

EMILY BRIGHT: Starting tomorrow, a North Minneapolis food shelf is trying a new solution to feed its neighbors, even after it closes for the day. It's opening a row of food lockers that can be opened with a code any time. Joining me in studio to talk about this is Pastor Jalilia Abdul-Brown, Executive Director of Change Starts with Community at Shiloh Temple Church. Welcome.

JALILIA ABDUL- Thank you, Emily. I appreciate coming here today.

BROWN:

EMILY BRIGHT: Absolutely. Can you describe what these lockers look like and how they work?

JALILIA ABDUL- These lockers are going to be life-changing, especially for North Minneapolis. They are bright. They are bold.

BROWN: They are beautiful. And the thing is that we are going to be able to serve an additional 18-plus more neighbors every day with food and resources that are needed.

I am really excited about these lockers. They are innovative. So we went through a company called QuickCollect. And it has been over a year that we've been working with our partners, which is CES in South Minneapolis. They were the first ones to get them in the entire city.

So they're off of Franklin. We're on Broadway. So I said, let's see if they get past their demographic first before we bring it to the north side.

EMILY BRIGHT: Well, I mean, it makes sense, too, because the need is not just during business hours. A lot of people are at work during that time. So what can people get in these lockers?

JALILIA ABDUL- So what they can get in this locker is it's going to be fresh food. We rescue-- with the help of Second Harvest

BROWN: Heartland, we rescue over 5,000 pounds of food each week.

EMILY BRIGHT: Wow.

JALILIA ABDUL- That is in addition to food that's already ordered. We see and serve, some months, most months, over 8,000

BROWN: people a month.

EMILY BRIGHT: Wow.

JALILIA ABDUL- OK? And that is for food and violence-prevention work that we do. We also hire youth. So these lockers are

BROWN: innovative in that they are technology. And people will be able to walk up 24 hours a day to get food out of these lockers-- that mom that is on her way to work whose kids need food, that single parent at night that's saying, man, I got to work, two and three shifts, but they still need food.

As right now, we know SNAP cuts are hitting everyone hard. Everyone's budget is getting tighter. But the food shelves don't stop. Right now in Minnesota, we saw last year over 9 million visits to food shelves. Minnesota doesn't even have that many food shelves. So that lets you how great the need is.

We're going to have fresh food in there. People love to see us. I like to say we're like *Cheers*. Everybody knows your name. We're a third place. But we couldn't have got these lockers done without Second Harvest Heartland, the Cargill Foundation, the [? MacLellan ?] Foundation, but also Hennepin County.

These lockers are not cheap. Also the Anthony Foundation. We also had to lay concrete just to get these lockers done. And the innovation part, the youth who are in our child nutrition and violence-prevention program, a lot of them will be filling those lockers.

EMILY BRIGHT: And do you just walk up and open a locker?

JALILIA ABDUL- So what will happen is-- I'm glad you asked that. We are doing what you call non-barrier. We don't want people to
BROWN: have to-- what if you don't have a computer?

There were two options given to us. And we chose an option that we're going to use more called on-demand, where you'll be able to walk up to these lockers. If you have a cell phone, you're going to just put a number in, your name and your number. It'll pop up, give you a code, and the locker will open right up.

EMILY BRIGHT: Great.

JALILIA ABDUL- So we are taking away the barriers.

BROWN:

EMILY BRIGHT: That is wonderful. I know, looking at census data, rates of federal food assistance in North Minneapolis zip codes are two, even three times the state average. You mentioned the new eligibility rules and work requirements, cuts to SNAP. What effect has this had on your work?

JALILIA ABDUL- This has has-- oh, my goodness. I have not-- we were just talking. I haven't seen this many people come through
BROWN: our food shelves since COVID. So last year when they did the SNAP cut, we saw an increase immediately. Now we're seeing that right away.

We are serving people of every race, every creed, every color, every demographic. And what we are seeing is the need is great. And so when a food shelf closes, that doesn't mean hunger closes. Hunger doesn't keep business hours.

