



Common Threads
COOKING FOR LIFE



ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2025

Reflecting on our past, driving towards our future: A year in review.



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Letter from the CEO

Dear Friends,

We are reaching a turning point in how we understand food. The connection between ultra-processed products and chronic disease is no longer hidden, and neither is the healing potential of real, whole food. Ultra-processed foods now make up nearly 60% of the American diet, fueling obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, conditions costing our healthcare system over \$1 trillion annually. Common Threads has spent 21 years working to rewrite this story, building a future where nutritious food isn't a privilege but a given.

Yet this year tested that commitment profoundly. The defunding of SNAP-Ed programs forced difficult pivots. Instead of pulling back, we doubled down, staying at the table with the communities we serve and pushing forward with bold new approaches. At Common Threads, the kitchen and the table are powerful places for transformation. Around them, children discover new skills, families build healthier habits, and community leaders imagine a more equitable future. Through the simple act of preparing and sharing a meal, curiosity grows, confidence expands, and connections take root.

This year brought both resilience and innovation. We launched food is medicine demonstrations in Medicaid care. We introduced our Healthy Food Foundations program and adapted our curriculum to improve emotional well-being and mental health outcomes, recognizing that true health encompasses both body and mind. Through deepened partnerships with school districts, healthcare systems, and community organizations, we've taken a whole child, whole family, whole school, whole community approach because sustainable transformation requires all of us.

Every step brings us closer to a future where every child has access to knowledge, skills, and support to thrive. A future built one lesson, one recipe, one family meal at a time.

Thank you for being with us at the table.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Novick O'Keefe". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Linda Novick O'Keefe
Co-Founder & CEO

Common Threads Awarded \$400K Multi-Year Grant from Florida Blue Foundation

In alignment with our mission to promote health and wellness through nutrition education and cooking skills, Common Threads was awarded a \$400,000 multi-year Food Security Grant from the Florida Blue Foundation. This significant investment, distributed over four years from October 2024 to September 2028, affirms our commitment to addressing food insecurity and improving health outcomes in underserved communities.

We recognize the power of food as medicine and actively integrate this philosophy into our programming. With support from the Florida Blue Foundation, we are expanding our efforts to deliver evidence-based nutrition education, hands-on cooking experiences, and access to affordable, healthy foods. This approach not only empowers individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong wellness but also supports the broader movement of utilizing food as a tool for preventative healthcare.

The grant enables us to reach 2,760 youth and adults in the Allapattah community, in collaboration with the Village of Allapattah YMCA. Through these initiatives, we are:

- Providing hands-on cooking classes that emphasize nutrition education, meal preparation, and kitchen safety.
- Prioritizing local purchasing to strengthen small and community-based growers and purveyors, support economic growth, and increase access to fresh ingredients.
- Working with healthcare and community partners to integrate our programming into broader wellness initiatives that address health equity and food security.

Florida Blue Foundation's Growing Resilient Communities initiative aims to mitigate poverty and health disparities across Florida. As a trusted nonprofit partner, we are fostering meaningful change in public health. Our collaboration with the Florida Blue Foundation demonstrates the long-term value of tackling food insecurity and promoting nutrition education as a foundational pillar of community health.

Looking ahead, Common Threads will continue to build on innovative partnerships to strengthen our impact. Integrating Food as Medicine principles into our programs supports lasting change and sustainable healthy eating habits for families.



20th Anniversary Celebration and Roundtable: Advancing a Healthier Future Together



On Monday, June 2, 2025, Common Threads proudly marked a milestone celebrating 20 years of empowering children, families, and communities through nutrition and cooking education. Our 20th Anniversary, Beyond the Table, celebration in Chicago brought together supporters, partners, and champions committed to shaping a healthier, more equitable future.

More than a commemorative moment, the evening served as a powerful catalyst for investment in our mission. The event featured 29 celebrated Chicago chefs, each lending their talent to elevate the experience and highlight the importance of food education. Thanks to the generosity of sponsors, donors, and guests, the celebration welcomed 232 attendees and raised 170,822 dollars. These funds directly strengthen our programs and expand our impact nationwide.

