



neighbor to neighbor

News from Freeport Community Services

FALL 2020

A virtuous circle

Ever heard of a vicious circle? The kind that starts with a single negative event and results in a cascade of other negative events?

A different kind of circle began in Freeport and Pownal—a virtuous circle. Back in May, two middle school friends, Lana DiRusso of Freeport and Mary MacDonald of Pownal, struck upon a great idea. With a little help from their parents, the two girls organized the Save a Business, Feed a Family fundraiser on GoFundMe. The idea was to raise money to buy gift certificates at local restaurants struggling during those early days of the pandemic. The gift certificates would be tucked inside bags of food handed out at Freeport Community Services' food pantry. In total, the girls raised over \$5,000 that has been distributed to local families. Families were fed. Local businesses were



Lana and Mary deliver gift cards to FCS.



Kennebec Savings Bank donated to FCS to support local restaurants, including Antonia's.

supported. Our community grew stronger and the girls' great idea kicked off a new chain of events.

At Kennebec Savings Bank, they heard about the Lana and Mary's fundraiser. "We thought their campaign was a brilliant way to give back to those in need while supporting local restaurants that are working hard to keep their doors open," said Amanda Cooley, the Community Engagement Director at Kennebec Savings Bank. Inspired by Lana and Mary,

Kennebec Savings Bank has donated \$2,500 to Freeport Community Services. An additional \$2,500 each was given to four other food pantries within Kennebec County and the greater Freeport area. On top of that, KSB donated \$12,500 to Good Shepherd Food Bank to support those five pantries.

As fall arrived, the funds from Kennebec Savings Bank were used to purchase more gift certificates. FCS set out to boost local restaurants with a fresh infusion of support at a time when the state was



FCS partnered with Laughing Stock Farm

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Mission Statement

To enrich lives, connect neighbors and help those in need in Freeport and Pownal.

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Dear Friends,

We are here for you, because you have been here for us.

The pandemic has impacted us all in different ways. For families who face perennial challenges, the hurdle of stay-at-home orders or lost wages was simply another trial they needed to overcome. Other neighbors found themselves in the position of needing help for the first time in their lives. Freeport Community Services was proud to stand with you all as we navigated these new waters together.

Over these last months, we have been overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of our community. While we grieve for things that have changed, we can find deep gratitude for the gifts we may not have known without this moment. Gifts like seeing two middle school friends launch a micro-movement of positivity that continues to have an impact to this day. Or, local treasures like Desert of Maine finding creative ways to gather together with a socially distanced picnic in the dunes.

At FCS, our work continues and that is its own gift. Being able to serve our community provides us with purpose and deepens our commitment to each other. We know that many of you miss the part you have played in this work. And, we dearly miss you. We miss our volunteers serving Friday lunches or ringing up Thrift Shop finds. We miss chatting with you over coffee. We miss the energy and enthusiasm you bring to our Community Center. We can't wait for the day we can safely welcome you all back inside.

We will continue to take heart in the work you are doing for our community outside our walls. You are holding food drives like the November event at Laughing Stock Farm and the Pickle to Pantry tournament in October. You are knitting mittens for our Harvest Helpers drive. Just as you have been here for FCS in these trying times, we will always be here for you.

Wishing you all peace and health and the happiest of holiday seasons,


Paula
Executive Director

A season of giving back

Many families are wondering what the holidays will look like this year. Will they be able to travel? Is it safe to have visitors from out of state? We may find ourselves mourning the loss of some traditions just as we find joy in creating new ways of celebrating the season.



There is one holiday tradition in Freeport and Pownal that will remain unchanged—the Holiday Helpline. At FCS, we know there are families who will be facing their first holiday after losing a job or facing drastic pay cuts. It is truly a gift to be able to help these families keep their own unique holiday traditions alive.

Beginning with Thanksgiving, FCS will create and provide holiday food baskets for families. Last year, FCS provided over 100 Thanksgiving baskets, feeding nearly 400 people. This year, families will have the option of choosing between two types of baskets. The first option will be the traditional basket, overflowing with food to prepare your very own Thanksgiving Day meal. The second option is a precooked meal that you will be able to warm up, rather than having to cook from scratch.

