

TEN YEARS AND HALF A MILLION FREE HOT LUNCHES
A History of the Community Soup Kitchen of New Haven

by

Suzanne Selinger

The Community Soup Kitchen now serves an average of 180 people - more than 300 on busy days - breakfast and a full course lunch; located in the Parish House of Christ Church on Broadway, it operates five days a week; it also provides an array of social, medical, and legal services. When it was founded in 1977, it offered soup and bread with peanut butter to some 20 to 30 people, serving once a week at noon in the Salvation Army Building on lower Chapel Street. In both instances, kitchen and dining space, equipment, food, and labor were donated, and in both the Kitchen has intentionally been a community rather than a place for handouts, offering hospitality as well as food to those in need. These are not the only ways in which the two vastly different Soup Kitchens are one and the same.

Starting and Moving

Halfway through the 1970's, urban poverty in the U.S. was unfinished and neglected business. It was superseded in economic news by the energy crisis of 1974, the highest rate of inflation in decades, and a severe recession that brought unemployment to a post-World War II peak. The problems of the urban poor, especially in the northeast, were intensified by these forces.

On hand, the New Haven Emergency Free Food Council, formed when several agencies established in the late 1960's agreed to pool resources, distributed packaged food to individuals in temporary trouble - for example, confronting unemployment or having to deal with lost or delayed benefit checks. But chronic poverty, especially for those without families and homes, was a different matter, and in 1976, to stimulate concern for the poor, a coalition consisting of Christian Community Action, the New Haven Halfway House, and a volunteer group from Yale University organized the first Greater New Haven Walk Against Hunger.

In November 1977, Diane Welborn, the spouse of a Yale Divinity School student, decided it was time to open a soup kitchen in downtown New Haven. She made the decision after an encounter with a man who emerged from a bush in the Divinity School parking lot and asked for money for food. She gave him some money and they talked. She then made some phone calls and ascertained that he and other hungry people had no place to turn to for meals. She went to Dwight Hall (Yale University's clearinghouse for student volunteer projects) and presented the idea for a kitchen to Director Henry Freeman. The soup kitchen was to serve two purposes: to provide hot and nutritious food and to serve it in a home-like atmosphere. Dwight Hall approved the idea, gave her \$20, and arranged for the use of space in the Salvation Army building at 679 Chapel Street on Tuesdays. The Kitchen opened the same month. On the first day of operation Diane and a small group of friends outnumbered their guests, but

soon a steady group of twenty were coming in to eat. At first the volunteers brought soup ingredients from their homes or solicited them from friends. They made the hearty soups from the unpredictable ingredients they assembled, adding more ingredients as they received them in the course of the meal, and developed the cooking strategy we still use: creativity and improvisation; as much protein as possible; no recipes. "Most of the soups just happen," Diane reported.

To provide an atmosphere of warmth and hospitality, the first meals were served on tables with white linen cloths, china and silverware, and flowers from Diane's home garden. The volunteers talked with the guests as they cooked and then ate with them. Many guests lingered and offered help with dishwashing and cleaning. By February 1978, the original volunteers were determined to serve a second weekly meal and, in March, began to do so. To supply it as well as to lessen the haphazard nature of the Kitchen's food supply - to fill in gaps caused by expected food that did not materialize or by spoilage - they needed storable staples. They began to solicit money from area churches, and, following Diane's success in persuading a neighborhood bakery to sell surplus bread at very low prices, they made the rounds of local bakeries regularly.

With the intention of supplementing these resources, Diane applied for a VISTA appointment to the Kitchen (through Dwight Hall) as full-time coordinator, and in the spring she received the assignment. It came just in time because the Salvation Army

had informed the Kitchen early that year that it needed all its facilities for a summer program and the Kitchen had to move.

Diane approached the New Haven Episcopal Deanery and got \$500, the Kitchen's first formal grant. George Smith was treasurer of the Deanery at the time and in a way the Kitchen also got him: he agreed to be our treasurer in 1978 and was unable to persuade us to let him retire until the end of 1986. With this backing, Diane presented an organizational and growth plan to the Downtown Cooperative Ministry (DCM is a consortium of 12 churches and several associate organizations concerned with the needs of the poor and disenfranchised). The Kitchen was to have a Board of Directors, advisory and executive, representing the community and providing administrative support to the coordinator. We received DCM's endorsement and support in the form of a \$2,000 grant. By late spring the Kitchen was at least on the road, with full-time staff (Diane), organization, seed money, and formal recognition.

In the course of these efforts, we were acquiring a clearer sense of the pattern of daily life and the character of the Kitchen. We learned very early that the Soup Kitchen's daily operations were a barometer of external events. The distribution schedule of welfare, social security, veteran benefits, disability, and other checks meant fewer guests at the beginning of each month and more at the end - our monthly averages are worked out from extreme points. We learned, too, that lost and stolen checks were a frequent occurrence to individuals who lived

in very unsecured dwellings at best, and we tried to help them through the bureaucratic paths in these instances.