So I think we need to really look at-- I'm glad you brought up North Minneapolis. North Minneapolis has the fifth largest food desert in America. And I don't think people realize that we have grand openings and grand closings of stores.

And it's really because some people see the perception of safety. It's a under-invested community. But we're trying to change that with our great partners and great donors to say, listen, we can build this neighborhood up. We can shore this neighborhood up. But guess what? It's going to start with healthy food.

EMILY BRIGHT: Yeah. And you caught my attention because you mentioned gun safety and programs. So change starts with community. You started to address gun violence, especially violence against women. How did that turn into food access?

JALILIA ABDUL- How did it turn into food access? I was spending a lot of my budget on food. A lot of things that people needed
BROWN: was food. I mean, they wasn't necessarily asking me for clothes. People was like, man, I don't have any food at home.

And then we had to intervene with a lot of people that were being shot. And they was like, well, I had to feed my family. So I'm like, OK. And I grew up food insecure. I was actually homeless before with a child here in Minnesota.

So I grew up in a family of 10, and I know what it means to be food insecure. And we're dealing with a lot of addiction right now, too. So what I was seeing was that the unhoused population was also seeing me on the streets. And they were just like, Jalilia, I need some food.

Mostly every request I took was for food. So we had to pivot to using food as a violence-prevention tool. Because when we brought youth together for the dynamics to say, let's interrupt this violence or let's prevent it, we had to bring them together over food.

And I found that to be a common denominator that people was like, if you have food, we'll show up and come. We start getting families to show up, young men and young women that were trapped in the cycles of violence. They were showing up. We were breaking bread, but we were also resolving gun violence.

And what we saw is it pivoted into us working with the Cargill Foundation, the former CEO. He saw the need. We had a high rate of youth that were committing gun violence and crimes with guns.

And he came to me. He said, man, we got to do something about this. And he said, why don't we also pivot to providing jobs? And I got to give a shout-out to [? D-Mac-- ?] that's what we call him-- his wife, [? Kathleen. ?]

And I want to give a shout-out to the executive director of the Cargill Foundation and the new CEO of Cargill because I'm going to tell you something. I would say some people just show up, but these people actually show up to volunteer.

We're just not looking for your money. We're looking for hands to get to work with us. I will say, they show up. They showed up to do that. They continue to show up, but also they saw the need. But they invested in the need.

And I want to share this, that because of that, we hired these youth, gave them jobs. We got an agrihood garden that they begin to work in. The crime for youth in general declined in North Minneapolis 40%.

EMILY BRIGHT: What a tremendous partnership you have. Last question-- I understand you have a grand opening tomorrow. Just briefly, what's on the agenda?

JALILIA ABDUL- BROWN: I'm really excited. The grand opening-- well, we're going to open the doors at 10:00 AM. The ribbon-cutting will begin at 10:30 AM. We're going to give tours of our food shelf. You'll get to see us in action.

And then we're going to give tours of the way that these new 24/7 food lockers will work tomorrow. The address is 1201 West Broadway, door number 3. We work out of Shiloh Temple International Ministries, which has been around for 95 years.

So I want to give a shout-out to Bishop Howell and also his wife for remaining in a community that long. So we're here to stay. We got staying power, but we are our own non-profit. We sit on our bottom. We work out of door number 3. So we're our own-- we have our own outreach and violence-prevention and food-shelf space in there that is absolutely beautiful.

I want to say we got bulletproof doors and windows, so feel safe to come through. Come support us, and also donate to what we do. Because it takes money to do what we do.

EMILY BRIGHT: Have a wonderful celebration tomorrow. Thank you for coming in today.

JALILIA ABDUL- Thank you, Emily. I really appreciate you. Thanks for having me.

BROWN:

EMILY BRIGHT: And this, I have been talking with Pastor Jalilia Abdul-Brown, Executive Director of Change Starts with Community, which operates Shiloh Cares Food Shelf.