After Thanksgiving, FCS will quickly shift gears to get ready for the winter holidays. For many years, FCS has helped generous community members fulfill wish lists for Freeport and Pownal families. Gifts are purchased, wrapped, and delivered to FCS for families to pick up in time for the holidays. Last year, 380 people were 'adopted' and FCS anticipates an increased need this year. Luckily, we know that the generosity of our community is the true joy of this season.

For information about FCS' Holiday Helpline, contact Sarah Lundin at 865-3985 x205 or slundin@fcsmaine.org



volunteer spotlight

Randy Pepper

How did you start volunteering at FCS?

I worked for 25 years as a computer programmer, but I always felt I hadn't done anything worthwhile with my time. Working on a payroll system, making sure executives got their paychecks, wasn't the most important thing in the world.



I went to SMCC and got an Associate's Degree in Human Services. Then, I worked as a case manager at Tedford Housing, a homeless shelter in Brunswick. I left to care for my mother and after she died, I decided I'd rather do something local. Some of my neighbors worked at FCS and the Food Pantry interested me. It gave me an opportunity to work with clients. That was 8 years ago.

What else have you done at FCS?

For a couple of years, I worked for the Holiday Helpline. I worked full time from October to January. I had a phone, a desk, did excel spreadsheets, and set up a system. I've worked on other special projects. Everybody here does.

How has Covid changed volunteering at FCS?

Well, one of the main things was that there wasn't any volunteering at first. It was a helpless feeling knowing that stuff needed to be done, but not being able to do anything. I've only been back working here a couple of weeks.

What does FCS mean to you?

It's my community. I know there are a lot of people who need help, even if they keep it hidden. I think people need to look out for each other, especially in a rural area. I feel strongly about that. I grew up in a household where volunteering was a big part of my life. I was brought up to believe that people who are given a lot are expected to give a lot back.



thrift shop update

The Thrift Shop is offering **Time to Thrift** appointment shopping to keep our customers safe and warm. No waiting outside in the cold and snow!

One-hour Time to Thrift appointments are available:

Tues., Wed., and Fri. at 12 pm, 1 pm and 2 pm
Saturday at 10 am and 11 am

Here's how it works:

- Come by FCS to pick up a ticket on the day you wish to shop.
- Tickets are free and available starting at 9:30 am outside FCS.
- Choose a ticket for the hour you want to shop.
- Doors open at the time printed on the ticket—no need to stand in line!
- Browse and shop, then be ready to check out 15 minutes prior to the end of your time.

One ticket per person, please. Your ticket is valid for the time and day printed on it. There is no need to call or email. Just swing by the shop to choose your time.

Regular drop-in shopping is still available too!

Drop-in hours:

Tues., Wed., and Fri. 3 - 5 pm
Saturday 12 - 3 pm

If the need to adapt arises, we will keep you posted on Facebook and Instagram as well as our website [fcsmaine.org/thrift-shop](https://www.fcsmaine.org/thrift-shop)

Happy Shopping!

PS... Don't forget our donation times are:
Tuesdays & Fridays 10 - 3
Or call 865-3985 x 207 if you need to make special arrangements.



Race for Your Neighbors

During this season of social distancing, FCS will be trying new ways to come together as a community. Race For Your Neighbors was our first 'apart together' event.



Susanna Hancock in costume on the water.

On the warm and sunny weekend of November 7th and 8th, friends all over Freeport and Pownal headed out to support their neighbors. Hiking, biking, dog walking and roller blading, they hit the streets. A few racers even took to the water paddling and rowing to show their support.

FCS hid three little houses, representing the three houses of our Community Center, around Freeport. Racers had all weekend to search for them. If they found all three and posted their pictures on Facebook or Instagram, they were entered in a drawing for



Annie and Greg Flewelling found all 3 houses.

a \$250 gift certificate at L.L. Bean. Congratulations Annie & Greg Flewelling took home the grand prize!

Stay tuned for future socially distanced ways to come together as a community. If you would like to help organize future events, contact Christine at cllyons@fcsmaine.org.



Palmer kids race for FCS.



Harvest Helpers

A drive-up and drop-off way to donate

Rain and wind could not dampen the spirits of the Freeport and Pownal community or the FCS staff at the first ever Harvest Helpers event.

