, and Farmington. The Share Fund got a new Executive Director (Skip Smith) in the past year, one who was eager to collaborate with Gather around improving food security in Rochester and who participated in an interview.

The findings from both the 2020 and 2021 interviews are provided below; as with the staff interviews, the findings are organized around the components of the process evaluation, namely recruitment and maintenance, context, resources, fidelity, confounders and contamination, and transition and sustainability.

**Recruitment and maintenance:**

In 2020, the interviewees provided information on how they were first contacted by Gather to introduce the organization and its desire to provide M4K in Rochester. Two of the four partners recalled that they were contacted by Gather via an email through the Seacoast Food Provider Network (SFPN), a
group of food pantries and soup kitchens, along with support organizations and volunteers, who provide emergency food for residents of New Hampshire and Southern Maine. They indicated that they were told that Gather was looking for a location to hold a mobile market in Rochester and solicited suggestions from local partners. One noted that the SFPN was an effective way to connect with organizations that are also invested in addressing food insecurity. As a result of the outreach and shared mission, Gather was invited and ultimately used Grace Church as a site to offer services.

Another partner recalled that Gather’s first contact with her was made via the City Manager’s Office. It was explained that, at that time, Gather was hoping to offer services through the summer camp program offered by RRC. After a successful collaboration via the summer camp program, Gather indicated that it would like to offer M4K at the RRC on a regular basis.

The fourth partner, from the Child Care Center, reported that she approached Gather after seeing a Facebook post about M4K. She recalled,

“If they are doing it [M4K] in Portsmouth, how do we do this here [in Rochester]? I have 400 families.”

As a director of a program for school-aged children, mother to children in the Rochester Public Schools, and PTA President, she was someone with a lot of contacts in the school system and felt she could help Gather in getting established in Rochester and letting families know about the market. She indicated that people like her make good contacts for a program like Gather.

“We partnered to feed about 150 kids last summer. Kids learned to shop. Families and staff loved it. You really feel like you are part of the Gather family. This [helping Gather in Rochester] is not a burden.”

In 2020, all noted that their relationship with Gather was positive and that Gather asked little of the partners in order to make M4K available in Rochester.

“In general, it has been hands-off for me. We talked about what parts of our building they could use and what they needed. They just needed to let us know if they needed to change the time or day [of the market]. We gave the key pad access. They only used our location six times or so before COVID. It was very easy.”

“Everything works really well. Seamless. They are very independent. We worked on our facility space and scheduling. They are well organized and we rarely have to get involved. The things they ask of us are limited.”

Some also noted that, in 2020, their relationship with Gather benefited their organizations in tangible ways.

“He [Gather’s Associate Executive Director] said we could get extra food from Gather if we needed it or we could have leftovers from the market or we could get food from the Food Bank delivered to Gather so that we don’t have to go to Manchester to get it. They have been so supportive. Our relationship helps to reduce waste at the market. We had bare shelves at the time, but since we have been partnered with Gather, we never have to worry.”

“Our networking has been great. We’ve done peer-to-peer fundraising. Being part of this is good.”
In 2021, three of the four partners described satisfying and collaborative relationships with Gather.

“It’s going really well [the partnership with Gather]. Gather has been very kind to us. We have similar missions and views of the world and work well together.”

One noted that COVID had presented challenges to collaborating as closely as she’d like.

“I love Gather. We’ve seen less of them during COVID. Having direct interaction is so great because it makes you feel like you are part of something bigger. But we are trying to stay connected. We are working together on Pack the House.”

A third described a challenging history but said that his organization and Gather have a solid partnership now.

“When I came here, there was a mixed bag of feelings. I think there had been concern that Gather was trying to take over in Rochester. But there’s been a changing of the guard since…We’ve built better working relationships based on mutual benefit around distribution and communication and getting food to people who need it.”

The fourth partner expressed a desire to coordinate more closely with Gather in Rochester and elsewhere that Gather may intend to work in Strafford County to ensure the efforts of the two organizations would support one another rather than conflict, for example offering timing and locations for their respective programs so they are as convenient as possible for families. Another partner expressed intention to coordinate more closely with Gather and to volunteer at M4K in order to demonstrate the collaborative relationship between the two organizations and to market his own program.

“We’re all so busy in our siloes. I’ve talked with Gather about this and we have agreed to share information about any changes in our policies and to advertise one another’s services. They would like me to volunteer at the market wearing my [shirt with my organization’s logo], but I haven’t done that yet…”

In 2021, to inform future implementation of M4K in other communities and support eventual transition of M4K to a community partner(s), the partners were asked to offer suggestions for how an organization should approach a community in which it hopes to operate something like the M4K model.

“If they [Gather] had it to do over, I’m sure the conversations would have been different. Perhaps if we had started with a joint model, maybe we could have taken on more of the model over time, of course not to the extent that Gather can do to run the program.

“We always start with key players in the community and ask how we can come together to serve families. I don’t think that was done here.”

“Rather than go in and re-invent the wheel, I’d reach out to the local food programs, describe what they [Gather] have done elsewhere and explore how we can work together. It’s important to assess the willingness of people to partner…If they need to back-off [transition some of M4K to another agency in Rochester], they could come to us and talk about how to do this. It’d be a win, win for everyone. If we can do anything to help, they just need to let us know.”
Marketing is a key element of recruiting and maintaining families in a program like M4K. In 2020, when the partners were asked about the strategies to reach eligible families to let them know about the market and to support their continued use of M4K, most were aware that Gather had used flyers, emails, and social media to advertise M4K in Rochester. Three of the partners indicated that they helped disseminate information about M4K, although one explained that she had done more early on and could probably do “a better job of spreading the word now.”

“I know they utilize social media. They tagged the location of our property and we approved it on our end so it would show up in both of our feeds. Flyers are posted in some places. They [Gather] utilize the pantry network [SFPN] and asked partners to spread the word. For a couple of months, we put flyers in our pantry bags so people knew they could come to the market [M4K].”

“They [Gather] make it easy to spread the word.”

The fourth partner said that, although she did not believe her organization had assisted in the effort to market M4K to date (in 2020), she believed her agency would be willing to help. Three partners were also aware of the text message reminders that Gather sends to families and felt those were important to keeping families engaged.

In 2021, the partners each described how they were working with Gather to successfully market M4K to parents, especially through word of mouth and shared social media.

“We share M4K information on our social media and with our program participants. We can’t put up signs or flyers in our building because it is owned by the city, but we do share information with participants.”

One partner would love to “step up” their efforts to market M4K to Rochester families.

“My dream would be to have them [Gather] come to the center and introduce themselves to parents who haven’t been involved [in M4K to date] so they can ask questions. Then, they could push information to me about locations, etc. and I could send friendly reminders to parents over email.”

“We’ve given flyers [about M4K] to our families through several of our programs.”

Some of the partners were aware that Gather continues to use Texably.com to send reminders to parents and thought that was an ideal mechanism for reaching families.

Assessing barriers to use, that might interfere with initial or continued use of the market, was also important to the process evaluation of M4K. In 2020, the partners were asked if there were any barriers to use of M4K among Rochester families. Three of the four suggested that transportation was probably the biggest barrier families face in using M4K.

“Transportation. Some are limited by what they can carry. So if you walk to the market, there is only so much you can carry. We’ve been thinking about this too but haven’t found a solution yet. Do we provide grocery carts?”
Although one partner argued that the turnout at the market each week is an indication that the M4K schedule works for the community, another wondered whether the timing would work when the pandemic is over and parents return to work.

“Timing is an interesting issue. Usually [at the time M4K is operating] most parents would be working. The very low-income may still be able to make it at that time, but moderate low-income people would likely have trouble and may need it [M4K] to happen after work hours.”

In 2021, the same potential barriers to maintenance of families with M4K were identified, although parking was also discussed as a barrier Gather and Grace Church had worked to overcome.

“I think timing and transportation are the biggest issues, but Gather is so accommodating and offers the market in two locations in Rochester.”

“Parking is a problem for some people. Gather’s program is big and it takes up space. For some that’s an issue but the closing of the street between two building has worked and the market is very visible so now both lots gets used better, I think.”

“Transportation is a big one...If I don’t have transportation or if the family has one car and someone needs it for work. And if you don’t have a babysitter and have to carry a lot of groceries. With kids and public transportation or walking [it’s a barrier to use]!”

One partner questioned how, with so many individuals returning to work, how utilization of M4K may be affected, whether the market times would continue to work for families and whether the need would be as great as it had been throughout the pandemic.

Context:

In 2020, when discussing the social, political, economic, and other factors that may have influenced the implementation and success of M4K in Rochester, most of the partners described the other food programs in the community. They explained that, although some were welcoming of yet another food resource in the community, others were concerned that Gather’s presence in Rochester may threaten the food sourcing mechanisms and financial health of the existing Rochester food programs.

“I think one organization was a bit concerned about Gather coming at first, mainly about competition over resources, you know, outside agency concerns...I didn’t expect this...People had heard of Gather. They had a good reputation. They [the organization with concerns] are a long-standing organization in the community, but they do scrape by for resources so saw Gather as a threat to their sustainability...I think they may also have wondered why a Portsmouth organization would be coming to Rochester and were they coming in to look like heroes...Maybe there was also some concern that they were too good to be true...Now it’s okay though.”

The partner went on to explain that Gather handled the situation well, meeting with the organization that had concerns and explaining that Gather was not interested in “stepping on toes.” In the end, the organization benefited from its relationship with Gather as Gather provided access to additional food to support the organization. The interviewee also explained that other organizations may have had concerns about partnering had Gather not already been well-known and respected.
“Partnering might have been a risk with a lesser known agency.”

Another partner recalled some initial concerns because Gather was offering fresh foods and thought M4K might impact sales at the community’s farmer’s market.

“I think they were afraid of how Gather would take away from their sales, but it’s okay now. In fact, now the farmer’s market takes SNAP and WIC [with help from Gather]. It [partnering with Gather] has actually benefited the market.”

One partner explained that it was probably helpful Gather reached out to programs that could provide them with a “heads up” about such situations so Gather could resolve problems early.

“I think it’s important to engage partners that know the community and especially the local food programs.”

Another argued that it is particularly important when an organization enters a new community to learn about the culture of the community to avoid problems.

There was acknowledgment that, initially, Gather had questioned whether the use of the Grace Church as a M4K location would be a problem for those who do not attend church or who subscribe to a different or no religion. It turned out, as the Grace Church participant noted, to not be a problem.

“We have not seen any issues with that. We get great turnout at our pantry and nobody has ever had any problems.”

By 2021, the concerns about competition had gone away and partnership to address food insecurity in Rochester were far stronger. A change in organizational leadership at one partner agency and staffing at another had made way for closer collaboration with Gather. Also, by 2021, Gather was a known quantity in the community and their benefit to the residents was evident. Gather had also provided significant resources to the partner agencies, particularly food, and collaborated with partners around Pack the House to raise money for local agencies to address food insecurity; both moves that further alleviated fears about competition.

