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DAILY NEWS

LOCAL

When federal support faltered, Milford MA pantry got help near home

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

- A Milford food pantry received a free roof replacement from a local company amid rising demand and federal funding uncertainty.
- The Daily Bread Food Pantry has seen visits nearly triple in the past year, and now serves 80 to 90 families weekly.
- The donated roof, worth up to \$17,000, allows the pantry to redirect funds toward food and operational costs.
- Run entirely by volunteers, Daily Bread relies on community support from local businesses, churches, and residents to meet growing needs.

When federal and state guidance on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program swung back and forth earlier this month, the Daily Bread Food Pantry in Milford — and the families depending on it — found its steadiest support from right in the community.

A Milford roofing company, Master Roof, donated the labor and materials for a full roof replacement at the Exchange Street pantry, offering it a measure of stability when the government offered little. Other local organizations have stepped in as well, helping the pantry keep pace as the holiday season drew near.

“All the money that would have gone toward the roof can now go toward food for the people who need it,” said Francis DeAngelo, president of Daily Bread.

A small pantry bearing a much larger load

Founded in 1991, the Daily Bread Food Pantry serves families in Milford, Hopedale, Upton and others. Manager Cheryl DeAngelo and her late husband, John, built it from a small church initiative into a steady local resource.

Their son, Francis — a lifelong volunteer who became president after his father's death in 2023 — now helps lead it alongside his mother.

"I was 6 years old when the food pantry was established," said Francis, a history teacher at Milford High School. "Naturally, I was part of the process — organizing food drives, volunteering on Tuesdays and Thursdays, supervising over the summer."

Pantry visits have nearly triple in the past year

Today, Daily Bread runs entirely on roughly 100 volunteers who handle intake, stocking, distribution and home deliveries. Open on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, the pantry moves 3,000 to 7,000 pounds of food each week, supplied primarily by the Worcester County Food Bank and local grocers.

As local need has grown, the pantry has grown with it. What began as an entity serving about 25 families a week now supports 80 to 90 — a figure that climbs as the holidays approach. Over the past year, total visits have nearly tripled, from 5,600 people in 2023 to more than 16,000 in 2024.

More: SNAP recipients can spend unused money on their EBT card for up to 274 days

This surge coincided with a brief disruption to SNAP benefits earlier this month, before the federal government reopened and restored November assistance. State Rep. Brian Murray, D-Milford, said the lapse reflected a broader pattern of federal retrenchment that local providers are increasingly expected to absorb.

"The federal government has been cutting across the board — food assistance, transportation projects, research, even school meals," he said. "The magnitude of those

reductions just can't be made up by any single state.”

At the same time, Daily Bread was confronting a major expense of its own: replacing its 30-year-old roof. Estimated to cost between \$15,000 and \$17,000, the project would have taken a significant bite out of the food budget during the busiest stretch of the year.

A roof raised by neighbors

Help ultimately came from another corner of Milford. After Tri-County Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Laura O'Callaghan and Director of Programs and Services Sherri Hannon learned the pantry needed to replace its aging roof, they reached out to Master Roof, a company led by the father-and-son combo of Wilson and Paul Valdez. They agreed to take on the project at no cost.

“The minute they were asked, they just said yes,” Cheryl DeAngelo said. “That takes a special kind of person.”

The Valdezes then turned to their primary supplier, GAF — one of the nation's largest shingle manufacturers — which agreed to donate all necessary materials: shingles, underlayment and leak-prevention barriers. In recognition of their donations, Murray issued formal House citations to both companies.

“It's a wonderful project for a business looking to meet a need for a provider of charitable services,” he said. “And as we continue down this very uncertain road of federal government support, unfortunately we're going to need more and more of these kinds of contributions.”

Master Roof, other community members get to work

The job moved quickly from promise to action.

On Nov. 1, a Master Roof crew arrived to begin the roof replacement. With the First United Methodist Church opening its driveway for debris removal, workers put down protective tarps, stripped the old shingles down to the deck, inspected every sheet of plywood, and

installed new leak barriers and synthetic underlayment before finishing with a 50-year shingle system backed by a 25-year workmanship warranty.

PHOTOS: Even a pandemic doesn't stop Daily Bread Food Pantry in Milford

By mid-afternoon that day, a job that usually takes weeks to schedule — and cost thousands of dollars — was complete.

Rising materials costs made the timing even more critical. Completing the project now, Paul Valdez said, prevents the moisture damage and rot that can drive future repair costs much higher.

“Apart from the money, it just gives volunteers peace of mind,” he said. “It lets them know their mission is protected.”