In the time of Covid, we are all looking for ways to help our neighbors while maintaining social distance. Harvest Helpers was FCS' first contact-light event. Nearly 30 cars braved blustery October weather to deliver new socks, hats, mittens, scarves, and face masks. Some came from as far afield as Portland, while others drove from just around the corner. Several cars delivered on behalf of their neighborhoods or organizations.

FCS staff thanked them all with delicious doughnuts and apples donated by Thompson's Orchards of New Gloucester. Our drive-up donators were entered in a raffle for a \$25 Thrift Shop Gift Certificate. Dorris Flaherty came up from Portland to deliver a bundle of hand knitted goods and drove away as our winner.

By the end of the morning, FCS had collected hundreds of items from thermal socks to pom-pom hats. Donations continued to come in for days after the event. In early November, volunteers began the task of sorting and wrapping the items. Wrapped donations will be delivered to families in our community as part of FCS' annual Holiday Helpline. In these times especially, it means so much to deliver a gift of warmth to our neighbors.



programming updates

Our doors are always open!

While some things here may look a little different, FCS will always be about neighbors helping neighbors. We're helping keep our neighbors warm, safe, and fed throughout this pandemic and beyond.

- **Referrals** to outside resources connect our neighbors to the help they need.
- **Fuel assistance** program keeps homes in Freeport and Pownal warm through the winter.
- **CMP disconnect help** will be more critical than ever. CMP payment deferral can create a steep cliff of bills that families will face in the spring.
- **Free school lunches** provided by the RSU5 through the end of the school year to all students as part of a collaboration with FCS and the Free Summer Lunch Program.
- **Backpacks** are back in student lockers discretely providing food to sustain children over the weekends.
- **Emergency assistance** helps with medication co-pays, gasoline, car repairs, and other emergent needs.
- **Medical loan closet** offers equipment including walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, and shower benches.
- **Age Friendly Freeport** initiatives move forward in 2021, spurred on by a \$10,000 grant.
- **Sand bucket brigade** returns this winter! Need sand for your walk or driveway? Can you help deliver sand to your neighbors? Contact Tawni Whitney from Freeport Friends at 774-212-0269.
- **Food Pantry** hours are Monday and Wednesday from 11am-1pm in the food pantry parking lot at 55 Depot Street. Can't make it to the pantry? No problem! Reach out to Sarah to set up weekly home deliveries.

For more information, contact Sarah at 865-3985 x205 or slundin@fcsmaine.org



Betsy Ruff (2nd from right) with founding mothers.

Our roots run deep

The roots of FCS have become local lore. Back in the 1970s, a group of dedicated women joined forces to address emergent needs in our community.

Freeport Community Services began as an all-volunteer organization out of a borrowed garage on East Street in Freeport. "Once something like this starts," mused Betsy Ruff, FCS' first director, "it spreads." FCS did just that, growing up from its grassroots into the organization we know today.

FCS has created a model that communities such as Yarmouth and Standish have sought to emulate.

Meeting the needs of Pownal and Freeport

FCS will always be deeply committed to meeting the needs of our hometown one family at a time. "Things always cropped up," Betsy explained. "Needs aren't always material." Sometimes they were about other ways of finding support, like a group that formed to support families grieving the loss of a child. "It's very easy to overlook peoples' needs," Betsy said. When someone came to FCS for help, Betsy's first impulse was, "I think we can do it!"

A legacy worth preserving

When looking back on her time with FCS, Betsy Ruff was proud to have been part of it and felt that she had "made a difference in this community." It is a legacy worth preserving.

If you would like to give a gift to Freeport Community Services as part of your legacy, contact Kim Hudak at 865-3985.

A community of giving

A sweet way to donate

Catherine Carty-Wilbur found a sweet way to express her gratitude for Dr. Nirav Shah and his work during this pandemic. Shah Bars have been a big hit throughout Maine and a big help for our tri-town community, with 10% of the proceeds going to support FCS' Food Pantry. When asked why they chose to give to FCS' Food Pantry, Kristin Frazier of Wilbur's explained that they wanted the money to go where it could do the most good. Over 10,000 Shar Bars have been sold as of November and over \$2,300 donated to FCS!