“We are working with Gather on the Pack the House event and taking our partnership to the next level.”

“They are a great bunch of folks doing awesome work throughout the Seacoast and we are glad we have good relationships with them.”

**Resources:**

In 2020, the partners were asked whether M4K had adequate resources (e.g., food, space, materials, staffing, partners) to ensure the market was successful. Most posited that Gather must have the food resources it needed, as the market is successful and Gather is able to help other food programs in Rochester to access resources as well. Two of the partners questioned whether Gather had all of the volunteers it needed. One explained.
“As far as I know, yes [Gather has the resources it needs for M4K], although I think volunteers are challenging to get during COVID. Elders are hunkered down. We have talked [to Gather] a couple of times about volunteer recruitment.”

The other partner that questioned whether M4K had sufficient volunteers explained that her efforts to help Gather recruit volunteers early in their partnership were challenging.

“I sent an email out to seniors about volunteering with Gather and that was confusing. They [seniors] would come in and say, ‘No one got back to us.’ It’s probably better now.”

In 2021, the partners also assumed that Gather must have sufficient resources as it appeared to be serving the community well. They were not aware of significant resource issues affecting the delivery of M4K in Rochester.

**Fidelity:**

In 2020, when asked if M4K was implemented as originally designed or if the model had been changed in some way, three of the four partners said they did not know. The fourth felt confident that the model was unchanged, as she had been provided a detailed description of what M4K would look like in Rochester and it was as she expected it to be.

“They told me exactly what they’d do and they did it. They lived up to their promises!”

In 2021, again the partners had little insight about the fidelity of the model, although one indicated that M4K seemed less focused on children in the 2021 than it had in 2020. With the move to a combined model, with M4K families and other families shopping at the same time, she was concerned about M4K’s ability to achieve its child-related objectives.

“It felt like [before the change in model] it was more for the kids. Now, it feels like it’s more for adults. Before, the kids got to choose what they wanted and I think it is better to focus on the kids. That’s so good for families.”

In 2020, one partner noted how important it is that M4K makes it easy to qualify for the market. She said that other food organizations require significant documentation as proof that people are eligible for services and that such requirements present a barrier to resources. She further explained that some programs have limited resources and have to restrict use of their programs to local residents only. If they did not, she argued, they would not have sufficient resources for the Rochester community.

While not mentioned in 2021, the low threshold for utilization of M4K was clearly seen as an important component of the M4K model in the previous year.

In 2021, the partners explained that M4K was providing a variety of healthy foods to Rochester families, which suggests that M4K’s purpose and approach had persisted through the summer of 2021.

**Confounders and contamination:**

In 2020, the partners were asked which and to what extent other interventions may have influenced M4K’s outcomes in Rochester. Two of the four referred back to the concerns of other food programs in the community while also acknowledging that any challenges Gather may have experienced related to the existing food programs had not interfered with the success of M4K in Rochester. A third
said she was not aware of any politics that would have influenced M4K’s outcomes and went on to explain how unique the M4K model is. However, she did question why M4K had to move a couple of times.

“As far as I know, there is nothing like the mobile market [M4K]. There are established pantries but they [Gather] are the only ones that bring it [food] and make it available and leave. I’ve not heard of anything like this anywhere else. I’m not aware of any politics or anything. I know they have moved a couple of times and I’m not sure why.”

One partner talked about the culture of Rochester and how it poses challenges to any program, especially from outside the community.

“The culture piece here is big. It’s still an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality here and people have a hard time with programs that give things away for free, and that’s what Gather does. I think they think it create dependency and a lack of accountability. I’d say some put people in two camps here ‘old schoolers’ who are locals and the ‘free loaders.’ And there is a lot of resentment. There’s a real bootstraps mentality.”

She was not entirely sure how the culture of Rochester affected M4K’s outcomes but could envision that some people may elect not use M4K or may judge those who use it.

In 2021, there were no confounders identified as interfering with Gather’s ability to achieve its objectives. The partners clearly see Gather as an important partner in their work to address food insecurity and they all identified ways in which they were helping one another to be successful.

**Transition and sustainability:**

In 2020, the partners were asked how prepared the community would be to continue M4K if Gather decreased its involvement and what the barriers and facilitators would be to the continuation of M4K in Rochester. Three of the partners felt certain that M4K would cease to exist in Rochester if Gather decreased its involvement. The fourth said that, if M4K continued, the model would be quite different. All argued that the loss or diminishment of M4K would be devastating for the community and for partners that have come to rely on Gather for support of their own food programs.

“We couldn’t sustain the market, not at this scale. It would be devastating.”

“I don’t think it would happen [that the market would continue]. They [Gather] have a greater ability to gather the food. They have trucks and a refrigeration system. Our local pantries don’t have the physical space for something like that so couldn’t pull it off.”

“I know I don’t have a budget for it [running M4K]...it would not only hurt the community because I don’t see the market continuing, but it would hurt us too as our food pantry really benefits from the relationship with Gather.”

“I don’t see any organization being able to step up to do it.”

In 2020, when afforded an opportunity to share any other thoughts they had about M4K, each reiterated how much they enjoy working with Gather and how much help Gather has provided to the community and other food programs.
“They have been amazing...They offer us stuff and have provided food for our food pantry...”

“I love working with Gather. They have really contributed to the success of our food pantry. I think they are always thinking of ways they can help the community by helping other food programs expand their reach without excess burden or demands on their staff. I also know people who have been to their Portsmouth location that had a good experience.”

In 2021, these sentiments were echoed by the partners. One remarked on how gratifying it has been to work with Gather to serve the community.

“I just love seeing people lined up [at M4K] to get food. It feels really good.”

While none of the partners identified as being ready to take over M4K, they commented on ways in which they were helping each other with marketing, fundraising, and with food, storage, and facility space (all described previously). In 2021, Gather piloted efforts (e.g., with RCCC) and transitioned portions of its operations in Rochester (e.g., the senior M4K to Share Fund and the winter market at Cold Spring to CAPSC). The optimistic tone of the 2021 interviews was noticeably different than in 2020, perhaps because it felt more feasible to the partners that they could assume some responsibility for the mobile markets, in partnership with Gather, to continue M4K into the future.

G. Staff debriefs

In 2020, notes were available for nine weekly post-market debriefs that took place between June 16 and August 18. In each debrief, the evaluation intern and Gather staff discussed what worked well at M4K Rochester that week, what did not work well, and what the staff would like to try to address challenges. The debriefs worked well as a way to capture what is a regular practice at Gather, the consideration of how to improve the quality and productiveness of its programming. In 2021, two debriefs occurred, one in August and the other in late September, giving the participants (Scott McKee and Mysty Shappy) an opportunity to reflect on the first two months of summer and then on the summer as a whole. The findings across the two summers were quite similar in terms of the most positive attributes and greatest challenges.

Three consistent and positive attributes of M4K were identified in both 2020 and 2021: (1) the mobile shopping model that allows users to choose from among the foods offered each week, (2) the ability to have the same people (staff and volunteers) week to week and using them in the same roles to help build familiarity, trust, and a sense of community, and (3) the low threshold to qualify for M4K.

The weekly markets that were described as working the best had common features: Adequate staffing and volunteers, good communication among staff and volunteers, and the ability to manage timing and achieve efficiencies through use of checklists and proactive planning. When markets were described as not working as well, generally the problems resulted from a lack of adequate staffing and volunteers, poor communication, and/or problems with time management, especially not allowing enough time for packing, unpacking, and to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. The failure to adequately plan ahead caused problems for a few markets and resulted in not having sufficient types or amounts of equipment and supplies (e.g., carts, chairs, tents).

In 2020, in the realm of critical equipment and supplies, M4K Rochester benefitted significantly from more truck space (whether in two large trucks or trucks plus a cargo van), and carts for moving food between trucks and down the line of the market. In 2021, the trucks (used to transport food) and too few certified truck drivers were problems for M4K. The trucks used for transporting food are old,
subject to frequent mechanical issues. Ideally, three trucks would be available each week, although this was rarely the case. And when all three were available, ensuring there were three certified drivers was also a challenge. Because the trucks are old, they don’t have lift gates, which make loading and unloading food much easier. The refrigeration on one of the trucks wasn’t functioning for part of the summer as well, although that problem is now fixed.

In 2020, chairs and tents (see more below) were repeatedly described as important, but they posed challenges in terms of the time and personnel needed to set them up. In 2021, each tent had some sort of problem; they were not designed to sustain the kind of use M4K subjected them too.

In 2020, processes that caused some problems involved the packing and unpacking of the vehicles, especially when moving from one market site to another and when packing trash after the markets, and the replenishing of foods before supplies were depleted. By trying different processes, it became clear that setting up food first and tents later was better for staff and participants. The staff and volunteers experimented with how to display foods and learned which work best vertically on racks (i.e., dry goods) or horizontally on tables (i.e., produce) and that the placement of some snack foods prior to check-in was efficient. Much of this learning appears to require trial and error, seeking the best set up for a given market, the number of users, and the types of foods being offered in a given week. In 2021, one staff member described a lesson learned that, once she saw M4K in operation, changed how she approaches preparation for the market.

“Now that I know how they unload food off the truck, I am building pallets differently, stacking the food horizontally versus vertically. That will make it easier for them to put some of everything out initially and to replenish the food when they are running low on particular items.”

In 2021, in general, the processes themselves were not as problematic as in 2020; equipment and staffing issues were more challenging.

In 2021, the check-in process was described as challenging because it is a paper-based system and because different funders require different types of information about market users. The check-in process was described as different each week. A consistent process and one that is computerized, allowing Gather to track utilization across markets, is necessary so that those who registered at one market (e.g., Somersworth) are able to use another (e.g., Rochester) without needing to re-register.

Over both summers, there were also circumstances beyond the control of M4K. The summer heat resulted in a need for cold water and more tents, both of which caused challenges (e.g., more time for set up of tents, keeping water cold but not frozen). The pandemic meant staff had to ensure market participants maintained a social distance and were wearing masks, although restrictions eased once vaccinations were well underway. In 2020, maintaining social distancing among market users was difficult some weeks and caused delays in the shopping experience because people had to move through stations one at a time. Again, through trial and error, the staff and volunteers learned how/where to place goods to reduce slow-downs in the line of shoppers.

