

Better Lives Rhode Island

# Impact Report



50 YEARS STRONG!  
1974 - 2024

## Summary



With a mission of providing hope for a better tomorrow, while helping homeless and hungry people survive today, Better Lives Rhode Island has been advocating for basic human rights, equality and justice since 1974. Through our Food Pantry (est. 1974), Community Meal (est. 1979), Homeless Outreach and Day Center programs (est. 2004), we provide food and supportive services with compassion to 25000+ people annually.

## Our Work



Better Lives Rhode Island is leading efforts to end homelessness and food insecurity in Rhode Island through these programs and activities:

**Food Pantry** - A member agency of the RI Community Food Bank, our pantry serves any resident of Providence who is food insecure and whose household income is below Federal Poverty Guidelines. The pantry is located at 12 Abbott Park Place in Providence and is open Monday 3 – 6pm and Tuesday, Wednesday 9am – 1pm. Hablas Espanol.

**Community Meal** - Our soup kitchen serves a restaurant style, sit-down dinner to 100 people each week. The community meal is a place where people can gather, be nourished, and cared for without scrutiny. The 134 Collaborative provides diners with access to legal clinics, health screenings, vaccinations, nutrition and benefits information. Clothing and farm fresh veggies are also available. BLRI Case Managers are on hand to offer help with social services and housing. Fridays from 3:00 – 5:00pm at 134 Matthewson St in Providence.

**Homeless Outreach and Day Center** - Our Homeless Outreach and Day Center programs provide comprehensive services to an average of 60 homeless and housing insecure persons each month. Outreach workers practice trauma-informed care in providing basic needs to people living outdoors and connect them with healthcare and shelter. On-going case management, benefits assistance, housing navigation, and other resources are currently offered at our Day Center at 12 Abbott Park Place in Providence from 9am – 4pm Monday - Friday.

**Advocacy** - As proud members of the RI Homeless Advocacy Project and the RI Coalition to End Homelessness, we work at the community and state level to fight for policies and laws that protect the rights of homeless people.

**Education and Public Awareness** - Through our social media, affiliation with Street Sights, the Public's Radio, the Providence Journal and other media outlets, we strive to bring issues to the forefront, to inform, educate and encourage action

# History and Milestones



1974 - The organization began as a food pantry created by nine Providence area churches to provide bags of groceries to elderly residents living in the city's subsidized housing. The organization was aptly named the Providence In-Town Churches Association.

1979 - In response to increasing numbers of homeless people in the downtown area, a soup kitchen was started by a group of volunteers at the United Methodist Church.

1985 - Providence In-Town Churches Association (PICA) was incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a Board of Directors from member churches. Part-time staff was hired, and both the food pantry and community meal programs operated out of the United Methodist Church at 134 Matthewson Street.

1990's – Social Service programs geared towards the elderly were offered at subsidized housing developments in the City and at the YMCA on Broad Street.

2004 - A homeless man named Ronald Watts began distributing clothing and toiletries to people living on the streets on a voluntary basis. He was later hired as the first Outreach Worker and from lived experience created a client-centered, holistic, walk-in case management program.

2006 - The agency moved its operations to the First Universalist Church and the Board embarked on a three-year capacity building plan with New Roots.

2010 - The SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach and Access to Recovery) program was added to provide a streamlined benefits application process for those without income and unable to work. The agency relocated to 15 Hayes Street.

2018 – Since the agency was no longer solely a faith-based organization, PICA's Board of Directors decided a name change was in order. Better Lives Rhode Island was born with the ministries of PICA as the cornerstone of its work.

2020 – The COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill. Except for a two-week period, Better Lives Rhode Island remained open to provide groceries from our pantry shelves, to deliver bagged meals to homeless shelters, and encampments, and to provide resources and support to those staying on the streets.

2021- Change in agency leadership. After 18 years at the helm, Diana Burdett retired and Paula Hudson, who had been a case manager with the agency since 2019, became the new Executive Director.

2024 – Celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> year in service to the Providence Community, Better Lives Rhode Island has grown and prospered. The agency now employs nine dedicated full-time staff and has a budget of close to one million dollars. Last year our Food Pantry distributed 214,680 pounds of food to 18,269 individuals and 6,401 nutritious meals were served to community members at the Friday Community Meal. Our Homeless Outreach program provides food, water, tents, sleeping bags etc., crisis intervention, and connects people to shelter and/or medical treatment. In the past year, our Homeless Outreach and Day Center team served 607 people including 21 children under age 18, 119 Seniors age 55+ and 28 Veterans. In total, we served 25,277 people in our community this past year. 83% of those served had household incomes less than 30% of Area Median Income (AMI).

2025 and beyond - Future plans are bright and include the launch of a transitional housing program for formerly incarcerated women being released from the Adult Correctional Institution (ACI). The Board and staff are in the process of developing a 5-year strategic plan and a succession plan for transition of leadership.

# Real Impact = Better Lives



## In Their Own Words

Hi, I'm Michelle. When my children and I lost our housing two years ago and found ourselves on the street, my pastor called Better Lives RI for help. They immediately jumped into action, first finding us a motel room and then finding us a landlord who would accept our section 8 housing voucher. Without Better Lives I don't know what we would have done. They not only found us housing, they helped fully furnish our apartment, right down to a vacuum cleaner! I thank God every day for the help and generosity I received from Better Lives and I still see all their smiling faces when I go to their food pantry every two weeks for groceries! Thank you, thank you, thank you!



My name is Austin and I became homeless at the age of 21. I was in the care of DCYF from the age of 8 through 21. I had an undependable family who could not help and so when I was exited from care, I couch and shelter surfed for the next 9 years. At some point I stopped caring about being housed, I felt defeated. But when I stumbled on Better Lives Rhode Island the staff there became familiar faces as their generosity and caring hearts were extremely uplifting. They gave me something to look forward to and made me feel a part of a community. Thanks to their hard work, I am now off the streets living in a warm place just as the cold weather is upon us. My decisions I do not regret however my choices were right and at the end of the day Better Lives RI is the organization that shines bright. Thank you, Better Lives Rhode Island.

## Thank You Supporters!



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