The people who came to eat at the early Kitchen tended to be lonely and isolated individuals, predominantly male - they generally lived in SRO's or rooms at the Y with no cooking facilities or had no homes at all, and this pattern has held steady. We've also served families and single mothers and children (especially in later years), but it has been other providers, such as Fair Haven Soup Kitchen, in which families have predominated, while we seem to have attracted the outcast. The problems and vulnerabilities they bring with them have determined the nature of the social services we have come to offer. Unemployment and housing problems affect all indigent populations; we deal on a larger scale with the conditions of chronic poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, addiction, and mental illness.

Most of the early volunteers were affiliated in some way - as relatives or friends of students - with the Yale Divinity School. Within a year a small group of community volunteers had also formed. Beginning with caring conversation with guests to provide simple human contact, the volunteers realized that professional advice, referrals, and advocacy were also needed. They undertook to learn more about available social services and they turned to the Yale professional schools. The Yale School of Nursing and the Divinity School willingly assigned students to the Kitchen to answer questions and provide formal counseling. We

were aware that sometimes listening was all we could do, and we were aware that some of the most useful talking occurred at the tables among the guests themselves. One said, "If I can listen to someone and then give them some insight, it makes me forget about some of my own problems."

The Yale students ate with the guests. Guests increasingly offered to help with Kitchen work. The Soup Kitchen had become a community almost immediately. Much later, when the Kitchen formally incorporated itself, this identity was written into its bylaws. The purposes of the corporation were: "1) to provide free, nutritious meals on a regular basis in the downtown New Haven community for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged. 2) to enhance the dignity and sense of worth of those who come to the Kitchen by welcoming their involvement in all phases of the Soup Kitchen's operations."

As our moving deadline grew closer, Diane determined to find not only a permanent home for the Soup Kitchen but one which would enable it to serve meals more frequently and to more people. She returned to Dwight Hall to discuss possible locations with Henry Freeman and together they thought of Christ Church because it was large and centrally located. They approached Father David Boulton, Rector of the Episcopal church, and he decided that hosting the Community Soup Kitchen would be appropriate to his parish and that he could convince its members of this.

The parish was in fact not unanimous in thinking the Kitchen could be assimilated. However time was running out. Father Boulton was a firm and steady advocate. In compromise, the Soup Kitchen was accepted with the understanding that we were temporary tenants and that our status would be reviewed in six months. In July 1978 we moved in. Six months later the agreement was renewed.

For several years, the Soup Kitchen and Church operated within the framework of this understanding, and sharing arrangements were worked out on its basis. The Church provided space, the use of its equipment, and utilities. Any equipment installed in the church kitchen by CSK would have to be approved by the church vestry; it would remain if we left (with the later exception of a large walk-in refrigerator which we purchased in 1982 and which would not serve the needs of the parish - we would remove it if we left and would repair the hole made in the ceiling and roof of the pantry to accommodate its ventilating system). We cleaned up after each meal and had more extensive clean-ups from time to time; the church paid for garbage collection until, in the mid 1980's, additional pickups became necessary; we pay for these. We also were to pay maintenance and repair charges for the heavily used church equipment and did so until 1983, when the equipment got closer to the point of no further repair. We then launched a fund-raising drive for new equipment and installation, completed in 1986.

Our arrangement with the Church has been flexible enough to accommodate both growth and unforeseen situations. And it has accommodated the long duration of our tenancy. Moreover the Church has come to assume us as part of its ministry and to speak of us as such. Among our many debts of gratitude, the greatest is to its parish for doing so.

Settling In

The first meal at Christ Church was served on a Tuesday in July 1978 to 26 people. The Tuesday and Saturday noon schedule was expanded in August to include a third meal on Thursdays, made feasible by a \$500 donation from the Walk Against Hunger: in this second Walk, some 20 guests of the Soup Kitchen were participants. We also experienced the first of countless minipanics when, in this summer of 1978, a change in the administration of the food stamp program (the distribution time changed to once rather than twice a month) left many confused individuals with nothing for the second half of the month. However this crisis was the first of several that indirectly helped the Kitchen. Coverage by the New Haven Register brought both individual food donations at food distribution stations and greater local awareness of the problem of hunger.

Our new location on Broadway brought the Soup Kitchen into closer proximity with Yale. Now more undergraduates came to help, joining the YDS volunteers. Dwight Hall allotted office space to us and its Student Cabinet voted us an annual subsidy of

\$2,500. This support was welcome because we doubled in size by the end of 1978, serving some 50 to 60 people a day, and by August 1979 we were serving 100 people. We also expanded service to five meals a week in the first year at Christ Church. We spent \$5,000 in the Salvation Army period; in 1979 our budget was \$15,000 and we served 20,000 meals.*

* [Footnote: The Consumer Price Index, set at 100 for 1977, rose to 328.4 for 1986]

The Community Soup Kitchen was not the only food provider on the scene but by 1979 was the biggest, and it has remained such. In addition to the Emergency Free Food Council and DCM food pantries, which distribute food to be prepared in recipients' homes, and FISH, which makes deliveries of food to people confined to homes in emergencies, the Christian Union Soup Kitchen, Little Rock Church Soup Kitchen, Fair Haven Soup Kitchen (from 1980 onward), and several senior citizen centers served the needy. The Little Rock kitchen closed in 1983, but Christian Union continued with a style similar to Little Rock's, combining religious worship with its meals. Christian Union and Fair Haven remain our colleagues. We quickly learned that the senior citizen centers were closed on Saturdays from the fact that their guests came to CSK that day and we began to check with the other groups for better coverage of gaps in each other's schedules.