In both 2020 and 2021, the staff involved in the debriefs noted that it is important to understand the needs of market participants, to watch and learn what they like/will use and what they do not/will not. In 2020, there was discussion about conducting a survey early in the season to understand whether families have particular food needs (e.g. vegetarian, dairy/gluten allergies) so that Gather can plan ahead to meet the needs of those families. Additionally, there was discussion about contacting families who do not attend the market regularly to understand whether there is a problem or unaddressed need or if they have what they need and are feeling more food secure. While it is not clear whether there was a survey done to assess dietary needs and food preferences, Gather did complete a survey of M4K families to understand the reasons for discontinued and low utilization.
In 2020, the staff expressed concern about the extent to which the community was taking a role in the market. Very few M4K volunteers came from Rochester and there did not seem to be an organization able and ready to step up to assume more responsibility for the market going forward. Gather tried some creative ways to engage the community in the market. The presence of police as volunteers was described as successful. There was also discussion of featuring a resource each week (e.g., a suicide prevention program or an opportunity to meet a farmer from the community). In 2021, there were more volunteers from within Rochester to staff the market. While there isn’t a partner ready to take over M4K in its entirety, some partners have found ways to provide resources, primarily site use and storage, to support the market. Additionally, portions of Gather’s work in Rochester have been assumed by other organizations (as described in Section F, Transition and Sustainability), including a few “food drop” arrangements.

IV. Conclusions:

A. The outcomes evaluation:

**Question 1** of the outcomes evaluation is: How effective was M4K in reaching food-insecure children in Rochester? The anticipated outcomes for year 1 was that “400 eligible children will receive distributions of healthy food at the weekly market during the summer.” The total number of unduplicated children (n=739) who utilized the market at least once over the summer exceeded the target. The average number of children who used M4K each week of the summer (June 9 – September 1, 2020) was 278 (range 205 to 354). In year 2, the anticipated outcome was that “500 eligible children will receive distributions of healthy food at the weekly market during the summer.” Between June 14 and August 23, 2021, 624 unduplicated children benefited from the weekly market distributions received by shopping at M4K; another 38 received M4K distributions that were dropped off by Gather to the Rochester Child Care Center where the staff packaged them up for families who were not able to take advantage of M4K by attending the weekly market in person. Thus, the total number of unduplicated children (n=662) who benefited from M4K at least once over the summer of 2021 exceeded the target. The average number of children who used M4K each week of summer 2021 was 199 (range 113 to 267). The evaluation found that M4K was successful in achieving its targets of 400 and 500 children in the summers of 2020 and 2021, respectively.

**Question 2** of the outcomes evaluation is: How effective was M4K at increasing healthy eating behaviors among families participating in M4K? The anticipated outcome was “Greater than or equal to 70% will report improvement in one or more of the following: (1) Making more nutritious food choices; (2) Expanded variety of food selected/consumed; (3) Cooking and/or preparing food more frequently for themselves.” In both summer of 2020 and 2021, the majority of parents/guardians who were surveyed agreed that their children were eating healthier foods (80.3% and 80.8%, respectively) and a larger variety of foods (81.9% and 91.3%, respectively). Additionally, 77.8% of summer 2020 and 75% of summer 2021 parents/guardians indicated that their children understand how food choices affect their health and most parents/guardians (70% in 2020 and 71.8% in 2021) offered agreement that the health of their children improved thanks to M4K. The majority of the parents and guardians who were interviewed in both 2020 and 2021 also reported that their children were eating a wider variety of foods and healthier foods thanks to M4K, particularly a wider variety of fruits and vegetables.

With regard to the market’s influence over how often children prepare food for themselves, only 55.4% of 2020 survey respondents offered some level of agreement with the statement, lower than the expected outcome of 70% or better. The interviews provided important context for this finding, revealing that some parents and guardians feel their children are too young to be preparing their own food. Others explained that their children were already actively involved in meal preparation prior to
use of M4K. Those who identified a difference in their children’s involvement in food preparation reported that the children were helping with shopping at M4K, washing and cutting produce originating from M4K, preparing microwavable meals from recipes and/or ingredients they got at M4K, and were more interested in learning to cook since the family started using M4K. In 2021, the question was removed from the survey, however, several parents/guardians who were interviewed in 2021 reported that their children were actively involving in shopping, assisting with meal preparation, or preparing snacks and meals for themselves thanks to M4K.

The evaluation found that M4K successfully achieved the second anticipated outcome of “greater than or equal to 70%” reporting improvement in “one or more” of the outcomes for their children.

**Question 3** of the outcomes evaluation is: How effective was M4K in reducing food waste in and around the Rochester community? The anticipated outcome for summer 2020 was 36,000 pounds of fresh food will be rescued/gleaned and distributed to children in need. Gather rescued/gleaned 36,416 pounds of perishables foods (i.e., dairy, meat, produce) to feed Rochester families and met its anticipated target. Additionally, Gather rescued 10,984 pounds of non-perishables foods (i.e., packaged goods). In all, Gather prevented 47,400 pounds of food rescued/gleaned from local farms and grocery stores from going to waste and being added to local landfills.

In 2021, the anticipated outcome was 48,000 pounds of fresh food will be rescued/gleaned and distributed to children in need. Severe weather, labor shortages, and new market opportunities for local farmers; a combined market model (with M4K and other families shopping simultaneously in Rochester), and several other M4K markets operating in the Seacoast area meant that there was less fresh rescued/gleaned food available in the summer of 2021 overall and that those foods were distributed to a larger audience than just Rochester M4K families. In the summer of 2021, Gather provided 64,014 pounds of food to M4K Rochester families. However, more of that food was purchased in 2021 than rescued or gleaned. Of the food M4K Rochester families received in the summer of 2021, 21,545 pounds of the perishable foods and 7,897 pounds of the non-perishable foods were rescued or gleaned, 29,442 pounds in total. The evaluation found that M4K was successful in reaching its target for gleaned/rescued fresh foods in the summer of 2020, but not in the summer of 2021 for the reasons stated above.

Gather used the summer 2020/2021 evaluation of M4K Rochester as an opportunity to test whether M4K helps to alleviate parental stress, given its deleterious effects on children’s well-being. The evaluation sought data to understand if M4K could help alleviate parental stress related to finances. A majority (90.3% in 2020 and 92.6% in 2021) of parents/guardians surveyed reported that they felt less stress about how they would feed their families nutritious foods and most (86.3% in 2020 and 92.5% in 2021) indicated that they had more money available for other expenses, such as rent, utilities, and/or transportation, because they saved money on food. While M4K could do little to mitigate parental and child stress associated with the pandemic, it did appear to have an impact on parental stress related to finances and their ability to feed their children. The impact of parental stress related to financial hardship and food insecurity on children is yet another reason that effective programs like M4K are so important to children’s health and well-being.

**B. The process evaluation:**

Each of the seven components of the process evaluation and the associated research questions and conclusion are provided below. The conclusions are based on all of the research conducted to inform the process evaluation.

**Component 1 - Recruitment and maintenance:** How effective were Gather’s strategies for identifying, recruiting, and maintaining partners? How effective were the strategies used to reach and retain
families? What barriers affected the ability to reach and continually engage families? And what was done to overcome them? How did engagement differ for various segments of the target population and why?

Although an array of partners was engaged in Rochester before implementing M4K, their roles related to the market in 2020 were limited primarily to providing a location for the market and/or extending information about the market to eligible families. There was little dispute about whether the right partners were engaged. However, it seems that the approach, particularly to the community’s food programs, could have been more effective, particularly given Gather’s interest in transitioning the market to a community agency/ies in the future. While it seems that Gather expected a positive reception, perhaps particularly given early feedback from city leaders, the Rochester Child Care Center, Grace Church, and the city’s recreation center, some of the local food programs were worried about having to compete with Gather for resources or sales and that M4K would create demand and expectations, and then Gather would leave the community. Over time and by sharing resources with local food programs, Gather gained acceptance.

By the fall of 2021, Gather had strengthened relationships with the community foods programs, proven its commitment to the Rochester community, and provided additional support to the local food programs through a collaborative fundraising/food drive event and by providing food to these programs over time. Marketing via community partners continued in 2021. Additionally, local programs provided space for the market, storage space for equipment, and volunteers. The summer of 2021 also saw successful “food drop off” pilots and the transitioning of some of Gather’s operations in Rochester to other partners, including its Meals for Seniors program and the Cold Spring winter market operations. These achievements demonstrated that, working collaboratively, local agencies could assume more responsibility for the program. They also demonstrated that through its collaborative efforts to support these agencies and the community, it was able to successfully maintain partners in their effort to address food insecurity in Rochester. In retrospect, a different approach may have facilitated trust earlier on and a different kind of partnership in the summer of 2020, but ultimately, Gather has gained footing in Rochester and the hope that it can ultimately transition some of the responsibility for M4K to the community.

Although having a visible location and marketing via community agencies and social media were important to reaching some market users, it appears that the most effective vehicles for penetrating the skepticism and shame that some families may experience is to hear about the market from a trusted friend or family member and/or a community agency. Although the reminders disseminated via Textably.com were described as effective, keeping families engaged in M4K seems to primarily depend upon it being a positive experience for those who use it. The mobile shopping model; the variety and quantity of foods, including produce; and consistent, kind, and engaging staff and volunteers are all important elements that make the market a positive and valuable experience for Rochester families. Ensuring low barriers to enrollment also appear to be important to M4K use. Several families who were eligible for other food programs (e.g., local food pantries, federally-funded programs) noted that the difficulty involved in proving eligibility often outweighed the value of the resources those programs offer.

The most common reason families used M4K less than half of the weeks it was available over the summer of 2020 was that they did not learn about it until after it had been in operation for several weeks. Word-of-mouth marketing and the visible location of M4K appear to have been a key to alerting those families about the market. Lack of transportation and scheduling challenges appear to have presented challenges for some families. Gather’s efforts to mitigate these factors included holding the market in places already frequented by families with children and at one location where many families live; and allowing market users to shop for others who could not attend the market. Using Textably to remind users of the market schedule, may have allowed some to plan around it or to find someone else
to shop for them. Although volunteers were willing to help shoppers transport their groceries to their cars, there were limits to who can help carry groceries into public housing. Parents who were managing several children also faced challenges in shopping at M4K. M4K piloted the use of pull along wagons in 2021, after it was suggested by families in 2020, especially those with small children. However, the wagons were never returned after use and were no longer available; their replacement was not deemed a good use of M4K resources. In both 2020 and 2021, several families indicated that there were weeks when they did not need M4K and therefore they did not use it. From Gather’s perspective, the best possible reason for families to not use M4K is improved food security.

There were a couple of factors discussed as impacting M4K access by sub-groups of the community. Although some Spanish-speaking participants use the M4K, it is not clear how many others do not and why that may be. In 2020, Gather had, on occasion, a bilingual staff member at M4K in Rochester, but that was not generally the case. In 2021, no Spanish-language capacity existed among the M4K Rochester staff and volunteers. Keeping the model simple, so that users require little verbal instruction, seemed to allow most with limited English to use the market effectively.