Farm to pantry

Every year, Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment joyfully donates thousands of pounds of fresh, local produce to FCS and other organizations dedicated to fighting hunger. With this year's drought, there

was simply less produce coming from their fields. "Even though we produced less, it was our priority to support our neighbors in Freeport and Pownal," said Jim DeGrandpre of Wolfe's Neck. "And donating to Freeport Community Services is the best way to do that!" They even delivered fresh flowers — truly brightening everyone's day!

Chickens to kitchens

Three high school seniors focused on addressing food insecurity in the community for their senior projects at Freeport High School. Lizzie Soule, Rachel Wiest, and Natalie Domin, now FHS grads, raised a total of 82 chickens which they donated to food pantries at Portland's Preble Street and FCS. They crowdsourced funds to purchase the chicks as well as the grain and processing. FCS received 35 frozen birds along with 181 items of non-perishable food the girls bought with their leftover funds.



Picnic in the Desert

On July 18th, Desert of Maine hosted a Picnic At The Desert, raising \$2,500 to benefit FCS. This socially distanced event featured an individually boxed fried chicken dinner by Gather restaurant in Yarmouth and was topped off by dessert from Wicked Whoopies. Picnic goers were treated to a live music by the Americana band Magic 8 Ball.

"Virtuous Circle" continued from pg. 1

facing a second downturn in business. "Traditionally, fall is when our Freeport restaurants participate in our annual Chowdah Challenge," explains Sarah Lundin of Freeport Community Services. "This year, it's our turn to support them."

As Lundin began to think of other ways FCS could support local businesses, local farms were one obvious answer. Just as business had dropped off for restaurants, the local farms that supplied much of their fresh produce felt the pinch as well. Lundin saw an opportunity. She reached out to Laughing Stock Farm to supply the FCS food pantry with fresh, nutritious, local produce.

Bessie's, a local farm stand that offers delectable baked goods and comforting soups, was another resource Lundin tapped. In October, Lundin contracted with Bessie's to provide a meal for FCS' revamped 'drive through' Free Friday Lunches. For Bessie's, partnering with FCS is not an entirely a new connection. "We grew up volunteering," explains Lily Montgomery, who makes Bessie's soups and is the daughter of one of its founders. "And, my grandmother used to work at The Clothes Tree, before it was the Thrift Shop."



Lily Montgomery making soup for Free Friday Lunch.

Montgomery worked for a long time as the coordinator for the Bowdoinham Food Pantry and has done a lot of food sustainability work and farming. She got interested in making soup as a way of using less-than-perfect produce to make something beautiful and nourishing. Montgomery is diligent about using local produce. She explained how projects like cooking for FCS tap into her personal passions for food and farming and gardening. "It's been cool to combine my passion for food security and making good food accessible to everyone, with the local food movement and supporting my local farming friends. Tying them all together in one pretty package is too good to be true," says Montgomery.



Delivering warm food to neighbors

There is one last link in the chain of this circle of positivity and giving. On Fridays at noon, a brightly decorated van pulls up to the curb at FCS. The front seat gets loaded up with warm, homemade food. Then, the driver of the van heads off to deliver the goods her neighbors.

It's easy to forget that this virtuous circle began as an idea between two friends. But, for those who have been a part of the circle, it will be impossible to forget the impact it has had on their lives.

stay in touch with FCS

Communication is so key in these challenging times. Here's how to stay in touch with with Freeport Community Services.

Emails

Freeport Community Services uses Mailchimp to make our email communication more efficient. For some, this means FCS emails may land in your Spam folder.

To be sure you are getting news and updates from FCS, please ADD sadams@fcsmaine.org & clyons@fcsmaine.org to your email CONTACTS. Still not getting our emails? Check your SPAM folder! If FCS is in your SPAM, please mark it as Not Spam or Not Junk.

Website

Wondering what's up at FCS? Check out our beautiful new website at fcsmaine.org. You'll find helpful information from Thrift Shop donation times to Food Pantry Hours.

Newsletters

Not on our mailing list? Want to go paperless? Contact Kim Hudak at khudak@fcsmaine.org or 865-3985 to get on our mailing list or request an emailed version of your newsletter.



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Community Programs and Services Ext. 205

Donations Hotline Ext. 216

Volunteer Coordinator Ext. 206

Open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm



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