

## Food Bank and Toyota Team Up for "Meals Per Hour"

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### By Amy Thompson

After Superstorm Sandy, Food Bank For New York City worked hard to provide food and services to New Yorkers in hard-hit communities who were desperate for our assistance. But as hard as we worked, we knew we could do more. That's when serendipity stepped in. Our partner Toyota came to us wanting to get involved. At first I thought, "What do a car company and a hunger relief organization have in common?" As it turns out, a lot! We both share a passion for helping people.

Over the past few months, we have worked with the Toyota Production System Support center (TSSC) on the "Meals Per Hour" project, a collaboration borne of Food Bank's constant search for innovative ways to get people the food they need. The idea was simple: TSSC would help us apply the manufacturing philosophy Toyota uses to build cars to our food pantries in order to feed hungry New Yorkers faster and more efficiently. For eight weeks, Food Bank provided food to Metro World Child, one of our longtime member agencies, as well as the staff to pack and distribute it into emergency boxes for hungry families in Far Rockaway, a community ravaged by Sandy. TSSC was on hand every step of the way to train us and implement their principles.

In the warehouse, where the food boxes were packed, loaded in the truck, and prepared for distribution, TSSC and Food Bank got busy making changes. They suggested that Metro switch from square boxes to rectangular ones to ensure that each box was filled with less air and more food.

We also implemented an assembly line box-packing system that dramatically reduced packing time. Changes were even made at the point of distribution in the Rockaways, which reduced the amount of time it took volunteers to hand out boxes. What were the specific outcomes of all the TSSC improvements? Watch the [Meals Per Hour video](#) and see for yourself! With each viewing of this video, Toyota will donate the cost of one meal to Food Bank For New York City, up to 1 million meals!

I had fun helping with the distribution each week in Far Rockaway, but I also learned more than I was expecting to, and I know others at Food Bank have as well. As a result of this project, Food Bank has already begun to apply TSSC principles to our Community Kitchen and Food Pantry in Harlem, as well as to some of our member agencies across the five boroughs, with plans to do more. TSSC has also agreed to come back and help us improve the efficiency of our warehouse, which is the largest wholesale food distribution center in the world. It will be quite a job, but I know from firsthand experience that we'll see great results!

*Amy Thompson is a Capacity Associate and works on the award-winning [TEN program](#) at Food Bank For New York City.*