Dietary preferences and needs were identified by staff as potential barriers, however several parents and guardians who were interviewed indicated that M4K offers options for vegetarians and those with allergies to gluten and dairy. The Gather staff noted that observing market preferences and shopper behaviors is useful for understanding what they like and will accept (e.g., cabbage and dented cans). They also noted, however, that it is important to ascertain whether particular food-related needs exist early on so that M4K can offer options for those users that will ensure their needs are met and increase the likelihood that they will continue attending the market. Upgrading the registration and check-in system to an electronic system was identified as important step for tracking utilization of M4K’s many markets by Rochester families and for storing data useful for informing which locations should be stocked with particular foods to meet dietary needs and preferences.

**Component 2 – Context:** Which aspects of the larger social, political, and economic environment influenced M4K implementation and success? How did these factors influence implementation and success and what could be done (or what was tried) to mitigate the impact of negative factors?

The concerns some local food programs had about Gather’s arrival in Rochester in 2020 (as described above) posed early challenges to M4K. Gather assured partners of their shared interest in serving the community, extended resources to support the local food programs, and, over time, proved itself by delivering on a highly successful model for addressing food insecurity in Rochester.

Prior to the pandemic, a large proportion of Rochester families experienced food insecurity, but with job losses brought on by the economic fall out that accompanied the pandemic, many Rochester families became even less financially secure. And with schools moving to remote learning, children lost easy access to the Free and Reduced Price Breakfast and Lunch Program that was part of their daily routine at school. Although the federally-sponsored summer meals program exists in Rochester, the families interviewed for the project explained that having to go to the site to access food was inconvenient and, for some, created health concerns given the pandemic. They also expressed that lack of variety and choice in the foods available there meant they were getting things their children would or could not eat, which led to food waste. Given the pandemic, an outdoor market was safer from a health perspective. Both summers brought extraordinarily hot and humid days, which made outdoor shopping, let alone waiting in line, an uncomfortable experience for some individuals. With regard to the pandemic, Gather implemented safety measures such as social distancing and making masks available to its staff, volunteers, and shoppers. Food stations were spread out and only one family at a time could shop at a given station; given the market’s set-up and the volume of shoppers, the pace at which participants could make their way through the market was sometimes quite slow. Thus, the staff sought and found ways of improving M4K to achieve greater efficiency. They also made water and tents
available to mitigate the heat. While waiting in line was still described as an undesirable aspect for some families in 2021, the value of M4K helped to offset the inconvenience.

**Component 3 - Resources:** Were the resources (e.g., food, space, materials, staffing, partners, roles) adequate to achieve the project objectives? What were the barriers and facilitators to reducing food waste?

Although resources for M4K in Rochester were described as “adequate,” implementation and operation of the market was not without challenges over both summers. The ideal circumstances (i.e., when M4K worked best) included plenty of staff and volunteers, good communication among staff and volunteers, and the ability to manage timing and achieve efficiencies through use of checklists and proactive planning, and plenty of truck space for transporting food and trash. However, the staff generally found themselves managing without all of the elements of an ideal situation. Additionally, in the summer of 2020, warehouse and refrigeration space were limited and there were some elements of the market that could have used additional focus (e.g., to produce pre-made meals). In 2021, mechanical problems with trucks and having too few certified drivers were problems, as well as challenges posed by the loss of a staff person and having the responsibility for greeting and check-in falling on one person. Despite these challenges, M4K achieved all of its expected outcomes in 2020 and two of the three in 2021.

With regard to food waste, M4K’s model (which allows families to select what they want and need) and their approach (which is responsive to the what families need and will use) were influential in reducing food waste among participating families. Over both summers, the parents/guardians interviewed indicated that they use most of the food they take from the market, and that little goes to waste. As a result of the pandemic, more people began shopping locally for food, which increased demand for local produce and reduced the supply available for gleaning/rescue. In both 2020 and 2021, weather was a factor affecting local farming yields. While the pandemic reduced the number of farm workers available to local farms in 2020, extreme labor shortages in 2021 significantly impacted farm production and harvesting. In 2021, with new market opportunities for farmers, less food was available for rescue/gleaning. While Gather was able to secure enough food to feed all M4K families in both summer 2020 and 2021, it was not able to achieve its target for gleaning/rescue in 2021.

**Component 4 - Fidelity:** Was the program implemented as designed? If not, why not and how did it impact outcomes? If mid-stream modifications were made, why were they made and what impact did those modifications have on the program?

The M4K model originally implemented in Rochester was like that in other locations. However, after implementation, it was modified to incorporate social distancing, improve the flow of the market, and provide relief from the summer heat and humidity. Gather approaches its work from a quality improvement perspective, trying new things to address identified problems and observing and recognizing what is needed, appealing, and acceptable in a particular community. In the summer of 2020, the changes Gather implemented improved operations. It’s not clear whether or how such changes affected the outcomes (i.e., children served, food rescued, and improvements in the variety and nutrition of foods children consume and their preparation of food).

In the summer of 2021, Gather introduced a couple of changes to the model. First, it piloted a project with the Rochester Child Care Center to provide food to families who had been unable to visit the market to access food for their children. The moved proved successful in feeding 38 additional children in the summer of 2021 with little extra effort for M4K staff and volunteers. Additionally, Gather combined two mobile markets (the one exclusively for M4K families and the one for other Rochester families) into a single market. The combined model was described as improving access for families by extending the time available for shopping for all users. The elements most important to families
remained intact: The mobile aspect of the program, the “shopping” experience that allowed families choice of the foods they want, and the low threshold to qualify for the program. Additionally, M4K continued to provide sufficient quantity, quality, and variety of healthy foods.

Two issues appeared to cause dissatisfaction among several M4K users in 2020 and 2021. The long wait in line, due to the number of shoppers and social distancing required by pandemic precautions, and the issue of limits placed on the amount of food a family can take. While the pandemic’s impact on the line will ultimately be resolved, the line caused frustration in other regards as well. Smoking, “cutting in line,” and the difficulty some parents appeared to have in managing their children were cited as problems. With regard to limits, the few times Gather imposed limits on some goods (e.g., meat, milk), a few families with multiple children indicated they didn’t receive enough to feed their families. Conversely, multiple parents/guardians indicated that some families take more food than they need which depletes what is available for the rest of the shoppers at M4K; this was especially true of snack foods. Allowing families to shop for those who cannot attend in-person is an important strategy for maintaining M4K users and ensuring children receive nutritious foods. However, families that shop for other families likely appear to be “taking more than they need” and causing hard feelings among other M4K users. These are both issues related to M4K’s model that require additional problem-solving in order to maintain user satisfaction, which is important to both word-of-mouth marketing and retention of families in M4K.

**Component 5 - Initial and continued use:** How many families used the market once and did not return versus those who used it repeatedly? What was the average and range of visits? How many families engaged in food demonstrations at the mobile markets and used the recipes provided at the markets?

An average of 278 children (range 205 to 354) used M4K each week during the summer of 2020 and a total of 739 unduplicated children used M4K at least once. Market use among survey participants ranged from 1 to 18 times with a mean of 8.7. As described previously, most of the parents/guardians who did not use the market at least half the weeks that it was available in the summer of 2020 said it was because they did not know about M4K until the market had been open for several weeks. Several also reported that they skipped the market on weeks when they did not need food. In the summer of 2020, however, approximately 31% used M4K one time only and then did not return.

In the summer of 2021, 662 unduplicated children benefited from M4K (624 at the mobile markets and 38 through M4K drop-offs to the Rochester Child Care Center. On average, 199 children benefited from the M4K per week with a range of 113 to 267). Over the summer of 2021, 234 children visited the M4K for the first time in the summer of 2021 and did not return thereafter. Most, 82.6% of parents/guardians survey indicated that they attended M4K more than half of the weeks it was offered; and only 17.6% reported using M4K half or less than half of the time it was available or rarely. For most, low M4K utilization was explained by improved food security. In the summer of 2021, with many people returning to work, as well as increased SNAP and WIC benefits, it seemed that many people were better positioned to purchase foods and thus did not use M4K when they did not need it.

The evaluation’s surveys can only provide insight into why survey respondents may have had low M4K utilization. To understand why other families had limited or discontinued use of M4K, Gather conducted an assessment in 2021. In all, 77 families provided reasons for their limited or discontinued use of M4K. The primary reason was that their food security improved, although some described challenges with work schedules, transportation, health concerns, and child care.

Reliable data on food tastings are not available (see page 12). Of the parents and guardians who responded to the survey, most (84.1% in 2020 and 71.6% in 2021) rated the recipes excellent or very good. Several of those surveyed had taken recipes from M4K; some saved them and planned to use them later, whereas others had tried one or more and found them easy and delicious. Those who had
not used the recipes indicated that they didn’t appeal to them, they didn’t need them, or they didn’t have time to use recipes.

M4K also provided families with access to prepared foods; satisfaction with these offerings was assessed in the 2021 survey and 77.5% of parents/guardians rated them as excellent or very good.

Component 6 - Confounders and contamination: Which/to what extent may other interventions have influenced the project outcomes?

As detailed under component 1, Gather encountered challenges with a couple of the existing food programs in Rochester in 2020, particularly the worry among these programs that they would have to compete with Gather for resources and/or sales. The early worries and skepticism appeared to have been resolved by the end of summer 2020 and did not negatively influence M4K’s outcomes. In the summer of 2021, the partnerships with existing food programs in Rochester were strong and collaborative. Partner agencies provided support with marketing M4K to eligible families, space for the market and for storage of equipment, and volunteers. Gather provided partners with food for their programs and collaborated on an event at the Rochester Opera House to raise funds and food donations for three Rochester food programs. A pilot project with the Rochester Child Care Center ensured that 38 children received food through M4K in the summer of 2021 who likely would not have benefited from the program otherwise. Partnerships with local programs, which strengthened over time, did not hinder M4K. Rather, they enhanced the success of M4K by providing support for marketing and operations, particularly in the summer of 2021.

Component 7 - Transition and sustainability: How prepared are partners to continue the program with decreased involvement of Gather? What are the barriers and facilitators to the program’s sustainability?

In the summer of 2020, neither Gather staff nor the partners interviewed believed there was an organization or collaborative in Rochester that was prepared and equipped to take over operation of M4K. Without Gather’s involvement, it was described as unlikely that M4K could be sustained in Rochester. Although the partners assisted with marketing and providing space for the market, they were not equipped to source, store, or transport the food necessary for the market.

In the summer of 2021, there was still no single partner or collaborative prepared to take over M4K Rochester in its entirety. However, several promising transitions occurred that may pave the way for one or more partners to assume more oversight of M4K Rochester in the future. The Community Action Program of Strafford County and the Share Fund each assumed responsibility for operating mobile markets in Rochester (Meals for Seniors and the winter market at Cold Springs, respectively). With ongoing support from Gather to provide food to these locations, the partners demonstrated that it is possible for them to provide operational support for mobile markets. Whether and when a partner or partners will assume responsibility for M4K remains to be seen, but these 2021 changes offer optimism that Gather may be able to transition more of the responsibility to the community over time.

