**American Heart Association and Commonpoint Queens Continue to Increase Healthy Food Access for NYC Residents**

COVID-19 brought attention to rising food insecurity across historically excluded neighborhoods in New York City. The pandemic also increased unemployment throughout the five boroughs, leading to higher rates of food insecurity. Additionally, many local markets closed as businesses struggled to stay open, forcing many people to turn to local community-based organizations for assistance. The increased need showed how vulnerable residents became during the pandemic and families across the city started looking for alternatives to access foods when food banks and pantries saw unprecedented lines. According to data from the NYC Department of Health, from June 2020 to March 2021, use of emergency food services increased among Black and Brown New Yorkers particularly in neighborhoods that are designated as food deserts. The same data showed that women were more likely to use emergency food resources such as pantries.

 Commonpoint Queens serves a large Black and Latino population. Many of the people who use their services are immigrants, some undocumented. 60% of the members who depend on Commonpoint Queens for help, are Latino, many with a median income below the NYC average.

The AHA and Commonpoint Queens began their collaboration earlier in 2022 by adopting the AHA Healthy Pantry Policy and receiving funding for a refrigeration unit which helped increase their food pantry capacity. Although pantries can help increase food access for community residents, it’s just one way to address food insecurity. Starting October 2022, Commonpoint Queens implemented a nutrition security screening at their 3 pantry sites. This screening is done every day in which the pantry is open. Commonpoint Queens has staff who use the Feeding America screening questions which helps determine how food insecure a family is. They then collaborate with their work life department to sign up community members for SNAP, WIC and other child nutrition programs. The nutrition security screenings are happening at the following locations:

1. Commonpoint Queens Central Queens

67-09 108th Street, Forest Hills, NY 11375

1. Commonpoint Queens The Hub

77-17 Queens Boulevard, Elmhurst, NY 11373

1. Commonpoint Queens Sam Field Center
2. 58-20 Little Neck Parkway, Little Neck, NY 11362

To help alleviate the demand on existing food pantries and relief efforts across Queens, the Commonpoint pantries serves an average of 800 families weekly on Fridays, distributing a week’s worth of fresh and nonperishable food items. A total of 100,000 families have visited the pantry since June 2020. The operations are supported by over 100+ volunteers from within the immediate community. The nutrition screening will be reaching 2000+ people per month across each individual site

“Community members aren’t just coming into our pantry for themselves, they also volunteer with our pantry operations. We’re always looking to expand our ability to handle more food as we have other pantries around Queens that we collaborate with.” said Fadia Mohama, The food pantry Director of Strategic Initiatives at Commonpoint Queens. The refrigeration unit will allow us to increase capacity and ask our AHA and Commonpoint Queens will continue to be partners in addressing food insecurity while working towards equitable health outcomes throughout Queens

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Fadia Mohama Date

Director of Strategic Partnerships

Commonpoint Queens

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Vice President, Health

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