Much of our funding has come from New Haven organizations and groups that support all area food providers, allocating monies according to immediate and long-range needs - notably DCM,

CCA (Christian Community Action) and Cooperative Parish Sharing, a fund assembled annually by member churches of the Catholic Diocese of Hartford. Informal arrangements quickly evolved. Occasionally one of us would receive a large gift in kind and we shared it or swapped it for something else. In 1981 CCA received a truckload of blue cheese salad dressing; we got 40 cases of it. The same year, Lender's Bagel Company gave us several thousand pounds of frozen vegetables, stored for a product they were discontinuing: we contacted the other distribution groups immediately. (This gift was a forerunner of the great bagel giveaway of the summer of '87 in which Lender's bequeathed 50,000 bagels made unsaleable by damaged packaging.) CCA often served as a clearinghouse for such ad hoc arrangements, just as it has formally collected and distributed the Walk Against Hunger funds each year.

In August 1979, CSK received a \$5,000 matching grant from the New Haven Foundation - they would give one dollar for every two that we raised. This incentive helped financially and brought us greater local recognition. The New Haven Register printed a few stories about the Kitchen and we began to find gifts in kind, from single jars of mayonnaise to cartons of food, on our doorstep in the morning. School groups held food drives that produced about 20 cases of canned goods per drive. Church newsletters began to print requests in early summer to save extra garden produce for the Kitchen. We were also 'adopted' by several area groups such as the Jaycees, which has operated an

annual hayride since 1980 to benefit the Kitchen with canned food and money (about \$1,000 per drive), and Albertus Magnus College, which created and sponsored the annual Stone Soup Race for us - sponsors of the runners contribute about \$1,600 each year. Our next-door neighbors at the Connecticut National Bank occasionally chose to come for lunch in these early years - as paying guests.

The period from 1978 to 1981 was one of steady growth, experimentation, firming up, and weeding out for the Soup Kitchen. The coordinator, a part time dining room supervisor, and a core of active volunteers concentrated on providing growing numbers of people with nutritious and varied food and increasing the number of volunteers from the New Haven and suburban communities and Yale. The coordinator necessarily spent an increasing amount of time on fund raising among individuals, church parishes, organizations, and foundations, the latter requiring formal grant applications. We also approached local businesses, and members of the Whalley Avenue Business Association placed change containers for the Kitchen in their stores. Bakeries continued to provide excess or slightly stale bread very inexpensively; a local pizza restaurant, owned by the landlord of one of our volunteers, sent batches of pizza from time to time; a coffee shop did the same with sandwiches. As the Kitchen grew, neighborhood and local businesses demonstrated support with gifts in kind and services. Pac-Tec Inc. donated cleaning supplies. Precision Food Services repaired the oven in our stove and, when it began to deteriorate seriously, extended

its life till we procured a new range. Minore's Poultry and Herman Alpert Meats were early donors, especially at holiday times, as they still are.

Our initial support from individual churches had been predominantly Protestant. Soon an equal number of Catholic parishes began to provide food, volunteers, and money. Jewish congregations also contributed. In fact the nonsectarianism of the Kitchen is an essential part of its identity, by choice rather than merely to fulfill the requirements of a nonprofit organization. At various times we have rejected offers of service - for example, the holding of Bible classes for our guests - to retain this quality. The same has been true in the political realm. We have been glad to receive recognition from elected officials and have sometimes taken it upon ourselves to remind them of the needs of our constituency. However we have rejected appeals from political groups to support causes outside our mandate to feed the poor; our staff, governing board, and volunteers, working side by side, have always represented a full political spectrum.

Daily life at the Kitchen began to assume a pattern closer to that of the present day. Food was still served in the kitchen and then taken into the dining room. And we still served soup or, with better luck, stew. However the increase in numbers of guests toward the end of each month became a more emphatic occurrence than earlier - up to 200 by mid-1981; further, more women and children were showing up. Soon we were regularly

filling jars of soup to be taken out at the end of each Tuesday and Saturday meal to tide people over on Wednesdays and Sundays, the days the Kitchen is closed. (Now we serve take-outs after every meal.) From the beginning, volunteers had brought in discarded clothing from families and friends and it was so welcome that distribution of used clothing became a regular Kitchen service - we collect more actively now, from consignment shops as well as individuals, and have assigned a special volunteer to the task. The Hadassah Thrift Shop has been a major donor of clothing and calls us when it has a good supply.

