

As a representative of the Slavic and Eastern European immigrant and refugee community, I feel a deep obligation to share my journey as a Food Bank Ambassador, particularly considering the incredible hurdles many of my fellow community members face upon arriving in the United States. Story of our client “When I first arrived here, the stark contrast between my life in Eastern Europe and the new world I found myself in was overwhelming. The Russian- Ukrainian war had darkened our skies back home, forcing many of us to leave everything behind. The day I boarded the plane to the U.S. was marked by fear and uncertainty. While I was grateful to escape the war, I knew that my journey was far from over. Little did I know just how crucial it would be to have a support network in place as I navigated the initial weeks in this unfamiliar land. In those first few weeks, while waiting for benefits from the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), I experienced firsthand the chilling reality of being without resources. I remember standing in line at the one of the food pantries, feeling a mix of gratitude and shame. The pantry was filled with people from all walks of life, each of us bound by the common thread of seeking support. Many of my companions were Russian and Ukrainian speakers, their eyes reflecting stories of loss and hope. We did not speak enough English and we were not familiar how to ask for the food items” It is one of many stories we hear all the time serving our clients. Realizing the immense need for assistance, I stepped into the role of a Food Bank Ambassador in 2022. Our non-profit organization the Community Pulse Association has taken it upon ourselves to cater to the needs of families who are caught in this transitional phase, those who have fled their homes and are now adrift in a new world. We work tirelessly to provide culturally specific free food boxes every month, ensuring that our community can access familiar and comforting foods during this daunting time of change. Each month, we help over 100 families, but it’s more than just handing out food—it’s about building relationships. I recall an elderly woman named Nadia who fled Ukraine with her two grandchildren. She and I would chat as I handed her the food box, connecting over our shared memories of home—dishes like borscht and pierogi that brought back fleeting moments of joy. It became clear that food was more than sustenance for her; it was a tangible link to her past, a taste of home that made the very real struggles of the present more bearable. The stories I hear from fellow refugees and immigrants often blend hope with despair. Many are waiting for work authorization or Social Security numbers that can take weeks, sometimes even months, to arrive. Meanwhile, they can not work and make money to provide the food to their families. They tell me about the anxiety of not having enough food on the table for their children while they wait for the system to catch up with their new lives. Each story underscores the urgency of our mission and highlights the need for stronger food resources during these vulnerable moments. Our outreach events, held on weekends and evenings, have become a haven for community connection and collective resilience. They serve not only as a means of distributing food but also as a platform for sharing information about navigating the challenges of life in a new country. Together, we discuss other resources available—legal assistance, job training programs, and mental health support—fostering a sense of community that extends beyond just food. As I advocate for initiatives like “Food for All,” I often reflect on our shared humanity. Regardless of where we come from, every person deserves to sit down at a table filled with food. In 2025, it is disheartening to think that hunger remains a reality for so many in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, primarily due to systemic obstacles that can trap individuals in cycles of need and uncertainty. Through my role as a Food Bank Ambassador, I am remarkable how community-driven initiatives can spark change. I am deeply hopeful that as we continue advocating for more inclusive policies and support systems, we can eliminate hunger and ensure that,

eventually, every family has the food they need to thrive. Together, we are weaving a tapestry of resilience, compassion, and hope, helping each other to rise from the ashes of conflict towards a future of nourishment, stability, and ultimately, belonging.