Anchored to the celebration, Common Threads also hosted a C Suite Roundtable that convened leaders from health care, food systems, corporate philanthropy, and education. Their discussion focused on one core question: What could we change individually, organizationally, and across society if we invested in children through a prevention and behavior-change lens?

This dialogue sparked an important cross sector conversation about what it will take to build a long term, sustainable ecosystem where food, health, and education intersect. Participants explored strategies to improve community well being, reduce long term health costs, and strengthen economic outcomes by prioritizing early, evidence-based interventions.

Together, the evening's celebration and the executive roundtable underscored a shared commitment to creating healthier futures for children and families by ensuring every community has the knowledge, skills, and access needed to thrive.

Event Photos and Videos:

[Click HERE to view photos from the event.](#)

[Click HERE for the Video Recap](#)



SNACKS & MEALS

171K

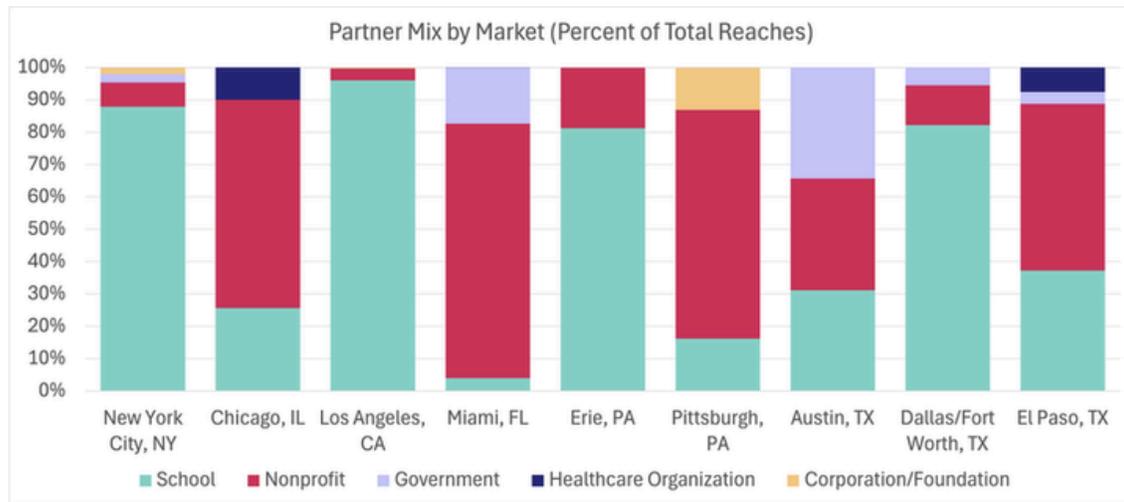
STUDENTS SERVED

36K

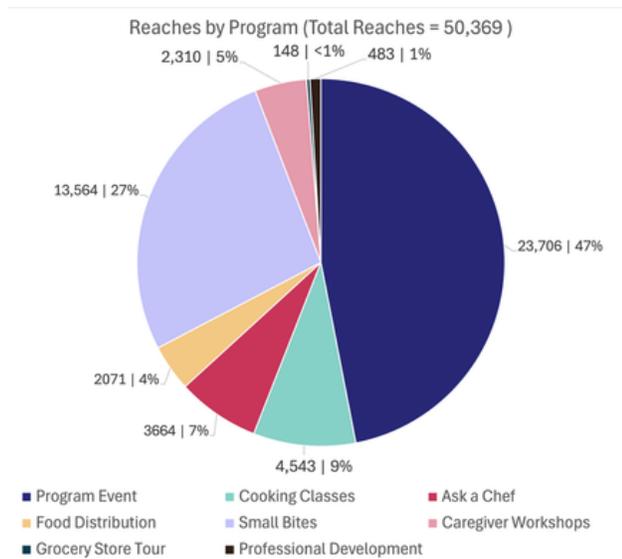
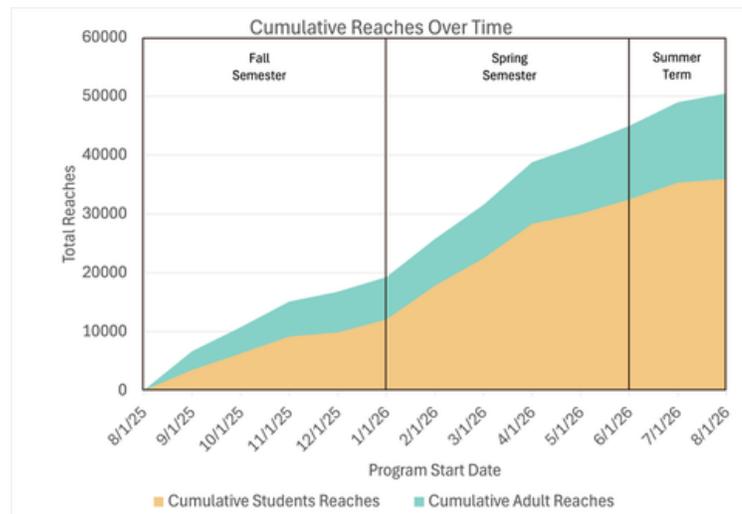
NUTRITION
PROGRAM HOURS

172K

By the Numbers



Over the course of this fiscal year, our cumulative reach steadily climbed, reflecting a growing ripple of impact across both students and adults. The parallel growth among students and adults highlights the breadth of our programming and its ability to meet people where they are, across ages and stages. Together, these trends tell a story of sustained engagement and expanding influence over time.



This fiscal year, our reach was powered by a diverse set of programs working together to create broad impact. Program Events led the way, accounting for nearly half of all engagements, while Small Bites and Cooking Classes extended hands-on learning to thousands more. Complemented by targeted offerings like Ask a Chef, Food Distribution, and workshops, these programs collectively demonstrate how varied approaches strengthened our overall reach and impact throughout the year.

A Decade of Impact at Risk: The Role of SNAP-Ed in Scaling Nutrition Equity

