

## Open Arms of Minnesota – Opening our Arms Wider to Nourish our Neighbors: A Capital and Capacity Building Campaign



### **Our Campaign: Opening Our Arms Wider to Nourish Our Neighbors.**

There is no shortage of need for Open Arms' services. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, over 920,000 Minnesotans are currently living with life-threatening illnesses including cancer, HIV/AIDS, COPD, congestive heart failure, end-stage renal disease, ALS, and MS. Many of these individuals are also living with food insecurity, co-morbidities (multiple illnesses), and a lack of stable income or housing, with thousands more caregivers and dependent children impacted by their loved one's life-changing diagnosis. Since 2010, weekly deliveries to Open Arms' clients have increased by 400 percent. Over the past five years, healthcare referrals to Open Arms have increased by more than 100%. And in 2020, for the first time in our history, we expanded beyond the Twin Cities and surrounding suburbs and began shipping meals to clients in rural and out-state Minnesota to help address the growing requests for our services.

But the demand for medically tailored meals in the metro area and greater Minnesota is astounding, and we are just barely scraping the surface.

COVID-19 has only magnified the need for Open Arms in the community. The public health crisis has driven client numbers to levels never seen before at Open Arms. Demand for our services has increased by over 35% since March 2020. This incredible growth has exacerbated already strained physical resources at our South Minneapolis building, making it urgent that we expand our capacity. Workspace for staff is maxed out; parking spots for volunteers, visitors and staff are at their threshold; refrigerator and freezer space in our building has reached its limit; and there is no more pantry or storage space available.

Open Arms proposes to raise \$6.2 million in a **capital and capacity building campaign** for improvements to our Minneapolis building and expansion to an additional physical location in the East Metro to meet the increasing need for medically tailored meals throughout the Twin Cities metro area and the state of Minnesota.

### **Here are the three major goals of the capital and capacity building campaign:**

#### ***1) Expand the Capacity of Our Current Facility and Kitchen:***

Open Arms is currently based in a 21,000-square-foot building with a state-of-the-art kitchen, located in South Minneapolis. Now ten years old and used by more than 1,000 people each week, the building needs maintenance, and improvements to increase capacity. These include replacement of our HVAC system and kitchen floor, the purchase of larger pieces of cooking equipment, and the conversion of one of our coolers to a blast freezer to quickly chill cooked foods for packaging. The Open Arms kitchen produces 17,000 – 19,000 meals each week and depends on equipment to run more than 70 hours per week. Needed kitchen maintenance also includes improvements to the oven hood system and the replacement of our well-used delivery doors. Due to the physical distancing required by COVID-19, we are also renovating our volunteer gathering places and staff offices and making significant technology upgrades to allow critical staff to rotate between working from home and being on site in the office.

In response to these needs, Open Arms has created a comprehensive building improvement plan that will specifically address the growing demand by allocating resources to improve the safety and capacity of our physical space. Investments in our Minneapolis building will improve services to Open Arms' existing clients and ensure the longevity of our programs.

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### 2) *Strengthen Client Services:*

As we open our arms wider to clients with more illnesses, respond to real-time client crises like COVID-19 and collaborate with healthcare entities to serve their most vulnerable patients, we must also ensure that our services continue to be safe, innovative, and high quality. Additionally, investment in our ability to ship meals throughout the state will ensure that some of Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens benefit from medically tailored meals. This campaign will allow Open Arms to support continued research and development on shipping meals throughout the state and allow us to purchase a more sophisticated client database that streamlines our processes and provides better service to our clients, as it would allow for more personalization of menu choices and better tracking of health outcomes.

In the long term, these client-focused updates will lead to improved safety and services and a better understanding of client needs, which will drive informed programmatic decisions and increase program effectiveness.

### 3) *Serve More Clients and Expand our East Metro Services:*

Anchoring our efforts to better serve individuals and families in need, Open Arms will lease and renovate a commercial kitchen in the East Metro, at Runway 52 on the west side of St. Paul, putting us in a position to expand our physical capacity and increase our geographic reach. Starting out, we will relocate the activities of our off-site revenue-generating kitchen, the Kitchen of Opportunities (KOO). The current KOO kitchen space in South Minneapolis is leased, and its physical capacity is maxed out. At our 2500 Bloomington building we have also grown out of freezer storage; we are producing 40% more entrees today than we were even 6 months ago. We will be building enough freezer space at our new St. Paul site to more than double our current capacity.

We will integrate our two kitchens (Minneapolis and St. Paul), but from a production standpoint, we will move our frozen meal production to the St. Paul kitchen and produce chilled meals (e.g., sandwiches and salads) at the Minneapolis kitchen. **By relocating KOO from its current location in Minneapolis, while we open the St. Paul kitchen, to our main kitchen on Bloomington Avenue we will increase meal production capacity at that site by 50% — from 2,000 to 3,000 meals per day — enabling us to better serve and onboard new clients living in Ramsey County and further east.** From day one, we will be delivering to our east metro clients out of the new kitchen and delivering to our west metro clients out of our 2500 Bloomington kitchen, poised us to maximize expansion efforts. In fact, we will be building a shipping area at the new building. So, in addition to expanded service in the metro area we will also more than triple our capacity to ship meals statewide and into **western Wisconsin**. While OAM (Open Arms of Minnesota) has increased services to clients living east of the river by 21% over the last five years, the need in the East Metro is growing rapidly: 1 in 7 St. Paul families struggle with hunger; the percentage of residents with chronic conditions such as COPD and kidney disease is higher than the state average; and incidents of life-threatening illnesses such as cancer are on the rise. The East Metro kitchen will serve as a base for even more expansion into underserved geographic areas that we are not currently able to deliver to, including parts of Washington, Dakota, and Ramsey Counties.

The additional physical location will help alleviate the myriad capacity challenges that we currently face. The new facility will relieve the pressure on our Minneapolis building with more freezer and refrigerator space, more dry storage space, more work areas for staff, more parking stalls, and a space to headquarter our burgeoning shipping project.

The kitchen in the East Metro will build on our successful Minneapolis model, creating a thriving community of volunteers from a variety of backgrounds to come together to help their neighbors. Currently, our vibrant volunteer community mostly represents the Western Metro; only 25% of current volunteers hail from East of the river. An Open Arms kitchen in the East Metro will allow us to double the size of our volunteer community and bring our volunteer opportunities miles closer to people living in the East metro as well as provide new jobs and internships for the East metro.