



BRIGHT SPOT: **The Good Food Collective**

Connecting food justice and child care through multi-sector community organizing and policy action

Serving FFNs since: **2019**

Area served: **La Plata County**

Case study authors: **Ana Elizabeth Chávez Mendoza, Christy Weber, María de los Ángeles Osorio Cooper, Ph.D.**

GFC leadership and staff: **Rachel Landis and Tiffany Chacon**



Origin story

In 2019, the founders of the Good Food Collective (GFC) in Durango, Colorado, recognized that food systems are essential mechanisms for addressing rural poverty, creating meaningful employment, honoring cultural identities, and building strong, connected communities. Access to healthy food is deeply tied to income and opportunity. Furthermore, food security is a prerequisite for health and civic engagement. Without it, individuals can't participate in the social, political and economic life of their communities.

While many organizations were addressing food security, health, and economic resilience, efforts remained siloed. Executive Director Rachel Landis recalled attending numerous food-related meetings—on farming, food pantries, and nutrition—and noticing that no one was collaborating. To help address this, GFC, the county commissioner, and the housing alliance convened a multi-sector coalition. GFC helped stakeholders connect the dots and recognize the interdependence between food

“Everyone was doing amazing work. But they weren’t talking to each other. So rural farmers kept struggling, agricultural lands were lost to development, and food insecurity deepened. Nothing was changing.”

– Rachel Landis
GFC Executive Director

systems, economic stability, and caregiving infrastructure. This systems-level approach is at the heart of GFC's transformative model.

GFC employs a grassroots, community-organizing approach built on trust, accessibility, and responsiveness. Staff members like Tiffany Chacon, the Childcare Project Manager, embody this bottom-up philosophy. Her job includes listening closely to the needs of the community and building relationships that foster empowerment and collaboration. "Our collective is all about grassroots efforts. There's nothing for the people without the people. Everything we do must be bottom-up," she asserts.

This relational approach has been particularly important in forging connections with Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers in a region where support systems are scarce. Through extensive engagement with community partners and FFNs, GFC learned that FFNs were struggling to afford healthy food for themselves and the children in their care. So in 2022 the organization piloted a three-month program that offered nutrition training, funds for nourishing food procurement, and technical support to help FFN providers integrate food costs into their business plans. Participating FFNs could opt into a weekly box of fresh, locally sourced produce for just \$12 per week, with the potential to reduce the cost to \$0 through enrollment in

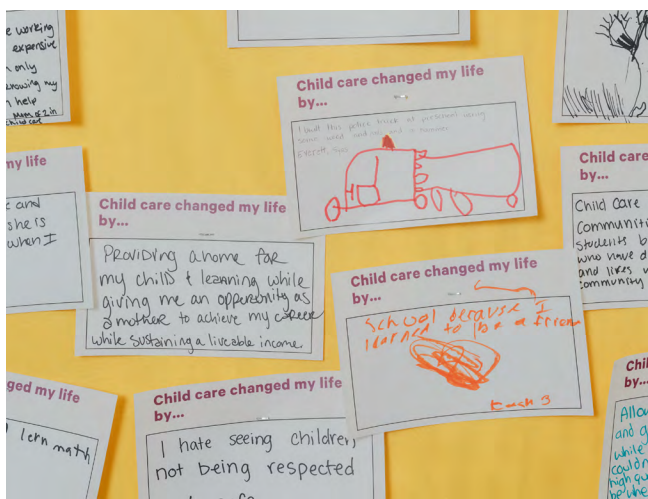
programs like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Though the pilot ended due to funding and staffing changes, GFC has continued to support FFN providers and families by connecting them with existing resources such as food pantries, gleaning programs (which recover surplus produce from farms), and government assistance.

"Sometimes you don't want to share [aspects of your life], but when you can share that story, you can create change by sharing that experience."

—Tiffany, Childcare Project Manager

GFC's work goes far beyond immediate relief, however. They strive to address the root causes of food insecurity by supporting the economic stability and growth of FFN caregivers—particularly Latina women. FFNs voiced a need for bilingual system navigators, Spanish-language training to earn Child Development Associate certification, and access to bilingual childcare centers—both to grow professionally and to support other Latine¹

¹ The Good Food Collective uses the term Latine to encompass Spanish-speaking cultures from Mexico, Central and South America.



families in their communities. These insights shaped GFC's strategic priorities and culminated in them joining with other organizations to support a bold, community-informed funding proposal in 2024. Passed in November of that year, Proposition 1A (a local lodging tax) will fund childcare and workforce housing (specific projects to be selected by county commissioners). GFC continues to push for the inclusion of childcare projects that are inclusive of FFN care. Other top priorities for GFC include: hiring a bilingual navigator, establishing a bilingual childcare center where FFNs can thrive in professional roles, and increasing access to high-quality childcare for working families.

By creating a space where every voice matters, GFC inspires their community to reimagine food systems not just as a means of nourishment, but as pathways to dignity, stability, and shared prosperity.

Funding transformative work

GFC understands that scaling its impact requires more than funding programs or services—it demands support for the deeper, transformative work of community engagement: setting priorities, solving problems, and advocating for systems change. While many grants support specific initiatives, fewer invest in this kind of long-term, community-driven transformation.