For more than a decade, SNAP Education funding has been essential to Common Threads' ability to deliver high quality nutrition and cooking education in under-resourced communities across the country. As one of the few SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies with a multi state footprint, these investments enabled us to build strong, outcomes-driven programming in Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio, reaching children and families who face the highest barriers to health and nutrition security. The recent federal and state SNAP-Ed budget cuts have had a profound and immediate impact on this work.

Through a combination of direct contracts and subcontracts, SNAP-Ed support allowed us to establish a significant presence in five states. We secured long standing contracts in Texas and New York, expanded through subcontracts in Pennsylvania and Illinois, and partnered with Ohio State University to integrate our curriculum into statewide programming. These partnerships helped Common Threads address both hunger and obesity among U.S. children and earn national recognition from city agencies, school districts, and community partners.



The long-term investments made through SNAP-Ed fueled major program growth. Our initial five-year, one million dollar award in Texas, later supplemented with nearly five hundred thousand dollars, enabled us to expand from Austin into Dallas, Houston, El Paso, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. In Pennsylvania, funding increased from eighty one thousand dollars in 2018 to two hundred thousand dollars in 2024, supporting our expansion into Pittsburgh. In New York, a five-year award that began at eight hundred thousand dollars annually increased to 1.18 million dollars per year and expanded our reach from two boroughs to all five. That support was renewed again in 2024. Most recently, a one hundred thousand dollar subcontract in Illinois opened the door for us to begin serving Chicago's West Side.

Collectively, this funding infrastructure allowed Common Threads to engage nearly four hundred partner sites and reach more than 135,000 individuals through over 4,000 classes. SNAP-Ed enabled us to deliver more than 117 million hours of programming and serve more than 117 million meals and snacks to children and families who needed them most. The inclusion of our Small Bites and Cooking Skills and World Cuisine curriculum in the national SNAP-Ed Library further strengthened our credibility and positioned our programs as high-quality, evidence-based solutions for addressing health disparities.