Increased volume and increased quantities of stored materials and equipment necessitated the purchase of new locks and, to keep guests from wandering into areas used by the church, we set up some gates and fences. Crowding and waiting longer periods in line increased the potential for disruptive behavior among guests, and fights sometimes broke out, as they do today. The staff is usually able to get people simmered down quickly and we have but rarely had to call the police. Regular staff members in the past few years have taken a course at Connecticut Mental Health Center in the control of antisocial behavior. The Kitchen also evolved the policy of banning offenders from the premises for specific lengths of time, and this policy, which is exactly enforced, is effective. We have had a few incidents of theft of kitchen equipment and a few complaints from neighborhood stores about suspicious behavior: the N.H.P.D. patrols after such incidents, which remain rare. In the early 80's, the dining room

supervisor initiated a daily recital of rules designed to keep the serving line moving and the dining room relatively quiet; we've lately discontinued this practice and instead have posted signs stating the rules, which seems to be equally effective. The daily benediction before serving, a Kitchen tradition since its founding, reminds everyone that we are a community.

By 1981 we had also established the tradition of special Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for which the New Haven community has come to respond with money, hands, turkeys, hams, and ovens to cook them in. However the turkeys and hams didn't come right away. While Christmas dinner, 1979, featured gifts of warm clothing from neighborhood stores, decorations, and music, the menu was still soup, bread and margarine, and pizza. Our usual way of calling for extra help for such occasions is through notices in parish newsletters. Often people who remember news stories from the previous year call early in holiday season to offer help. A scrapbook we kept in the early years is filled with Thank You notes from guests.

Some things that we started to do in the first years of our existence did not last. In 1978 the Dixwell Community House donated a garden plot on Ashmun Street for CSK use, and it was planted and cultivated by our guests for a while. However we couldn't spare the staff time or transportation that the project required, and it was abandoned. Our white linen tablecloths and matching sets of dishes and flatware also were relinquished: not enough of them for the increasing numbers of guests; too

expensive to maintain. (Since 1986 we have used stainless steel trays and plastic forks and spoons; thanks to the Blossom Shop, however, we still have flowers on the tables). Ping pong games on Saturdays also came and went, displaced by cleaning operations in the dining hall. In the area of fund raising, we tried weekend car washes by Kitchen staff and volunteers, but they did not generate enough business to warrant continuance. Very regretablely we had to abandon a project that worked impressively on a small scale: compiling and sending out resumes on behalf of guests with skills that seemed to match local needs. Again, not enough time for all who could be included.

We also made some experiments of a less tangible nature, involving tensions and uncertainties that took longer to resolve. The exact ways in which Kitchen guests were to be involved in both operation and policy making had never been spelled out. Similarly the relation between community volunteers and Yale volunteers was undefined. Roughly, from 1977 to 1980, guests were involved as helpers but not managers; in the same period, Yale's Dwight Hall and Yale professional students were the predominant force in the direction of the Kitchen. Under coordinator Helen Palit, from 1980 to 1982, as a deliberate effort to strengthen the autonomy of the Kitchen, the balance shifted to guest and community control. The most striking success in the new phase took place in 1980 when guests cooked and served a fund raising dinner for friends of the Kitchen on its third anniversary. The dinner is remembered with enthusiasm

by many, and Kitchen supporters found it not only gratifying but educational. A reporter quoted one guest's response to a visitor's question: "another reason I like working here is, se^ñor, because I'm hungry all the time."

Justin Brown, who followed Helen as coordinator, proceeded further in the direction of control by Kitchen guests: he experimented with turning over all daily operations to those who came to eat. However, for many who had neither experience nor sufficient security to learn new tasks and routines, the work requirement proved destabilizing and had to be relinquished. Thus when Skip Ferry (a U.C.C. minister) became coordinator in 1983, he confronted an anomolous situation in regard to both guests and volunteers.

It was Skip who conceived of the community identity that we have since maintained. He did not require work of guests but encouraged it - for example, asking one or several to accompany him on food pick-ups. He also brought Yale people back into the Kitchen though in a different way than hitherto. The Kitchen was firmly a part of the New Haven community and Yale students were invited to leave campus and come to work in it. Yale staff was also invited and for the first time appeared at CSK as a significant group. Further, Skip brought the Soup Kitchen into Yale classrooms: he was asked to lecture on the socioeconomic problems and needs of our guests. The Kitchen and Yale were separate and became closer because of the distinction. Dwight Hall's current director, Jack Hasagawa, sees the relationship

established by Skip as a model of Dwight Hall's mandate - to get a community project started and then let the community take control of it, in turn providing accessorially a source of community experience for Yale students.

