

# Food donations formed a link between two senior living communities near Boston during SNAP crisis

By [Claire Thornton](#) Globe Staff, Updated December 23, 2025, 11:41 a.m.



Resident service coordinator Judith Lucien and senior property manager Ron Quimby stocked the shelves in the makeshift pantry at Mainstay Supportive Housing and Home Care in Chelsea

on Dec. 11. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Husband and wife Ron Quimby and Krissy Fleming tell each other everything.

Each manages a senior living community near Boston, and often, when watching movies at home in Norwood, they press pause to reflect on how their workplaces are worlds apart.

[North Hill Retirement Community](#) in Needham, where Fleming works, sits on a 59-acre campus and advertises state-of-the-art amenities. Mainstay Supportive Housing and Home Care in Chelsea, Quimby's employer, is a HUD Section 202 property that provides affordable housing for very low-income seniors who need supportive services.

During the [government shutdown](#) in November, when Quimby was consumed with worry over the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cuts](#) his Chelsea residents faced, Fleming thought residents at North Hill would want to help.

“These two communities have a little tether between them,” Fleming, 55, said.

For more than a month, Quimby brought weekly donations from North Hill's 400 residents to Mainstay, filling his Toyota Camry “to

the brim” with cereal and oatmeal. With SNAP payments stopped in November, the food was a lifeline for the low-income seniors with medical challenges and limited mobility who had no extra money to go shopping with, he said.

Meanwhile, with a bit more income to spare, residents at North Hill embarked on grocery shopping missions for several weeks, pushing carts at Market Basket, Whole Foods, and Sudbury Farms in search of deals and specials they could send to Chelsea.

Besides groceries, there was a tangible kindness linking the two groups of seniors, said Judy Lucien, a resident services coordinator, who has worked at the HUD-subsidized apartment complex in Chelsea for 17 years.

“This is one of the greatest things that could happen here,” Lucien, 52, said.

Quimby and Fleming, who have worked at the senior communities for a combined 35 years, were also celebrated for connecting the two.

“Krissy and her husband were really examples for those of us who had less information and were less aware of the need,” said Geoff Pierson, 86, a retired school superintendent and North Hill

resident, who drove his Toyota Highlander around Needham hunting for fruit and other items he thought his counterparts in Chelsea would find delicious and “desirable.”

About 20 miles away, Joe Downey, 69, has resided at Mainstay in Chelsea for the past two years after living unhoused for about three years in Brockton.

After working in security for most of his career, Downey cared for his father, who suffered from a chronic disease, his blind aunt, and his mother, who died of a stroke.

Later, Downey said he slept on someone’s couch for \$1,000 a month and eventually “ran out of money.”

“The reason I’m here is because I can’t afford anywhere,” he said.



Resident Service Coordinator Judith Lucien and Senior Property Manager Ron Quimby carted a delivery of groceries to the makeshift pantry at Mainstay Supportive Housing and Home Care in Chelsea. Quimby said he was moved to tears when he saw the abundance of food the first week. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Of Mainstay's 66 residents, some have experienced homelessness and as many as 80 percent receive SNAP benefits, said CEO Larry Oaks.

“And when suddenly that was in question, it was like, ‘Wow, these folks can't live without that,’” said Oaks, who has worked at Mainstay for eight years.

Mainstay resident Camilla Smith can't cook without assistance, and relies on ready-to-eat items, Quimby said. Before coming to

Mainstay 10 years ago, Smith said she bounced between halfway homes and worked jobs at Stop 'N Shop and Friendly's Ice Cream.

Not having the SNAP dollars they relied on was a huge challenge for Mainstay residents during the shutdown, Smith said.

“If they take it away from us, it's harder to get along without it,” she said.

For seniors like Smith, 78, getting donations of flour, sugar, onions, and other whole ingredients from city food banks isn't always a great fit, Quimby said.

But the donations of graham crackers and granola bars from North Hill have been “tailor made for her,” he said.

To meet the complex needs of Mainstay residents, North Hill residents filled a storage room “four times over” with donations, Fleming said.

“I don't know who didn't donate, there's so many people who did,” she said.

Food was stocked at Mainstay Supportive Housing and Home Care in Chelsea. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

But Pierson, the former Lexington Public Schools superintendent, said he and his North Hill neighbors weren't "heroes." They had the financial resources to help the residents in Chelsea and wanted to support those affected by President Trump's cuts to safety net programs.

"I felt angry because of the behavior of the present administration to destroy things of value or of comfort," Pierson said. "The changes that have been made in many people's lives have been disastrous."

Though the seniors at Mainstay have a roof over their heads, food insecurity has been and will continue to be a critical issue, Oaks said.

"If they don't have their SNAP benefits, their incomes are not sufficient — they're not going to feed themselves," Oaks, 57, said. While SNAP benefits were restored in mid-November, he said his residents continue to worry about benefit cuts going forward.

After feeling scared at the start of November, Smith, at Mainstay, has developed a new routine in recent weeks, serving herself cereal and hot chocolate from the community's pantry before staff arrive later in the day to prepare lunch.

“It makes me feel taken care of,” she said.

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