Recommendations: Based upon the evaluation findings across the two summer, Gather may want to consider several steps to support M4K’s outcomes.

• First and foremost, M4K should retain its mobile shopping model, level of service, the variety and volume of food available, and the low barrier to enrollment.

(11) As word of mouth marketing is so integral to recruitment for M4K, Gather may want to implement an effort to encourage word of mouth marketing, such as the dissemination of “tell a friend” flyers or an incentive for telling others about the market. Additionally, partner agencies are an important source of marketing; Gather should maximize these channels through dissemination of flyers and other means of communication with community programs.
(12) At the time of enrollment, Gather should ask families about any dietary preferences or allergies so the information is known from the time of enrollment and available to Gather for planning. Additionally, Gather should ask enrollees to specify who referred them to the market (to support the referral incentive described above).

(13) Gather should test different strategies for addressing frustrations related to the line in which participants must wait before shopping. These issues include smoking, “cutting in line,” and children who are disruptive. Such strategies might include distributing numbers to users as they check-in, which would allow some who smoke to move to a designated smoking area while they wait and limit the occurrences of those who “cut in line.” Gather might also offer activities to engage children while they wait, perhaps in partnership with another child-serving organization in the community.

(14) Gather should also determine a way of communicating to users the rationale for its decision to generally not set limits on the amount of food families can take and clarify that some families are permitted to shop for others that cannot attend the market in person. While it is not recommended that Gather change its approach to limits, clearly something to help mitigate the hard feelings associated with the issue could be important to user satisfaction, retention, and word-of-mouth marketing.

(15) Participants may find it helpful for Gather to provide its recipes in a visible location (i.e., at M4K’s check-in table) and on Gather’s website, a recommendation made in 2020 that has not yet been implemented.

(16) To address its greatest challenges related to M4K resources, Gather should seek resources to support more reliable trucks for food transport and to develop an electronic registration and tracking system for M4K to replace its inefficient and cumbersome paper system. Additionally, Gather should ensure that more of its staff and volunteers are certified to drive the transport trucks so that they are less likely to find themselves without a sufficient number of drivers at any point in the future.

(17) With regard to future evaluation and fundraising, Gather should continue to track M4K’s impact on parental stress associated with finances and their ability to feed their families nutritious foods. Such information could be useful for future fundraising efforts, given that some funders are particularly interested in Adverse Childhood Events and toxic stress and their impact on children’s health and wellbeing.

With regard to sustainability of M4K in new communities, Gather should think strategically about the role that is feasible and desirable for them. The Rochester experience suggests that proactive outreach and engagement of partners, particularly those serving children, is critical to marketing to families and securing space for the market. However, if Gather wants to ultimately transition primary responsibility for M4K to a community organization, a different approach, particularly to existing food programs, is recommended. Based upon the literature, M4K should consider a community organizing approach, bringing together stakeholders invested in food security and the health and well-being of school-aged children to learn about their work and challenges, assess whether/how M4K may be able to help address gaps in services related to food insecurity, and create buy-in. It may be useful to acknowledge the trepidation partners first experienced in other communities and share their testimonials. The new partners should be involved in constructing a plan for piloting and transitioning the model over time. Gather may need to provide ongoing support (e.g., consultative, grant writing, food sourcing). With two years of experience in Rochester, Gather is well-positioned to share valuable lessons-learned with other communities.

It is clear, at least among the families and partners involved in the evaluation, that M4K would be missed if it no longer operated in Rochester. It seems unlikely that, for M4K to continue, Gather will
ever completely disengage with its operations in Rochester. However, as of fall 2021, it seems possible that a partner or partners may, in future, be positioned to take over some responsibility for operating M4K in Rochester. To do so successfully would require ongoing support from Gather for the sourcing, storage, and transport of food. Gather may find it also needs to provide staffing for the market, as the successful transitions to date (Meals for Seniors and the winter market at Cold Spring) are not as labor intensive as M4K’s weekly summer markets. It is also likely that, for a partner or partners to assume responsibility for M4K, Gather would need to provide help with program planning and possibly ongoing consultation for quality improvement. Such a partner(s) will likely also need support for fundraising; continuing with the successful fundraising and food drive event at the Rochester Opera House in future years is an excellent start to that end.
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Rural Hunger and Access to Healthy Food

Introduction


Meals 4 Kids (M4K) Mobile Market Toolkit

Gather, a non-profit organization based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has been addressing hunger for over 200 years and is dedicated to making New Hampshire’s Seacoast a hunger-free community. Gather’s Meals 4 Kids (M4K) is a mobile program delivered in six locations that provides fresh and nutritious food for school-aged children who are eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch at schools in communities throughout the Seacoast. Typically, in non-pandemic times, M4K distributes 10 meals per week per child during the summer and over school vacations. It is also designed to expand the variety of foods kids eat, and support them in making nutritious food choices, gaining self-sufficiency skills related to selecting and preparing healthy foods, and learning how food choices affect their health. In 2019, Gather secured funding to extend M4K to the rural city of Rochester and evaluate its ability to achieve M4K’s desired outcomes, as well as document the processes involved in achieving those outcomes. The evaluation was conducted over the summers of 2020 and 2021 and involved Rochester parents/guardians who used M4K, Gather staff and volunteers, and community partners. The evaluation found that M4K in Rochester achieved important outcomes, specifically:

- Serving the number of unduplicated Rochester children -- 400 in summer 2020 and 500 in summer 2021.
- Achieving improvement in child-related outcomes of healthier food consumption, consumption of a larger variety of foods, improved understanding among children about how food choices affect their health, and children’s health overall among 70% or more of the families served.
- Meeting its target for gleaned/rescued fresh foods in the summer of 2020 (36,000 pounds).
- Reducing parental stress related to finances and their ability to feed their children.

The evaluation also offered insights into the most critical aspects of the M4K model and other important lessons learned, particularly related to pre-implementation planning; these are summarized herein to aid others who share Gather’s commitment to addressing food insecurity among children in rural communities and who desire similar outcomes to those achieved by M4K in Rochester.

- **Pre-implementation planning and building trust:** To support implementation and long-term sustainability of M4K in new communities, it is important to think strategically about the role that is feasible and desirable for your organization. It is advisable to proactively reach out to engage stakeholders invested in food security and children’s health and well-being in the target community to learn about their work and challenges, assess whether/how you can address gaps in services related to food insecurity, and create buy-in. By providing food and fundraising support to local food programs, your agency may be able establish trust that will be vital to successfully serving the target community. If interested in transitioning operations of your model to the community over time (as Gather hopes to do), it is particularly important to partner with these stakeholders to construct a plan for piloting and transitioning the model. While Gather will likely

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6 While Gather had a constant presence in Rochester throughout the pandemic, the evaluation focused on its summer M4K markets, which operated morning and afternoon markets each Tuesday in Rochester at two different locations in 2020 and 2021.

7 In summer 2021, severe weather and labor shortages affected the ability of farmers to grow and harvest produce. Additionally, new markets for the goods they were able to produce impacted the amount available for gleaning/rescue. Gather was able to feed all M4K families, however more food was purchased in the summer of 2021 than initially expected and it did not achieve its 2021 target to rescue/glean 48,000 pounds of food.
need to provide ongoing support for food sourcing going forward, lessons learned in Rochester suggest that it may be possible to transition operations for the market to local partners over time.

- **The free mobile shopping model:** With transportation being a major barrier for many who could benefit from food programs, the mobile aspect of M4K was critical. Taking food to the community and making it available in central locations and/or those that children and families frequent is essential to create access. The free farmer’s market-style model, which lets families choose which foods their families will use in quantities appropriate for them, is both a favorite aspect of the model to participants and limits food waste.

- **Low threshold to qualify and simplicity of the model:** M4K users indicated that the process to qualify for various public and non-profit food programs can be onerous and that the work involved sometimes outweighs the benefits provided by such programs. By limiting the documentation families must provide and the restrictions on who can use M4K, families were able to benefit who may otherwise have been discouraged from participation. Further, the simplicity of the model makes it easy for users to understand. While having bilingual staff is preferable to serve diverse communities, simple processes enabled M4K to serve users with limited English proficiency.

- **Flexibility, including limit-free and “proxy” shopping:** In general, Gather tries to maintain flexibility in its approach to serve the most families possible. In 2021, it recognized that “food drop offs” to a day care center would create access to M4K for some families who simply could not get to the market itself. Gather also resists placing limits on the amount of food a family can take from the weekly market and, rather, lets families decide for themselves what their families need and will use. Overwhelmingly, parents/guardians reported that they only take what they need for the week and that little, if anything, goes to waste. In fact, among families who did not use M4K every week, the most common reason was that they had sufficient food and thus did not need M4K during the week’s that they skipped the market. Flexibility is also an important attribute of M4K. If a family is unable to attend the market one week, M4K permits a “proxy” or designee (e.g., neighbor or friend) to shop for the family while also shopping for themselves. While these aspects of the program can cause concern among some M4K users (i.e., who believe a given family is taking too much), they are important attributes of M4K, and thus may necessitate communication with families to ensure all understand their importance.

- **Variety of fresh, healthy foods:** Among the aspects of M4K most appreciated by Rochester families was that it offers a variety of fresh and healthy foods, including produce, meats, and dairy; items families indicated are the most cost-prohibitive. M4K also offers recipes that can be used with its weekly offerings and prepared foods that families may want to try making on their own. These attributes helped distinguish M4K from other food program models with which Rochester families were familiar.

- **Consistency of staffing and program philosophy:** Stigma can be a barrier to use of food programs. M4K was able to build trust and relationships with Rochester residents by having the same staff and volunteers in the same roles each week. The program philosophy is to offer families a shopping experience in which they choose what they want and need from among a variety of healthy food options. The staff do not question the decisions of participants or limit their selections. Trusted relationships and not feeling judged were important aspects of the M4K model to Rochester families.
• **A quality improvement approach**: As an organization, Gather has an orientation toward continuous quality improvement, recognizing systems or offerings that work well and that should be maintained or those that do not work and should be modified. The M4K staff are attuned to listening to families in real-time, conducting annual surveys, and using observation to identify areas for improvement. In addition to testing different ways processes (e.g., ways of laying out the food to facilitate both choice and smoother operations), the staff also took note of special dietary needs (e.g., gluten-free, lactose-free, or vegetarian) and particular preferences among families to ensure they were able to meet the needs of Rochester families. Based upon the evaluation findings, it was suggested that Gather make the following modifications: (1) At intake, ask families about any dietary preferences or allergies for use in planning; (2) test strategies for addressing challenges associated with waiting line (e.g., smoking, “cutting in line,” and disruptive children) such as distributing numbers at check-in, which would allow some who smoke to move to a designated smoking area while they wait and reduce “cutting in line,” and offer activities to engage children while they wait, perhaps in partnership with another child-serving organization in the community; (3) Provide recipes in a visible location (i.e., at M4K’s check-in table) and on Gather’s website so M4K can easily access them; and (4) Move to a computerized registration/check-in system to facilitate easier access for Rochester families at other M4K locations, to support evaluation, and to track dietary needs/preferences.