CSK governance evolved considerably in the early 1980's. An Executive Board met monthly and an Advisory Board began to meet twice a year. The Executive Board always included a member of the Christ Church clergy; the Kitchen coordinator reported to the Board each month. Financing became the major concern of the monthly meetings. While we have received numerous grants from foundations and large corporations - including the New Haven Foundation, Phillipp Marrett Fund, Breslau Foundation, Graustein Foundation, Caroline Foundation, Hospital of St. Raphael, and Greater New Haven Board of Realtors - the backbone of Kitchen funding was and is individual donations. However the donation pattern is seasonal, and the Kitchen, from about 1980 onward, has lived on a roller coaster that moves up from fall through Christmas time and then hurtles down a long course from February through August. To brake the annual crash, we have initiated a variety of fund-raising events - dinners, concerts, and campaigns for specially-designated needs. We have learned to be mindful of similar efforts by other charities and schedule ours at times that don't conflict with theirs.

The Soup Kitchen has also been the grateful (and relieved) recipient of large ad hoc gifts from individuals - for example,

1977 to 1982, transportation of food and other supplies was done by the coordinators in their own cars (ownership of which was stated as a requirement in their job descriptions). In 1982, Justin Brown worked out a sharing arrangement with Columbus House for an old pickup truck. A short time later, volunteer Bonnie Hodge and her husband donated their used yellow and brown Chevrolet station wagon to the Kitchen; it became the first Soup Wagon. Because we were in a red-ink phase when we got the wagon, we had to wait a while to get insurance for it; similarly we had to wait till one of our good angels gave us a gift of snow tires.

The Soup Kitchen began to receive surplus U.S. Department of Agriculture food in May 1981 via Christian Community Action and was able from that time onward to purchase USDA surplus (dried milk, cheese, butter, rice and pasta) for the cost of transportation alone. Canned meat came later. This new source thickened our soups for the increasingly hungry and numerous guests who greeted us every day.

There is a regularness and dailiness in CSK life that is extremely valuable to its guests and we strive to maintain it. Getting the food out is always the first task - preparing, cooking, serving, and cleaning up. Behind the dailiness are the financial peaks and troughs, the crises that prevent us from sitting down after we've caught our breath from the last one, the unpredictability in numbers of guests and in food and supplies, and the simple facts of exhaustion of equipment and sometimes personnel. But apparently we had created a viable community

institution by 1981. Witness these testimonies: In spring 1980 the Kitchen was a beneficiary of a New Haven Police Department bust of an illegally operated city bar; its dismantling yielded us two refrigerators. In the same year, St. Mary's School incorporated into its curriculum a required course, "Social Concerns of a Christian," in which students either volunteered eight hours to a social agency or visited it to study and then write about it. We were one of the designated agencies.

Changing to Stay the Same

From 1981 onward, the CSK Board of Directors concerned itself increasingly with questions of liability insurance and discussions revolved around the question of incorporation. Injuries to workers on the premises would be covered by Christ Church; injuries resulting from fights would be the responsibility of the CSK paid staff. Health and unemployment insurance for the Kitchen staff - which soon included a part-time cook in addition to coordinator and dining room supervisor - were also needed. We sought legal advice and were told that financially we would probably be better off unincorporated. However growing risks might tip the balance. We decided to pay for unemployment coverage and continued to debate. In September 1982 our refrigeration equipment became exhausted and we proceeded to investigate larger, more energy-efficient systems - an unexpected and unsettling expense, estimated at \$2,000. The same month, the Board decided to apply for membership as an

Associate Organization in the Downtown Cooperative Ministry.*

*[Footnote :The other associate organizations are Citizens for Humanizing Criminal Justice, Sage Services (for the elderly), and Columbus House (a shelter for the homeless).] Our immediate purpose was to obtain group health insurance. The long range purpose was to become better integrated into the social service network comprised in DCM. In October 1982 the DCM Board accepted CSK unanimously. This was our first change in legal status.

With a sense that the volume of our activity was such that we would be better served by incorporation than ad hoc solutions, the Board decided in 1982 to draw up new bylaws. The decision was precipitated by trouble and success. In 1981 a drastic upsurge in unemployment, accompanied by announcements of cuts in social services, became a national problem that changed the conditions of living and thinking for people usually secure from socioeconomic dislocation. We realized we would have to respond to both familiar and unfamiliar needs. It was actually the very success of coordinator Helen Palit's expansion of our food resources that determined the decision to incorporate and led to the most basic changes in the Community Soup Kitchen since its founding.

Soon after Helen became coordinator, she took a break at Fitzwilly's, where potato skins are a house specialty. She wondered what happened to the insides of the potatoes and realized that restaurants must be routinely discarding unused as well as marginally usable food. This prompted her to ask

Fitzwilly's and some other neighborhood restaurants to donate their rejects. Her intent was to introduce variety into our daily offerings along with security against gaps and shortages. The dozen or so restaurants she contacted were very cooperative and their generosity and constancy went beyond our expectations: gourmet ingredients and side dishes became frequent at the Kitchen. Helen called her operation the New Haven Food Salvage Project, and by mid-1981 it had more than the Soup Kitchen could use and was giving food away at the distribution sites of the Emergency Free Food Council. To transport the food quickly, we used a van loaned by Christian Community Action. The combination of support from CCA, FISH (an active member of EFFC), and a private donation paid for the part-time services of a driver: the Food Salvage Project was now independent of the Soup Kitchen though Helen directed both. Grocery stores were also approached for postdated foods (such as baked goods and yogurt), damaged packages, and less-than-fresh produce; they could of course claim a tax deduction for their donations.

