



# WASHINGTON, D.C.

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## Friends Caring for Friends



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Since 1988, Food & Friends has been caring for the Washington, D.C., metropolitan community — specifically those living with HIV/AIDS, cancer and other life-challenging illnesses, like Lou Gehrig's disease, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's — by preparing and delivering specialized meals and groceries. In fact, in the last 25 years, the organization has delivered more than 15 million meals to nearly 22,000 clients.

What started in the basement of the Westminster Presbyterian Church with just 20 volunteers has evolved to meet the changing needs of the community over the last two decades. The organization has since moved from the cramped church basement to a state-of-the-art kitchen and pantry facility and initiated new programs, including nutrition counseling and education.

"A basic need is having healthy food, and for our clients who are really sick, they don't have the ability to go shopping and cook and prepare healthy meals," says Stacy England Grom, who has worked her way up the ladder at Food & Friends over the last seven years. She now serves as associate director of development for communications and special events. "We take all of the guessing and stress of planning healthy meals out of it."

Food & Friends is the only organization of its kind in the District of Columbia — the service area encompasses nearly 5,300 square miles, from D.C. to Maryland and Virginia. With a staff of professional chefs and registered dietitians, meals are catered to meet the special dietary needs of people living with a broad range of illnesses. In fact, the chefs and dietitians at Food & Friends have developed 11 different meal plans for six weeks' worth of deliveries, so a client never eats the same thing twice during that time.

While the organization and the breadth of its services may have grown, however, the core idea behind its operations remains simple. "Food & Friends was built out of a need of friends wanting to take care of their friends," says England Grom. "That's still our philosophy. We want to take care of our friends in the community."

Take care of the community they do. Food & Friends delivers six days a week, 52 weeks a year. And the organization doesn't just feed sick clients. "For a lot of families, we have mothers who are sick and still need to care for their children, so we make that possible by serving all dependents and caregivers in the household, too," says England Grom. The meals are completely free of charge, and while eligibility requirements are based on illness, not income, more than 75 percent of Food & Friends'



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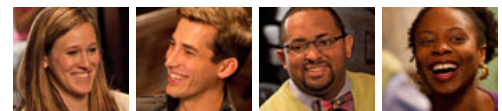


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clients have monthly incomes less than \$1,000.

Food & Friends' services are made possible with the help of more than 12,000 volunteers and 20,000 individual and corporate supporters. There are many ways one can get involved, whether volunteering in the kitchen, the office or on the road. "Our greatest need for volunteers is to do deliveries," says England Grom. "Fortunately, our delivery coordinator is fantastic at finding a route and days and times that fit into your schedule, so it's easier for you to lend a hand." Routes take about two hours.

Monetary donations are always welcome as well. "We are truly grateful for every single penny that comes through this door, and we work really hard to make sure those dollars are being put to good use," says England Grom. Another way people help is by hosting food drives for Food & Friends' Groceries-to-Go program, which provides groceries to individuals and families who live outside the meals delivery area or who are healthy enough to prepare their own meals.

"What makes us really unique and special is the relationship that we have with employees and volunteers and clients," says England Grom. "This really is like a big family, a big community, and we're all here to support and take care of each other." What's more, since every meal is home delivered, the delivery volunteers are often the only people clients see all day. "That's why friendship, empathy and kindness are as much a part of the sustenance we provide as the meals we prepare," says England Grom.



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