The sudden loss of SNAP–Ed funds has disrupted long-standing community partnerships, reduced our ability to deliver programming in multiple states, and significantly diminished our capacity to reach families who rely on SNAP–Ed as one of the few preventive health resources available to them. These cuts not only affect the future of our direct service programming but also jeopardize years of progress toward reducing nutrition insecurity and improving health outcomes for children in under-resourced communities.

While the scale of the funding loss is substantial, our commitment remains unwavering. Common Threads is actively engaging partners, donors, and stakeholders to identify new pathways forward so that the momentum built over the last decade is not lost. The need for preventive nutrition education is greater than ever, and we are dedicated to ensuring children and families continue to have access to the tools they need.

Advancing the Evidence: Contributing to National Nutrition Education Research

Common Threads continues to strengthen its role as a contributor to national nutrition education research. This year, several of our collaborative studies were accepted for publication in leading peer reviewed journals and selected for presentation at major scientific conferences, underscoring the rigor and relevance of our work.

Two abstracts from our Kitchen Clinic partnership with UC ANR, *Assessing Nutrition Knowledge, Behaviors, and Cooking Skills Among High School Culinary Career and Technical Education Students and Evaluation of a Pilot High School Culinary Medicine Program from the Perspective of Students and Stakeholders*, were published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. Each project was also featured as a poster presentation at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior Conference.



In addition, our NIH partnered abstract, *Evaluating Well Being in Underserved Communities Through Culinary and Nutrition Education: Adaptation of the PERMA Profiler for Youth*, was published in the *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science* and showcased as a poster at the Association for Clinical and Translational Science Conference.

These milestones elevate Common Threads' visibility within the research community, reinforce the evidence base behind our programs, and support future funding opportunities and cross sector partnerships that will expand our impact.

FY25 Program Highlights

Community involvement is at the heart of Common Threads' mission. Throughout the year, our programs have been highlighted in the media, showcasing the impact of hands-on learning and food education in fostering healthier communities. These special features reflect our commitment to empowering individuals with essential cooking and nutrition skills while strengthening local partnerships.

Bringing Leaders Together to Advance Nutrition Security

Common Threads convened community leaders, health advocates, and mission-driven organizations at the Paso del Norte Health Foundation for an in-person panel discussion focused on advancing nutrition security and improving health outcomes in El Paso. The panel featured local leaders, including Gabriela Gallegos, Associate Professor at UTHealth Houston; Patsy Terrazas-Stallworth, Co-Founder of Desert Spoon Food Hub; and Anthony Tomasheski, CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of El Paso. The event was well attended by current program partners addressing food access and nutrition insecurity, and was followed by site visits and discussions with key partners to explore collaboration opportunities and plan future initiatives.



Empowering Adults Through Food as Medicine

Common Threads launched Healthy Food Foundations, a new Food as Medicine program designed to increase adult participants' cooking confidence, nutrition knowledge, and nutrient intake to prevent or manage common diet-related chronic diseases. This three-lesson series combines essential nutrition education with hands-on cooking classes, allowing participants to immediately apply key principles to preparing healthier meals. The program also positions Common Threads to access new funding streams, supporting its ongoing expansion and long-term sustainability.

Integrating Food is Medicine into Medicaid Care

Common Threads is advancing its Food is Medicine strategy under New York’s Medicaid 1115 waiver through participation in the Social Care Network, delivering services to Medicaid members across Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Our team is actively receiving referrals via Unite Us for kitchenware distribution and delivering culturally tailored, Medicaid-aligned nutrition education through a Registered Dietitian. While referral volume has been lower than anticipated and adapting to platform and compliance requirements presents a learning curve, Common Threads is refining workflows, strengthening referral protocols, and building relationships across the Social Care Network to ensure long-term integration, sustainability, and improved access to healthy meals for participating families.