As this new local food source grew, so did the need for it. Our guests were complaining about increasing difficulty in even getting a hearing with prospective employers; lay-offs were becoming ordinary events and followed the rule of 'last hired, first fired.' A greater number of young people, Vietnam-era veterans, and mothers with children were appearing at the Kitchen. We also noticed a change in racial distribution among

poverty profile in the U.S., had been predominantly black; in 1981 and 1982 we saw an increase in the number of Hispanic and white people. Further the Kitchen staff observed that the usual drop in attendance at the beginning of each month no longer occurred. The federal budget cuts of the new Reagan administration were being felt. So too was fear in a tightening economy: donations from individuals lessened. The Salvation Army and FISH reported in a New Haven Register story that the usual pre-Christmas wave of generosity just didn't exist in 1981; this meant less to store for the post-Christmas ebb.

We had been receiving USDA surplus food monthly since May 1981. Helen decided that the New Haven Food Salvage Project, with federal food supplements, required its own Food Bank to cut waste and maximize its potential. The Connecticut Food Bank, as the new entity was to be called, would join Second Harvest, a national food salvage program in Chicago which distributed "unsaleable" food donated by companies with national networks. (Such food may come in dented cans or superseded packaging; it may be a discontinued line, and so on.) Second Harvest also sets standards for local salvage programs. Like the other food banks in Second Harvest, the Connecticut Food Bank would not give, but sell, the food to providers, charging just enough to help cover transportation, warehousing, and operating costs.* *[Footnote: The Emergency Free Food Council does the same and, to emphasize the point, recently dropped the word "Free" from its name]

The Food Bank was organized in April 1982 and opened three months later. Its director was former CSK volunteer Mark Patton. Participating organizations were required to have their own tax exempt numbers; the Kitchen therefore proceeded with incorporation. The new bylaws for this purpose were ready and agreed upon in spring 1983, and in August the papers for incorporation were completed and sent to Hartford.

It was Helen Palit who made CSK the autonomous institution that it now is; it was also she who changed the coordinator's role to include that of manager and publicist. Though not without exception, developments in the second half of the Kitchen's existence followed largely from her work and some, such as computerization, were anticipated in discussions before she left in late 1982.

The change from soup to full course meals seems inevitable in retrospect - both the need and resources for it were emerging in 1982 - but a combination of chances was needed to bring it about. Early in 1983, Justin Brown was on duty as coordinator when a donor brought in some food that required cooking. No one on duty that day could manage the cooking. So Justin went outside to the line of guests waiting for the meal to begin and asked if anyone could help. Two said they had worked as cooks - one in the Navy and one in a downtown restaurant - and would try. With the other ingredients on hand they produced a good meal. They also told Justin what they'd need to do an even better job, and Justin, who believed wholeheartedly in guest participation in

kitchen affairs, listened. While the Kitchen resumed its soup routine, he began to gather utensils. A few weeks later he went to Washington to visit a group similar to CSK and came back with a surprise: a banquet-size set of Lenox china that the group had received as a gift. Now we had the idea, the skills, and the paraphernalia; the Food Bank had the food; we have been cooking full-course meals ever since.

This shift affected the physical arrangement of the Kitchen. We needed the serving table for food preparation; therefore serving was moved into the dining room. Justin also decided to open the dining room earlier in the morning because guests wanted a place to come to: he was of course responding to the needs of an increasing number of homeless people. We started to call the hours from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. drop-in hours, and they facilitated the social services that the Kitchen provided. In June 1982, voter registration was conducted at the Kitchen for the first time. In the same period, Yale School of Nursing students began to perform routine blood pressure screening.

To prepare meat, vegetables, potatoes (or rice or pasta), and salad for some 200 people each day and clean up afterward, we needed a larger kitchen staff. The Welfare Department of the City of New Haven had assigned a few Workfare people to the Kitchen in 1982 with very satisfactory results and we asked for more. Since 1983 we have had a Workfare group of about 20, each working some 20 hours a week. They are paid a little over minimum wage, plus health insurance, by the Welfare Department.

The goal of Workfare is to make individuals "job ready." Because many of the workers in the program have not held jobs before, the CSK dining room supervisor instructs them in responsible work habits - keeping to schedules, recording hours, finishing tasks. Ideally the CSK Workfare worker will return to the Welfare Department to be placed in a training program, and over 20 have 'graduated' from CSK in this way. However programs are not always available. Some of our Workfare workers have been at the Kitchen for several years; they share their experience with new trainees and volunteers. Our present cook and kitchen manager started as a Workfare assignee.