Mission-aligned private foundations have played a key role in sustaining GFC's community-led initiatives. The Colorado Health Foundation, a state-wide philanthropy that launched a community food systems project six years ago, awarded them a planning grant, and later provided four years of additional funding to address food insecurity through systemic change and community leadership.

Rachel Landis emphasized, "They were an adaptive learning institution. We were thought partners. Even though they were funding food

systems work, they made it clear: 'It must be community-led.' So, when we told them our community prioritized childcare—not expanding food pantries—as a means to address food insecurity, they didn't hesitate. They honored that request and supported it. That was rare and beautiful for a philanthropic organization. They have since provided additional funding, which has been incredible." This shows that strategic funding is not just about financial support. It is about investing in community leadership, being a thought partner, and creating opportunities for long-term systems transformation.

"If we as an organization add capacity, build connections, and foster the mindset that 'if we all work together, we can do this,' then that is the world we'll create."

—Rachel Landis, Executive Director

Systems change through sustained community engagement, community building, and activism

GFC's understanding of how to best support FFN caregivers was developed through community organizing, mutual learning, and the practice of *acompañamiento*—the practice rooted in Latine culture of walking alongside someone, symbolically taking their hand to help them reach their goal.

Self-doubt and fear are common among immigrant FFNs who are starting a new life in a strange and sometimes hostile environment, often without the family support that immigrants tend to lean on. Darcy recalled, "When I arrived in this country, I saw that the immigrant community, especially Latinos, didn't raise their voices. We lived in the shadows. But something

inside me said: this isn't right. Our voice is valid." Meeting Tiffany changed everything. Through regular meetings, both virtual and in person, Darcy and others found solidarity.

"I felt alone at first, but now I've found my people, my community."

—Darcy, FFN

Many FFNs first hear about GFC through word of mouth. For Silvana, who once felt isolated, getting involved with GFC was transformative. "When I arrived in the U.S., I didn't know any organizations. I felt alone. But when I joined the group and heard other women speak about our shared needs, I understood Tiffany's role—to help us unite. I realized I wasn't alone. We started supporting each other."

These gatherings are spaces of learning and mutual support, where FFNs not only gain

practical tools but also the confidence to navigate complex systems and advocate for change. By helping immigrant FFNs raise their voices in decision-making spaces, GFC fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment.

GFC's *Voces de la Comunidad* (Community Voices) group originally raised the issue of child care affordability and availability being essential for enabling families to achieve food security in 2022. This led to the creation of the *Grupo de Cuidado Infantil* (Childcare group), an advocacy group led by Tiffany Chacon, advancing childcare access and provider support, in 2023. Participants meet weekly virtually to discuss strategy, share information, and just chat and connect with one another.

With a 2022 Early Milestones grant, the *Grupo de Cuidado* conducted a needs assessment and developed a strategic plan for early childhood education (ECE) in the region that would advance childcare access and provider support. A milestone in this journey was hiring Tiffany as Childcare Project Manager. "This wasn't just filling a position," she explained. "It was about sustaining our work and giving FFNs a voice in shaping childcare's future." By 2021, the group had secured additional funding to launch a local ECE organizing committee. The committee brought together county commissioners, city council members, and the rural housing alliance once more. In order to foster cross-sector collaboration, Tiffany helped lead critical conversations on cultural competence and capacity-building.

"[City officials] said, 'These moms are so mad at us.' I replied, 'They're not mad at you—they're angry about the situation. What you're hearing is passion and deep understanding.' That cultural nuance was vital to address."

—Tiffany Chacon, Childcare Project Manager



What makes the Good Food Collective a **BRIGHT SPOT?**

At the heart of GFC's impact lies a unique, holistic strategy that simultaneously empowers FFN caregivers and educates those in positions of power. Their work goes beyond direct assistance to meet immediate needs to the reimagining of systems that shape economic opportunity and stability. GFC invests in the leadership and self-determination of individual FFNs so that they can influence the policies and decisions that affect their lives. Together, they have influenced public funding frameworks and reshaped institutional behavior—helping systems evolve in step with grassroots priorities.

Through sustained community engagement, GFC gained a detailed understanding of the deep interconnection between childcare, food

We want to feel like we belong in this community, because we know that when we do, we can give our best. It's about giving and receiving. This country is our home now, and we want to be part of its future.

Arely, FFN



security, and housing. This led GFC to adopt an intersectional approach that reduces cultural barriers and encourages diverse stakeholders to jointly confront the root causes of inequality. By reframing child care as both an economic and social justice issue, GFC has catalyzed bold collaborations to implement practical, context-driven solutions. By rooting change in lived experience, they challenge conventional norms.

The road hasn't been easy. It's been a journey of courage, persistence, and collective action. Yet through GFC's support, FFNs have moved from the margins to the center—empowered, connected, and leading change. For Rachel, this is a source of deep inspiration: "I'm continually moved by watching people step into their power—how they begin to see themselves not just as caregivers, but as leaders. People start to realize they can shape not only their lives, but the future of their community."