Funding Spotlights

Common Threads is deeply grateful for the invaluable support of our corporate and community partners. Their generosity and commitment allow us to expand our reach, deliver impactful programming, and foster healthier futures for families across the country. This year, we are proud to highlight exceptional partnerships that have made a significant difference in the lives of those we serve.



Building New National Partnerships

Since the inception of our partnership in 2022, we have worked together to expand access to nutrition education and foster a deeper understanding of the link between food and well-being in New York City, Atlanta, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles. Together, we have engaged 7,714 students, families, caregivers, and educators across the country in nearly 33,000 hours of nutrition education and cooking skills programming and served 33,057 nutritious meals and snacks.

anahata ♥ foundation

Fueling Healthier Futures

Anahata's partnership has been instrumental in advancing our holistic approach to nutrition education, emphasizing the connection between nourishment, mindfulness, and overall well-being. Through their support, we have been able to implement our high school culinary medicine program, Kitchen Clinic, in both New York and Los Angeles. Kitchen Clinic is a 10-lesson food as medicine and career exploration course that equips high school students with nutrition knowledge, cooking skills, and exposure to careers in food, health, and wellness.



Fueling Healthier Futures

With the support of Paso del Norte, we have expanded access to culturally responsive nutrition education and healthy meals in El Paso communities where resources are most needed. This partnership has strengthened our ability to engage families, caregivers, and educators through hands-on learning experiences that promote food security, practical cooking skills, and improved health outcomes across generations.

Funding Spotlights

CONTINUED



Building New National Partnerships

Umoja's commitment to community empowerment has helped us deepen our reach and impact through programming rooted in equity, cultural relevance, and collective well-being. Together, we have fostered safe and supportive learning environments where participants gain the knowledge and skills needed to make informed food choices while building confidence and resilience.



Fueling Healthier Futures

Conagra's partnership has played a key role in scaling our nutrition education and meal access initiatives in Chicago, allowing us to reach more students and families with engaging, skill-building programming. Through this collaboration, we continue to strengthen food literacy, encourage healthy habits, and support communities in developing sustainable approaches to nourishment and wellness.



Finances Fiscal Year 2025

Unaudited, October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025

[Click Here to view document.](#)

Supporters

October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025

Visionary (\$500K+)

New York Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance

Investor (\$100K+)

Anahata Foundation
Austin Public Health
Florida Blue Foundation
iHeartIMPACT
Elevance Health
NYC Council Speakers Initiative
Paso del Norte Health Foundation
PennState College of Health & Human Development
State Senate District NY

Pioneer (\$50K+)

Annenberg Foundation
Dallas County
Giant Eagle
Kroger | Mariano's
Miami-Dade County
North Lawndale Fresh
University of Illinois Extension
United Way of Miami
USDA

Sustainer (\$25K+)

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Barilla
Batchelor Foundation
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The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust

Ally (\$10K+)

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Conagra Brands Foundation
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Julia Child Foundation
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Sally Mead Hands Foundation
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Special Children's Charities
Sprouts Healthy Community Foundation
Rachel Ray Foundation
Umoja Health

Supporters

October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025

Individual Donors

\$10,000 +

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Margaret Rainone
Margaret Wright
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Christina Silberman

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Aleinikoff Kittle
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Art Smith
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Christina Samatas
Elizabeth Wise
Geofferey Ellis
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Leoni & William McVey
Manolis Alpogianis
Marissa Huttner
Melinda Ring
Nick Thommes

Rachel Saunders
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Paula Douer
Tres Bailey
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Wei Chen Fraser
Won Kim

\$500+

Alexander Clavero
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Miguel Mata
Nikolas Nakos
Richard Dachman
Robert Hong
Ross Stuart
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Tres Bailey

\$250+

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Hochman
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Jennifer Fox
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October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025

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Jesus Salgueiro | Chairperson Emeritus

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