As 1983 proceeded, Kitchen food supplies were more plentiful and varied than in the past and operations more efficient. At the same time, we had to face again the sheer pressure of increased numbers of guests, notable among them those who had once been occasional visitors and now came regularly. This time the increase was such that, for the first time, the staff and Board of Directors doubted the Kitchen's capacity to keep up with it - the problem was not only food supply but turnaround time in cooking and space in the dining hall. At the urging of Skip Ferry, the directors began to consider whether one or more satellite kitchens at other New Haven sites might be necessary.

Some of the pressure was relieved by the opening of soup kitchens at Immanuel Baptist Church, which provided meals on Sundays, and More House (the home of Yale's Roman Catholic student association) which served on Wednesdays. The Immanuel

Baptist kitchen was established by Reverend Curtis Cofield, a long-time member of the CSK Board of Directors. The kitchen at More House has an even closer relation to CSK: we share food, supplies, and some federal funds. Columbus House, the shelter for the homeless established in 1982, also helped us as its social services expanded. Many of its residents eat at CSK; we have come to enjoy a very close relationship and have representatives on each other's administrative boards.

It was also helpful to acquire in September 1983 a basement storage annex in Yale's Asian American Student Association on Crown Street, thanks to the concern and generosity of that association. The annex freed the Kitchen pantry for fast moving commodities. In late 1983 we began to benefit from acceptance into two federal programs: the Federal "Jobs" Bill and FEMA or Federal Emergency Management Agency. The programs, channeled through CCA and the Emergency Food Council, consisted of food credits to be 'spent' at the Connecticut Food Bank. (The Jobs Bill also distributed funds for related uses; for example, CCA gave us a \$500 credit line for kitchen utensils). The Food Bank itself benefited from "Title I" surplus commodities (canned meats, vegetables, and juice) in addition to the USDA foods it already received. To deal with gaps in food provisions, the Food Bank formed a buying club (with a membership fee of \$50) for soup kitchens and other suppliers, concentrating on discounted items not usually available. Similarly the "Continuum" group of providers for the needy concentrated on procuring cleaning

supplies, paper goods, coffee, tea, and sugar from New Haven businesses which agreed to deliver and bill at prices equal to or better than 'cash and carry.' The FEMA and Jobs Bill credits, issued several times a year, amounted to several thousand dollars. Because we could get cold cereals and juice and pastries from the Food Bank and because guests were waiting for us when the Kitchen opened at 9:00 a.m. each day, we began to serve breakfast. We noted that most of our guests chose cereal over pastry and decided to continue the new meal.

The relief the new resources provided did not last. The Little Rock Soup Kitchen, which had served on Mondays and Tuesdays, closed in late 1983. This was also the time of Attorney General Meese's declaration of the nonexistence of hunger in America - we protested that view to our congresspersons. It was the time of reductions in the food stamp program, school lunch programs, social security disability pensions, and S.S.I. eligibility lists for the mentally ill, who formed a growing percentage of our guests. Locally, new housing patterns ('gentrification') decreased the availability of low-cost housing. By spring 1984 our daily meal count averaged over 200 (a twenty-five percent increase from the previous spring), and we hit a new peak on a day in March 1984 when we served 328 meals.

We are always vulnerable to the unanticipated crisis that rocks the boat a little too much. The Kitchen was burglarized in June 1985, losing the two coffee urns and teapot used daily and

its two kitchen window fans. As in our earliest days, however, the New Haven community responded with generosity. We reported the theft to the Register and they, the Hartford Courant, Channel 8, and WELI broadcast the story. We received donations of one large urn, a smaller one for tea, two fans, and about \$150. We spent the money on locks and installed a burglar alarm.

In late 1984 and early 1985 the meal count stabilized at a 180 to 200 average and we tentatively put aside the idea of a satellite kitchen. We decided instead to concentrate on improving the efficiency of CSK through renovation of its facilities and launched a fund-raising drive for that purpose. In the first phase of the Kitchen Renovation Project, we replaced the aging, inadequate, and unreliable stove with a new commercial range and hood, at a cost of \$6,000. In the second phase, completed in 1986, we installed a commercial dishwasher and new pot sink and work tables, at a cost of \$10,000. The speed gained from the equipment made an immediate difference in daily operations. More House provided its facilities while installation was in progress.

A large bulk grant from U.S. Surgical Corporation of Norwalk was a vital subsidy to Kitchen Renovation and a special mailing to friends of the Kitchen elicited a strong response. Another large portion of the funding came from local businesses that elected to participate in the Neighborhood Assistance Act (N.A.A. provides state income tax rebates, up to 70 percent, on corporate contributions. Since we were approved as an N.A.A. recipient in

1984, one-seventh of our annual budget has been supplied by this fund.)

