



Our Neighbors' Table Creating a place at the Table for Everyone

FAQ

What is Creating a Place at the Table?

Creating a Place at the Table is ONT's campaign to raise \$1.1 million to construct the new Jardis-Taylor Center for Our Neighbors' Table at 194 Main Street and bring its programs to capacity to meet existing and growing demand for its food pantry programs.

Why does ONT need a new space?

By 2010, ONT had already outgrown the space it occupies at Main Street Congregational Church. And since 2012, attendance at ONT's current location more than DOUBLED. In 2015, we provided the equivalent of 490,000 meals to people in need across our region. The members of the MSCC worked with ONT to see if the campus could somehow accommodate the unprecedented growth, but, ultimately it was not possible. Today, guests wait outside for services, sometimes for 90 minutes, despite brutal weather conditions. Small space requires us to store fresh products in locations scattered around town making our programs inefficient.

The truth is there are still thousands of people who are food-insecure in our service region who cannot get to us because we are too far from their homes and because our facilities are not ADA accessible or family-friendly.

Does ONT really need to spend that much money on a new building?

The total cost to design, reconstruct, and outfit our facility is \$946,000 (including a contingency). There are a number of other similar organizations that are also updating or building new facilities who are spending twice and three times as much.

ONT is actually saving a considerable amount of money. By securing the gift of the property, ONT has saved \$515,000 otherwise needed to purchase the facility. Through thorough design and competitive bidding, we have also ensured our construction costs are as reasonable as possible. Our contractor, McPartland Corp. has worked closely with our Construction Committee to seek discounts and donated labor through a network of local, qualified vendors.

In reality, the new location could not function as a food pantry without this construction. Ultimately, the price of construction is approximately \$150/square foot, which is a competitive rate for commercial property in our area.

Is there really that much need in our community?

Hunger affects 1 out of every 16 people living in our service area—1 out of 5 seniors and 1 out of 8 children—and is present in every one of the 12 communities we serve. This is the unfortunate reality. The recent recession increased food insecurity in the US by 71%. For many, the economic recovery still has not improved their financial status as they face fixed incomes, disabling health issues, and low-wage employment.



Has ONT always served 12 cities and towns?

Yes. In fact, up until 2008, ONT served anyone from anywhere who came looking for help. As local need increased, the ONT Board of Directors focused its resources on serving only those in north-eastern Essex County where there were not as many other agencies available to provide hunger relief.

Today, our Wednesday meal and emergency hotline serves anyone who comes to our door. However, our food pantry programs serve only residents of Amesbury, Boxford, Byfield, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, Rowley, Salisbury, South Hampton (NH), and West Newbury.

How do ONT's services reach people in need in the towns that are far from Amesbury?

Truthfully, this is a real challenge for people in need. ONT allows anyone in our service region to shop at our downtown Amesbury location once each week, currently on Fridays and Saturdays, and we expect expanded hours in our new location. This allows individuals who rely on borrowing a car or getting a ride more flexibility in getting to us when their transportation is available.

For 10 years, ONT has offered mobile pantry programs. Today, these programs reach close to 200 households in Amesbury and Merrimac, primarily seniors, who cannot get to our Amesbury facility. As we seek to improve accessibility for others who still cannot get to us, we will replicate the success of the existing community-based partnerships to make distributions more accessible in remote communities.

Is it a duplication of existing services for ONT to start programs in these other towns?

Not at all. It has always been a top priority to enhance services and NOT to duplicate programs. Our mobile distribution programs were developed in partnership with existing service agencies and community volunteers who identified unmet needs. Together, with local agencies, ONT lends its expertise as a food-focused organization to enhance whatever services that already exist. Over the past six years, ONT leadership has, in fact, eliminated programs like Sunday Soups when it was deemed to duplicate other programs or exceed need.

While programs do exist in various corners of our service region, program and poverty data indicate that there are thousands of people in need who are still under-served, particularly children with families and home-bound seniors. Current programs also limit frequency of access or the provision of the fresh foods that our guests cannot afford on their own. This has been the focus of ONT for more than five years and will be the focus of our community partnership building.

ONT has and will continue to coordinate regular meetings of organizations providing hunger-relief services to our region as well as a broader network of service providers serving Amesbury residents.

Will increasing programs in other communities decrease help available to Amesbury residents?

Absolutely not. ONT and Amesbury residents and business owners feel proud to maintain its roots in the Amesbury community where our programs began. Today, ONT is essentially meeting the problem of food insecurity in Amesbury. In 2015, 1 out of 10 Amesbury residents accessed ONT's pantry programs, demonstrating a strong, continued need and ONT's ability to respond effectively. ONT will continue its programs and community collaborations in Amesbury and use it as a model for programs across the region.



What will be housed in the new location at 194 Main Street?

The Jardis-Taylor Center for Our Neighbors' Table will house a food pantry where guests will shop for no-cost fresh produce, meats and fish, dairy, non-perishables and personal care items; a clean, efficient warehouse from which our mobile distribution programs will operate; and office space for our staff and volunteers where we can have confidential conversations with our guests.

What will happen to the Wednesday Meal Program?

ONT is 100% committed to continuing the operation of our Wednesday Meal. We are currently conducting a search for a new location for the meal program. Discussions with potential partners will be forthcoming. Ultimately, the new location will be chosen with the goal of increasing accessibility and guest safety and improving meal preparation facilities.

How will ONT sustain this new building and programs?

ONT is committed to sustaining its programs for as long as we needed. A dedicated Board of Directors commits time and money to the strategic direction of our organization.

Programs are created or grown only after careful planning and evaluation, maximizing partnerships that avoid duplication, leverage food at no cost, and engage community volunteers.

Since 2012, we have been building our annual fundraising program, seeking increased partnerships with sources of no-cost or discounted foods and products for our guests, and working with state and local officials to increase public funding.

ONT is and will continue to be incredibly efficient with its resources. By leveraging in-kind goods and services, our target is to spend not more than **\$1 per meal** served and we have met or exceeded that target for more than 4 years. ONT will continue to engage stakeholders in the communities we serve to secure their investments in our programs and in our mission to alleviate food insecurity across our region.

Shouldn't ONT be 100% volunteer run?

ONT is heavily dependent on 300+ hours of volunteer service every week. In the coming years, that will likely increase. However, a critical component to our sustainability is recruiting and retaining a qualified team of staff who are capable of assessing community need, facilitating partnerships, and training and supporting our large corps of volunteers. Over the last three years, as we have increased our staff, we have actually been able to decrease our operating expenses by 25%, demonstrating that the financial investment in a qualified team directly yields greater efficiency and impact on more people in need.