As the crew worked, the generosity extended beyond the roof. Master Roof employees spent their Saturday not only completing the labor but also cooking on-site and collecting donations from local restaurants and members of the Milford Hawks youth football team. Representatives from GAF even flew in to see the project firsthand.

“That speaks volumes,” Francis DeAngelo said. “Not only about Master Roof and their generosity, but about how many people in this town are willing to step up.”

The roof project freed up money the pantry urgently needs elsewhere. Grant funds previously earmarked for the roof can now go toward its largest recurring expense: electricity. With 13 refrigerators and freezers running around the clock (along with heating and cooling) the monthly bill ranges from \$600 and \$1,000.

“I’m overwhelmed by the generosity — from the owner, from the workers, from everyone involved,” Francis DeAngelo said. “It’s amazing what can happen when people come together for a common cause.”

A pantry built by a family, sustained by a town

That same willingness shows up inside the pantry every week: A rotating network of more than 100 volunteers keeps Daily Bread functioning without a single paid staffer.

Work is divided across shifting crews. On a typical distribution night, eight to 12 volunteers are stationed inside the building — greeting families, managing intake and keeping the line moving. A day crew heads out three times a week to collect food from the Worcester County Food Bank and local grocers, while a separate night crew (often joined by local students completing community service hours) stocks shelves and prepares the building for distribution.

Other volunteers step into more specialized roles. Supervisors rotate shifts to open the building and keep the work flow organized. Translators assist families who do not speak English, and grant-writing volunteers help pursue funding the pantry depends on. And for the 14 homebound families Daily Bread serves, a single volunteer completes every delivery.

“It takes a lot of hands,” Cheryl DeAngelo said. “Without them, we could never sustain the operation.”

A network that reaches across Milford

That support extends far beyond the pantry’s walls. The Tri-County Regional Chamber of Commerce has become one of Daily Bread’s most consistent partners, connecting the DeAngelos with local businesses willing to absorb capital needs — the same behind-the-scenes work that set the roof replacement in motion. The chamber is now helping the pantry pursue discounted window replacements.

Its involvement is hands-on, too. Hannon has been rebuilding the pantry’s website on her own time — adding pages, improving search visibility and making the PayPal donation link easy to find — while O’Callaghan has volunteered during distribution hours.

'Make sure families are taken care of': Food pantries are trying to fill the gap left by frozen SNAP benefits

“Every company is going to need something different from us,” Hannon said. “We’re willing to roll up our sleeves and figure out how we can help.”

Support also comes from every direction. Churches contribute throughout the year — from Sacred Heart in Hopedale to St. Mary of the Assumption in Milford, which will host a pancake-breakfast fundraiser in February.

Local businesses make room for the pantry, carving out space for donation tables, volunteer sign-ups and seasonal drives at Market Basket, Shaw’s and Dairy Queen.

“The community is extremely generous, both financially and with food,” Cheryl DeAngelo said. “From corporations to individual donations to the churches — they’ve supported us since day one.”

That generosity is built into Milford’s annual traditions. Each November, Scouts blanket neighborhoods with flyers, collect donations door-to-door, and sort food outside the pantry. The U.S. Postal Service runs a major drive each Mother’s Day weekend, picking up items along mail routes. And when donations typically dip after the holidays, the Milford Police Department steps in with late-winter drives to fill the gap.

How you can help, too

“The Tuesday before Thanksgiving is our Super Bowl,” Francis DeAngelo said. “We can easily serve 70 families that night. Volunteers might be here until 9 p.m., but they’re joyful. It’s contagious.”

Each family receives \$200 worth of groceries as well as gift cards to various local grocers, such as Stop & Shop, Market Basket and Shaw’s.

“We’ve never run out of food in 35 years,” Cheryl DeAngelo said. “The good Lord always provides.”

'Large amounts of virus': Why is there an egg shortage in Massachusetts? It's tied to bird flu

But matching demand has become more difficult. High food prices, a limited supply of turkeys due to bird flu, and lingering confusion over SNAP guidance have pushed more families through the doors. With more funding, Francis said, the pantry could return from a four-week to a three-week visit cycle, offering families a reliable safety net as they navigate inconsistent support.

“We want people to know that regardless of background, age, or ethnicity, all are welcome and all are served,” Francis DeAngelo said.

How you can support Daily Bread:

- Donate online through the pantry’s website;
- Purchase items from its Amazon Wish List;
- Sponsor or host a food drive;
- Volunteer, especially for stocking, lifting, intake, or home deliveries;
- Offer translation support, especially Portuguese;
- Assist with grant writing, one of the pantry’s most urgent needs.