• **Word of mouth marketing, marketing via partner agencies, and weekly reminders**: The most effective means of outreach and engagement of families to M4K Rochester occurred via word of mouth marketing (i.e., a trusted friend or family member) who recommended M4K and via other community agencies used and trusted by Rochester families (e.g., day care center, schools, other food programs, recreation/camp programs). Textably.com was also used to provide weekly reminders to families about M4K’s schedule and locations and proved helpful to families as they planned their weekly schedules. As word of mouth marketing is so integral to recruitment for M4K, it may be beneficial to implement an effort to encourage word of mouth marketing (e.g., “tell a friend” flyers and incentives) and maximize communications via partner agencies by disseminating flyers and other means (e.g., regular emails, occasional presentations at partner agencies).

• **Resources, evaluation, and fundraising**: The attached operations manual provides details about the types of resources needed for a market like M4K. In addition to food, there are considerable resource needs associated with M4K, including personnel, equipment (e.g., tables, tents, hand trucks), storage and refrigeration, and transportation. Your organization’s needs may differ from those experienced by Gather. To ensure adequate resources, it is important to track utilization, evaluate your program’s success at serving the community, and identify and justify resource needs. To that end, Gather’s parent/guardian survey tool (also attached), may be useful for evaluating the success of your market and for soliciting support from funders. It is relatively easy for funders to understand how M4K contributes to positive outcomes associated with children’s health and nutrition. It may also be beneficial to demonstrate how M4K helps to alleviate parental stress associated with finances and parents’ ability to feed their families nutritious foods; this could be especially interesting to funders with an interest in the impact of parental stress on children’s health and wellbeing.

If you are interested in implementing a model similar to M4K and have questions or would like to review the executive summary of the 2020/2021 M4K Rochester evaluation, please contact Gather at (603) 436-0641.
Meals 4 Kids Operations Manual

1. Decide what food to give out
   a. Meat
   b. Dry goods
   c. Produce
2. Order food
3. Make packing lists
   a. Trucks
   b. 210 west
4. Print rosters
5. Send Textedly reminder
   a. Login
   b. Upload list
   c. Send text
6. Distribution
   a. set up
   b. staff/volunteer roles
   c. break down
7. Education items
   a. Cooking Samples and Recipes
   b. Suicide Prevention
   c. CSA Recipes
   d. COVID resources
8. COVID-19 Protocol
   a. Social Distancing
   b. Masks and Gloves
   c. Sanitation
9. Surveying
   a. When
   b. Where
   c. How
**1. Decide what food to give out**

When deciding what food to give out your goal should be to have a variety of foods that can make a meal. The food you give out every week should include proteins, dry goods, and produce.

ALWAYS USE WHAT WE HAVE IN EXCESS – M4K uses a lot of food. Use what we have before using new purchases.

a. Meat

Choose meat first and decide on dry goods based on that. What meat is there enough of (700+ packages) that we didn’t give out last week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chicken</th>
<th>Beef</th>
<th>Pork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good with rice, black</td>
<td>Good with spaghetti,</td>
<td>Good with Baked Beans,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beans, mixed veggies,</td>
<td>pasta sauce, kidney</td>
<td>corn, most canned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corn, most canned</td>
<td>beans, most canned</td>
<td>veggies</td>
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<td>veggies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If there is not enough of any meat, then it will have to be purchased.

Meat should be ordered 2 weeks before you plan to distribute it, so **decide the meat for several weeks in advance**.

Market Basket puts Turkey dogs on sale in the summer, try to give that out a few times to save money.

NH Food Bank can purchase beef and chicken at less than retail, so work with them for the best variety.

b. Dry goods (plan a meal as best you can)

Pack what you have enough of. Typically, pack 60-70% of the number of kids you plan to serve. Not everyone takes every item.
The list above gives some ideas for dry goods that go well with certain meats. Try to budget your dry goods keeping the meat in mind. For example, if you are doing beef this week and pork the next, don’t give out baked beans this week, so you will have them for the next one. Additionally, you should consider what dry goods will pair well with one another.

All of the dry goods for one week should include at least 5 items. Below are some standard categories and suggestions.

- **Breakfast:** pancake mix, oatmeal, cereal (Yogurt or cheese for omelets can substitute for dry breakfast item)
- **1-3 Canned goods:** diced tomatoes, mixed veggies, canned potatoes, pasta sauce, black beans, baked beans, kidney beans, chick Peas, mixed veggies, carrots, corn, other
- **Starch:** Spaghetti, pasta (not the same as spaghetti), rice (preferably brown)
- **Meal Enhancers:** mac n cheese, ketchup, broth, gravy, etc.
- **Snacks:** Peanut butter crackers, mixed boxes of smaller donations, budget for 5 snacks per kid for each week, **don’t under pack, snacks go fast**
- **Juice:** juice boxes and ½ gallons, or other shelf stable juices
- **Peanut Butter:** give our every other week
- **Jelly:** give out every other week alternating with peanut butter (preferably squeeze jelly). Not every kid comes every week, so it’s a good idea to have a couple cases of whatever you brought last week just in case someone asks for it.

**c. Produce**

You need enough to set up a farmer’s market. Preferably start with 3 tables with vegetables, and end with one table of fruit.

**Fruit:** Have at least 3 options each week

Bananas are cheap and very well liked. Apples come in from the NHFB often. Oranges are great to have each week too. Use other types of fruits when you can (peaches, blueberries, kiwi, melons), but this is normally good.
**Vegetables**: Have 5+ options every week

Distributing rescued produce should always be the first priority.

Onions, carrots, cabbage, and potatoes can be ordered from the NHFB.

Also bring any Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) with you.

Order veggies that we won’t get from the above places. Peppers, cucumbers, broccoli, tomatoes, squash, peas, turnips, eggplant, and kohlrabi are all good options to purchase.

Try to get a good variety each week, and make each week different from the last.

For example, if you have lettuce, carrots, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, and radishes one week, use any good leftovers to supplement the market the next week. But order different things like eggplant, tomatoes, broccoli, peppers and peas for the next week.

Try to have enough staple vegetables (carrots, onions that you might get from the food bank) for every kid to get some.

You won’t have large enough quantities of most vegetables for every kid to have some so, you need to pack more variety.

Each week, we bring 12+ types of vegetables in smaller quantities. So when we run out of radishes for example, we can bring out turnips.
2. Order Food

When ordering food, buy local produce each week and supplement with orders from grocery stores like Saunders, Aldi, and Market Basket.

As a general rule you should always order meat 2-3 weeks in advance, bread 14 days in advance, and produce 1-2 business days in advance.

Go through the process of:
1. Decide what food to give out
2. Determine what you need to order
3. Order all food

We make these types of produce orders on an average week:

**Saunders** (earlier delivery), **Native Maine** (cheaper, better quality, but comes later in the day. May need to be ordered a day in advance) **Holden** (Probably the best choice)
Bananas (4-6 cases per day)
Oranges (2-3 cases per day)
Vegetables- peppers, broccoli, cucumbers, or green beans (2-3 cases each per day)

**Places we order from:**

1. 3 River Farmers Alliance
We purchase from here to support local farms, maintain relationships for gleaning opportunities, and to get a great variety of produce. Expect to order multiple types of vegetables from them each week. They also sell 1 lb packages of ground beef that is good to use for the meat for a week or two.

Order by: Saturday for Thursday delivery
Best contact: office: 603-944-9403

*Place orders on 3riverfa.com*
Order instructions: Orders open on Fridays at 10 am on 3riverfa.com to order on a weekly basis. Work with them from January-May to organize contract growing for the summer if you can, but this has not worked well in the past. For the first several weeks, they usually only have greens. Late July-early August is when they have the best variety.

2. Aldi
Aldi has very low prices for just about everything. It is a great place to get different fruits (blueberries and strawberries) inexpensively. Milk, eggs and bread are less expensive there as well.

Order by: Dry goods- 2 business days before
Bread, Dairy, Meat, Eggs- 4 business days before

Best contact: No phone. Speak to a manager in the store

828 Central Ave
Dover, NH 03820

And

2024 Woodbury Ave,
Newington, NH 03801

Order instructions: Speak with a manager to place a special order. If you need something immediately, you can buy out the store of anything on the shelves.

3. BJ’s
BJ’s is where we get our t-shirt bags (plastic shopping bags). They also sell chicken as a cheap option for a week’s meat.
Can order bags, and dry goods online.

Order by: 2-3 weeks in advance

Best contact: Brad (head of the meat department) store phone: 603-427-0400
Order instructions: Pick up chicken at least 4 days before the distribution to give it time to freeze. If we come in and pay for it when the chicken comes in, they can freeze it for us.

4. Dollar Tree
Dollar Tree is where we get pancake mix and strawberry jelly from. It is also a good place to get supplies for the cook-it-up bags (cutting boards, condiments).

Order by: 3 weeks in advance

Best contact: Order online at Dollartree.com
1981 Woodbury Ave, Portsmouth, NH 03801
Phone: (603) 570-0759

Order instructions: When you place your order online, you can get it shipped to the store for free. They can be disorganized, so make sure that your order is at the store before going to pick it up.

5. Market Basket
Market Basket is where we get things that we will need throughout the summers like peanut butter crackers and jelly. They sell cheap turkey dogs for weeks when you don’t have another meat. This is also where we usually buy cheese and bread products like burger and hot dog buns. When you are looking to buy something like taco kits, check the Market Basket weekly add as well as the nearest Market Basket.

Portsmouth
Order by: Dry goods- 3 days in advance
Bread- Full week in advance

Best contact: store phone: 603-436-0413 Allen Pelletier

Order instructions: They do not have storage capacity, so you need to pick up on the day that your order arrives. They do not get bread in on Wednesdays, so if you order bread for Wednesday, it will get there on Tuesday.
6. McKenzies Farm
McKenzies is a local farm separate from 3 River that we sometimes buy from. We get produce like cucumber from them.

Order by: 1 week in advance

Best contact: text Brett 603-973-1597

7. N.H. Foodbank
We get apples, onions, potatoes, and carrots from them on a regular basis. We also get juice and dry goods. The pantry orders from them every week. Meals 4 Kids orders from them separately every week. There are 2 separate orders for Meals 4 Kids, Program# 2 Seacoast and Program #3 is Rochester.

Order by: 1 week in advance

Best contact: Agency Relations Manager

Order instructions: Work with Mobile Programs Manager or Pantry Manager to do the weekly order. You must forward confirmation email to M4K intern and Pantry Manager. You should stockpile shelf stable items for Meals 4 Kids throughout the year to prepare for the summer. Order for M4K every week.

8. Ocean State Job Lot
They are great for getting large quantities of canned goods or items for the cook-it-up bags.

Order by: 2-4 weeks in advance

Best contact: Carolyn St. Jean, email: c.stjean@osjl.com

Order instructions: Email Carolyn the SKU#s of the items you are ordering and you will get a discount.
9. Saunders
Saunders is great for ordering fruit and relatively cheap vegetables like green peppers. We regularly get fruits and vegetables delivered from them each morning of Meals 4 Kids. *If you need to leave before 10:00, order for delivery the day before.

Order by: 2 business days before delivery to guarantee the item. They will deliver between 9:30am-11:00am. If what you ordered is out of stock, then they will deliver between 11:00am-2:00pm

If you need to, you can call anytime before midnight, and they will usually be able to deliver it the next morning.

Best contact: Phone 603-692-0005

Order instructions: Either leave an order message or place your order directly to someone.

Every day they go to Boston at around 3 a.m. to pick up the orders from the day before. So, if you order bananas 4 days before you want to pick them up, they may not be very fresh when they arrive.
If you get produce that is not high quality from them, call them immediately to get a refund.

10. Walmart
Portsmouth Walmart
Order by: noon on Friday to pick up on Monday. They need a full week’s notice for bread. Other items can be ordered 2-3 days in advance.

Best contact: Assistant Manager of Fresh, store phone: (603) 433-6008 ask Mobile Programs Manager or pantry manager who the Assistant Manager of Fresh is currently *they prefer if you text the assigned manager

Order instructions:
A few weeks before M4K starts, let them know. You need to get the UPC from the price label on the aisle (product code) for them (take a picture). When you go to pick up your order, pay at the service desk and pick up at the back receiving door.

**Rochester Walmart**

Order by: noon on Friday to pick up on Monday. They need a full week’s notice for bread. Other items can be ordered 2-3 days in advance.

Best contact: Brian, store phone: (603) 332-4300

**Native Maine**

Native Maine has better quality produce than Saunders and is cheaper, but is not as reliable with delivering on time. Use Native Maine for produce that you need later in the day, or order a day in advance if you need it for the morning.

It is best to order online at [nativeme.com](http://nativeme.com) using the following login information.

If you need to edit an order you placed online, you should call them at 207-856-1100 to edit.

**Favorite Foods**

Use this link to order: [http://orders.favoritefoods.com/cgi-bin/tnet/verify.html](http://orders.favoritefoods.com/cgi-bin/tnet/verify.html)

**Holden Produce**

Order online by midnight for next day delivery

Use this link to order: [https://holdenproduce.com/commercial-ordering/](https://holdenproduce.com/commercial-ordering/)

Least expensive most constant highest quality easiest delivery. Setting up recurring purchase i.e., eggs is easy for them to do

Call office and speak to Jenn Murch 617-889-2204

**Contoocook Creamery**

Best contact James AKA Jamie 603-568-6196 phone or text

Recurring milk delivery form a local place let them know you work with NHFB they will give you better pricing
15. Oakhurst
Set up recurring milk delivery typically slightly less expensive than Contoocook
speak to Carl to set up account
Phone # 207-415-3178

3. Make Packing lists

When you pack the trucks for each day of Meals 4 Kids, it is important to have packing lists to ensure that you bring what you will need. The same is true for setting up for M4K distributions at Gather itself (210 West).

a. Trucks

When packing the trucks, we need everything necessary for all stops for the day. This includes the tables, tents, sign-in sheets/rosters, all produce, all meat, all milk, all eggs, all dry goods, all bread, etc. Your lists will change from day to day based on how many we need to pack for, what we use all of, and what we buy more of. So make different packing lists for each day of distribution for the week.

Create the truck loading list after you 1. Decide what food to give out and 2.Order Food. You may have a different amount of vehicles depending on the size of your operation, but for the purposes of this example we’ll assume you have one cold truck and one dry goods truck.

Cold Truck

1. Rescued produce
2. Purchased produce
   - When packing produce, be conscious of all programs at Gather. If you ordered 4 boxes of peppers for example, you should make sure the pantry has enough peppers to get them through the day, and leave them a box if they need it.
3. Milk + eggs
- Check with manager on what your milk and egg budget is. The amount of milk and eggs you pack depends on your budget and how much milk and eggs you’re able to receive. For example in 2019 we bought milk and eggs from Walmart and gave out a half gallon of milk and a dozen eggs per every 2 kids in a family, but in 2020 we got milk and eggs for free from the NHFB so we were able to give a half gallon of milk and a dozen eggs to every kid.

4. Meat
- You should pack enough portions of whatever meat your giving out to kids to be able to give 1 to every kid. When we go to Rochester we bring 330 of whatever the meat is that week.
- You should also pack one or two pallets worth of miscellaneous frozen things. These are usually larger pieces of meat, and you should try and bring different types of meat than whatever the kids meat is that week. Things like frozen prepared meals, soups, and pizzas go well also.

Dry Goods Truck

1. Staple dry goods
   - Canned beans
   - Canned vegetables
   - Pasta
   - Pasta sauce
   - Diced tomatoes
   - Cereal
   - Oats
   - Pancake mix
   - Canned chicken or tuna

2. Meal enhancing dry goods
   - Ketchup
   - Broth
   - Syrup

3. Rescued dry goods
4. Non food items

**Non food items**

4 BIG COOLERS 2 SMALL COOLERS  
- Big coolers for misc. meat and small coolers for milk and eggs

2 SMALL TABLES 6 BIG TABLES  
- Small tables for check in and educational resources and big tables for food

14 TENTS  
- To shade our food, volunteers, and shoppers

ALL TENT WEIGHTS  
- To keep the tents from blowing away

GLOVES  
- Part of our COVID-19 protocol

MASKS  
- Part of our COVID-19 protocol

BROWN BINS  
- To display food

COLORED BINS  
- To display food

DOORKNOB BAGS/TWIST TIES  
- To bag large quantities of food into smaller bags

TSHIRT BAGS  
- For shoppers to put produce in

PAPER BAGS  
- For shoppers to put dry goods in

VOLUNTEER WATER  
- Water for our volunteers and shoppers

BLEACH BUCKET  
- Part of our COVID-19 protocol

PB&J BOX  
- For out staff to be able to eat lunch

SOCIAL DISTANCING SIGNS  
- Part of our COVID-19 protocol

6 CHAIRS  
- For our volunteers to be able to get off their feet

ROLLING CART  
- To display dry goods
WAGON
- To move heavy items long distances

The following are estimates of how many kids we usually serve at each stop in 2020. Check with Program Manager or CFO to find out current KPI of number of kids served at each location.

Over pack the first week and then consider a 10-20% increase as weeks go on. July 4th week is typically lower. Bring gift cards in case you run out of food.

Cold Spring: 100-150

Rochester Rec: 150-200

Fox Run Mall: 30-70

Kittery: 30-70

Gosling: 80-120

Hampton: 20-50

Seabrook Rec: 100-150

210 West: 20-50

b. 210 West

This is set up like on the road but set up just outside our front door. All food used for this distribution need to be weighed out and in and recorded on a separate sheet from the M4K on the road.

1) Dry goods

Dry goods bags should be premade at least a day in advance. They should have about 7 items in them, and shouldn’t be made with the same 7 items every week. For example the bags could have kidney beans, canned green beans, pasta, canned tuna, jelly, mac n cheese, and pasta sauce one week and have black beans, canned corn, rice, peanut butter, mac n cheese, and diced tomatoes the
next week. Each kid will get one dry goods bag. You should also have snacks and meal enhancers like ketchup, broth, or anything the pantry needs to get rid of out with you on the check in table so that shoppers can take if they want.

2) Produce Cart

Always use rescued produce first. Set up a produce cart out front much like the dry goods cart we have on the road. Have a variety of produce that you can make a meal with, putting the most important stuff at the shopper’s eye level.

3) Milk, Eggs, and Meat

Keep milk, eggs, and meat in a refrigerator in the front room and give them out just as you would on the road.
4. Print Rosters
We keep track of who we are distributing to by checking people in whenever they come to a M4K distribution. Most people who come have come to M4K before, so we just check off their names on the rosters/sign-in sheets.

Go to https://gather.soxbox.co/

Click Reports, Guest, Guest Data

Scroll down, and click the list that you want to print (M4K Participant list for the Seacoast roster, M4K Participant list Rochester for the Rochester Roster).
Then click Export

Open the exported file in Excel.

- Rearrange and bold headers in the order that follows: Parent Last, Parent First, Kid First, Kid Last, DOB, Address, City, Cell Phone
- Headers must repeat on the first line of every page. Click Print tiles, then rows repeat at top, then click little box, then click row 1
- Custom Sort list by Parent Last A-Z, then Parent First A-Z, then DOB oldest to newest
- Insert an empty column on the far left for a check mark
• Be sure to print the borders of all cells
• Format the document so all info is visible. It is very important that the parent last name and first name can be read, this is how people will check in for M4K. This can be done by clicking the merge & center button and selecting shrink to fit.
• Replace all dates of Birth that are 1/1 of any year with a blank space. We use 1/1/2010 and 1/1/2020 most frequently as a placeholder date for kids whose birthdays we don’t have. Blanking out these dates tells the person checking people in to ask for the kid’s date of birth.
• Page orientation must be landscape
• After formatting to create a useable list, print the worksheet. You will need 1 copy for each of the distribution sites (7 on the Seacoast, 3 in Rochester)

5. Send Textedly Reminder

Every week we send a mass text to M4K participants reminding them that Meals 4 Kids is happening again.

a. Login

Open another tab
Go to Textedly.com

b. Upload List

In the 1st tab, soxbox (A.K.A Foodbank Manager or FBM)
   1. Click Reports, Guest, Guest Data
2. Scroll down to Presets and click **textedly_pull seacoast** or **textedly pull rochester** (we text Rochester and our other locations separately because it would be very difficult to track our visits if we had 800+ people going to any of our 10 locations).

3. Scroll down and click “Export” to open the file in excel

In the 2nd tab, Textedly.com

1. Click on your **SUBSCRIBERS** tab
2. Click on **NEW SUBSCRIBER** in the upper right hand corner

3. Click **UPLOAD LIST**

4. If the **UPLOAD LIST** tab still shows a request box or pending status, log off then back in again or refresh your webpage
5. **VERY IMPORTANT** - Your list MUST be formatted exactly like the example in the link, including all the column headers in columns A through J. You do not need to have data in the rows below any column header except for column A which is the Phone column.

6. **The Headers Should Be Ordered As Follows:** Phone, First Name, Last Name, Email, Address, City, State, Zip, Company Name, Tags

**DOWNLOAD THIS TEMPLATE, COPY AND PASTE YOUR OWN DATA INTO THE CELLS, THEN SAVE AS A .CSV**

Here are some helpful videos:

**Tags and Filters:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9OOaFC9WxZOYzVDdkt4YXI3UDA/view?usp=sharing

**How to import:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9OOaFC9WxZOeXM1ZF8wVWU1NG8/view?usp=sharing

c. Send Text

In Textedly.com

1. Click on the “Messages” tab on the left
2. click “New Message” in the top right.

3. Select the keyword(s) that you wish to send the text to (M4K goes to people on the Seacoast, ROCH goes to people in Rochester, and M4T goes to teenagers on the Seacoast, MARKET is for anyone interested in Mobile Markets, and GATHERNH is for anyone in the Pantry Market –informing them of Thanksgiving or other events)

4. Compose the message
5. Check for errors
6. Check for mistakes
7. Correct typos
8. Send text (or schedule)

The messages are limited to 160 characters, but can be upgraded to 306 characters to count as 2 messages. Use only 160 characters when you can because more messages cost money.
Here are some example texts sent in summer of 2020:

**Mondays:**
Gather's M4K Markets every Tuesday in Rochester

Cold Spring & Rochester Rec: [https://www.gathernh.org/rochm4k](https://www.gathernh.org/rochm4k)

Please remember to stay 6 feet apart

**Tuesdays:**

Gather's M4K

Weds: Portsmouth & Kittery

Thurs: Hampton & Seabrook

Both days: 210 West Road

Schedule: [https://tinyurl.com/y78bfzk](https://tinyurl.com/y78bfzk)
Pls stay 6 ft apart
6. Distribution (also see ch. 8 COVID-19 protocol)

a. set up

Upon arrival to a location, park your two vehicles on opposite ends with their tailgates facing each other. You may have more or less than two vehicles depending on the size of your operation, but for the purposes of this description we’ll assume you’re using one regular box truck for dry goods and nonfood items like tables, and one refrigerated box truck for things like fresh produce.

Before beginning your set up you should have a little meeting with all new volunteers and explain the program. To them and what they can do to help (see volunteer roles).

Here is how we set up our distribution from left to right in 2020:

1. check in station

The check in table is placed right next to the tailgate of the dry goods truck. In front of the check in tables we have a table for snacks, a small table for educational resources, and a rolling cart with extra dry goods that we brought with us that day. This cart usually will include things like any candy that gets donated to us, cooking utensils, or somethings just things that we have in excess at the pantry that we want to get rid of fast.

2. coolers

We bring 4 large coolers out to distributions to store our miscellaneous frozen goods that are rescued from local stores. This is mostly meat, but we also get things like frozen pizza, noodles, or even ice cream. We have 2 full coolers at all times to be shopped from and use the other two as back up so we can fill them while people are shopping.

3. dry goods

This year we started putting all of our dry goods on a rolling cart, and it has worked very well for us. It is important to place items that are essential for a meal
like rice, canned vegetables, and beans at eye level so shoppers will be more inclined to take them, and to place more “eye catching” items like juice and condiments on lower shelves because shoppers will be more willing to reach down for stuff like that.

4. produce

We have four tables dedicated to produce. We put root vegetables on the first table because they are heavy, and we don’t want them going on top of lighter produce. Rescued produce should always be the first thing to go, so we put as much of that out as we can before we start using anything that we purchased. To help ensure that the rescued vegetables are being taken first we put them on the second table. Purchased vegetables can be put on the third table, but only after the rescued vegetables have been used, or you run out of variety within your rescued vegetables. The fourth table is for fruit and is the only table that fruit should be going on.

5. bread

The fifth table is where we keep the bread so that it doesn’t get crushed by the other items.

6. milk, meat, and eggs

This is the last station our shoppers will visit. Each of these items should be left in coolers just outside the cold truck replenish as needed.

All stations should be covered with tents to protect the food, our shoppers, and our volunteers from the sun. There should also be tents over the line so that our members have shade while they are waiting to shop.

b. Volunteer/Staff Roles

The first role that should be assigned is a check in person. They’re responsible for checking families in as well as monitoring the snack table and miscellaneous dry goods cart. The same check in person should do the same location(s) every weeks to build a sense of familiarity between our shoppers and M4K.
We usually have one person in the truck making bags, and two people on the ground putting the bags in the small coolers and handing them out to shoppers.

A line manager should be used to monitor the shoppers in line to make sure they are staying 6 ft apart from one another during COVID, and they are also responsible for signing up new members and handing out our weekly recipes.

A volunteer or staff member should be in charge of making sure the coolers are kept stocked at all times and ensuring that shoppers are only shopping from the front two coolers and not the backup coolers.

Other roles for volunteers include helping shoppers carry bags to their cars, restocking stations when food gets low, consolidating food, putting large quantities of food into smaller bags, breaking down empty boxes, and more.

c. Breakdown

Breaking down should begin 15 minutes before the scheduled end time of the distribution you are at so that you can leave in time to set up your next distribution. Tents should be the first thing that get put away as they take a surprisingly long time and it allows the market to continue running during the breakdown because food is still out. Once the last shopper is checked in, start clearing the station behind them as they shop the line. It is important to make sure the shopper doesn’t feel rushed, so let them know they can take their time and you are going at their pace.

It’s a good idea to bring some premade bags of dry goods, produce, and dairy incase shoppers show up after you’ve already put all the food away.

7. Education items

Beyond just giving people food, Meals 4 Kids is about educating on types of food, healthy eating, and cooking. Distributions should have a small resource table that includes miscellaneous pamphlets or materials that could benefit the people coming to M4K.
a. Cooking Samples and Recipes

Work with the cooking team to get some pre-made meals/sides like pasta salad and salsa to give out on the road. Print the recipes to give out as well. They usually use the same meat and produce of the week as we do.

b. Suicide Prevention

A large amount of the funding for M4K comes from a grant from Exeter hospital for suicide prevention. On top of providing healthy food to promote healthy living and therefore healthy minds, we try to provide some direct education on suicide prevention.

c. Recipes

In 2020 we had a local nutritionist who has been nice enough to lend us her services, so we email her every week telling her what food we will be bringing out and she puts together a recipe sheet based on that.

d. COVID Resources

This year we put together fliers with resources for Rockingham and Strafford counties for families who are struggling financially during the pandemic. The flier includes information like places families can get free meals, internet providers who aren’t charging late fees, and other resources like this.

e. Other Resources

We’ve also had this year include flyers for Waypoint, End 68 Hours of Hunger, summer camps, and more.
8. COVID-19 Protocol

a. Social Distancing
It is important to remind all volunteers and members to stay 6 ft apart from one another at all times. One way to help ensure that this happens is to put all stations at least 6 feet apart from each other, and not allowing members to advance to the next station unless there aren’t any people at it. It’s also important to remind volunteers to refrain from restocking stations while members are shopping at them.

b. Masks and Gloves
All staff and volunteers must be wearing a mask and gloves at all times during distributions. During load out in the morning, make sure you pack at least 1 box of gloves of all sizes (S, M, L, XL) and at least one box of masks. Although we don’t currently require our members to wear masks when they are shopping, pay close attention to local government mandates to make sure we are complying with the constantly changing regulations.

c. Sanitation
The first thing that needs to be done at every M4K distribution is sanitizing our tables, carts, and cooler tops. In the morning we make a sanitization solution out of bleach and water that is kept in a bucket with a lid and some rags. At the end of the day all coolers must be sanitized inside and out.
9. Surveying

a. When
We generally find the best time of year to conduct surveys with our members is. Around the last couple weeks of July at the earliest or the first week of August at the latest. The reason for this is because after about two thirds of the summer, our members have enough experience shopping with our program to be able to give meaningful feedback that we can use to better the program, and it leaves us with a month to start implementing whatever changes need to be made.

b. Where
We conduct our member surveys on the road at each of our M4K locations. We have found that the most efficient way to do this is by assigning an extra manager to the line whose sole responsibility is to assist our members in completing the surveys. Conducting surveys in person is really the only way we can guarantee that we will get the completed surveys back for analysis.

c. How
Conducting surveys in this setting requires a careful balance of asking enough questions to get useful data, but not asking so many that our members are dreading having to fill them out. It’s important to think carefully about how each question on the survey will be used to make the program better so that there aren’t a bunch of unnecessary questions taking up space.
Rochester Summer Meals for Kids (M4K) Mobile Market Parent/Guardian Survey

1. How did you hear about the Meals for Kids (M4K), Gather’s Mobile Market in Rochester? (Select all that apply)
   - At Gather in Portsmouth
   - Online (Gather or M4K Market website)
   - From a friend or relative
   - From another agency (e.g., housing authority, school, another food program/pantry)
   - A flyer or advertisement
   - Other (please specify)_________________________________

2. When did you first visit M4K/Gather’s mobile market in Rochester? Pick only one.
   - In 2019 (Before COVID)
   - In the Winter/Spring of 2020 (when COVID began)
   - In Summer 2020
   - In Fall/Winter 2020 or Winter/Spring 2021
   - This Summer (2021)

3. How often have you used M4K/the mobile market since the first time you visited the market?
   - All of the time - Every week since my first visit
   - Most weeks – I rarely miss a week
   - Fairly regularly – I attend more than half the time
   - Occasionally – I attend about half the time or somewhat less
   - Rarely – I hardly ever attend

4. If you choose “occasionally” or “rarely” in response to the question above, please select the reason(s) below that explain why you use the market as often as you do (choose all that apply).
   - Transportation/I had trouble getting there all of the time or most weeks.
   - The hours/days of the week didn’t work well for me.
   - I don’t need the food all of the time or most weeks
   - I receive other assistance with food so didn’t need to use M4K all of the time or most weeks.
   - If there is another reason, please describe it here: ________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Using the scale below, please tell us how much or how little you agree with each statement about HOW M4K HAS AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) eat a larger variety of foods than they would if M4K didn’t exist.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) are eating healthier foods than they would if M4K didn’t exist.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren)’s understanding of how food choices affect health is better than it would be if M4K didn’t exist</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The health of my child(ren) is better than it would be if M4K didn’t exist.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I save money on food, I have more money available for other expenses (e.g., rent, utilities, transportation).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please turn the page over for the rest of the survey
6. Is your child/children helping to prepare meals more often since you started attending M4K?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No, if no, why not (select all that apply)
  - [ ] One or more of my children is too young to help prepare meals
  - [ ] My child/children were helping to prepare meals prior to attending M4K
  - [ ] I do not expect/want my children to participate in preparing meals
  - [ ] Other (please explain) ____________________________________________

7. Please use the scale below to rate M4K and its offerings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The variety of foods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of foods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The recipes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather’s Prepared Foods</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(summer 2021 only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mobile Market overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Please select true or false for each statement below.

- [ ] True          [ ] False
  - I plan to use the Rochester M4K next summer too.

- [ ] True          [ ] False
  - I would recommend the M4K to other families.

9. Please finish the sentence below:

Without M4K, ____________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

10. Is there anything we could do to improve M4K? If so, please offer your suggestion below.

Thank you for completing this survey.