Shortly after Skip Ferry became coordinator he decided that the time for computerization at CSK had arrived. First, the daily service statistics and other record keeping that federal and state agencies required and which determined the size of grants and other forms of help had become onerous and was threatening to keep the coordinator out of the Kitchen. Second, we needed to track the seven or eight hundred separate donations we receive each year and manage a mailing list of twelve hundred. Equipped with his own second-hand Osborne-1 personal computer, Skip decided to aim for a duplicate Osborne that the Kitchen would own permanently and for accessories to upgrade the dual system. Within two years the Kitchen had its Osborne as well as a monitor, printer, and telephone modem, and we also acquired a Radio Shack laptop computer to store Workfare records entered on-site by the dining room supervisor. The Kitchen computer system finally cost about one hundred dollars, a feat made possible by Skip's energetic persuasiveness and the open ears and bounteousness of ten local businesses.

While the Osborne system needed luck and grace to come into being, it was a planned acquisition. Our transportation systems have been otherwise. By mid-1986 the Chevrolet Soup Wagon was showing signs of exhaustion from continuous food pick-ups and ascetic maintenance. In December it was hit by another car. In early 1987 it totally failed a D.M.V. Emissions Control test.

David O'Sullivan, Skip's successor as coordinator, took the test reports to Dick Fitzpatrick, a long-standing and devoted Board member who works at Crest Lincoln Mercury. On many occasions in the 80's, Dick has informed other businesspersons of the Kitchen's existence and encouraged them to provide gifts that match specific needs. David asked Dick whether the car could be tuned up enough to pass inspection. Dick looked at the reports and said no. A week later David was invited to Crest to receive a splendid green Mercury station wagon, acquired by Crest as a trade-in. Crest gave it to the Kitchen for \$25 - \$24 for transfer of title and temporary registration and \$1 for legal sale status.

In 1983, Skip instituted our annual fund-raising dinner, consisting of a cocktail party (the subscribers bring liquor), a soup kitchen dinner, and live chamber music; the dinners raise about \$5000. Two groups of musicians at the Yale Music School have provided the entertainment as part of their federal work/study program. The Brass Ring Quartet has also performed at CSK benefit events, thanks again to Dick Fitzpatrick. His commitment to the Kitchen being famous, the Brass Ring Quartet headed for Crest Lincoln-Mercury when it needed to lease a van for a tour. If Crest gave them the van on good terms, they'd perform for CSK. The transaction took place, and the Quartet chose to come back again for a dinner in spring 1987 - no van needed this time.

Skip's invitation to the Yale Music School was characteristic of his term as coordinator. He involved Yale computer science majors in the development of our computer system and presented some undergraduates with the intriguing problem of how to get their dining halls' leftovers into the Soup Kitchen. Prior to 1983 we had received Yale leftovers on a small scale and erratically because the University was concerned about liability. In 1983 a Good Samaritan law was passed by the Connecticut State Legislature (CGS § 52-557b). Although the law focused on release from liability in the delivery of emergency medical care, its scope was extended in application to charitable food providers.* [*Footnote: Legislation specifying this application is, as of the writing of this article, pending in Hartford.] Yale added the further caution of consulting with one of its microbiologists about lengths of time for the onset of bacteria. The students met and worked out the logistics for regular deliveries; soon mini-vans as well as human transporters were coming to 84 Broadway. The bounty is extraordinary the day following the dining hall shut-downs for vacations.

The Yale Law School also became formally involved in the Kitchen's social services in this period. Early in 1986, a group of Law School students and faculty (some connected with New Haven Legal Assistance) formed the Yale Homelessness Clinic. In the fall of 1986, they approached Skip to discuss the inclusion of CSK guests in their advocacy efforts. The discussion ranged further and they agreed to set up a clinic at the Kitchen. Since

that time, law students have been coming to CSK one morning a week to provide legal advice on all civil matters.

Skip also scanned the wider New Haven community and brought in the Technical Careers Institute (a trade school in West Haven) in an arrangement that became a model for others: students at the Institute did maintenance and repairs for us as a credited part of their training. In moving outward from Yale and downtown New Haven, Skip was following Helen Palit's orientation. The same is true of the Kitchen's use of local radio and television. In fall 1985 Hurricane Gloria hit Connecticut. Sister Doris Cormier of Holy Infant Church in Orange, one of our earliest supporters, contacted David O'Sullivan (then President of the CSK Board and a member of Holy Infant Church) with an offer of partially thawed food from the convent's freezer. This drew our attention to the fact that many area residents would have freezers full of rapidly defrosting meat they could not consume before spoilage. Skip called WELI's Storm Center, and an appeal from him was included in the storm announcements. The response went beyond our hopes: more than four hundred pounds of meat, including steaks, roasts, and chicken, were donated. Skip & helpers drove 114 miles to bring it all in and our cook was exhausted; we had an amazing week with no protein worries whatsoever.

In November 1986 the Department of Sanitation of the City of New Haven took cognizance of our large existence with a surprise inspection, and, with only a few criticisms, we scored 93 out of 100. The city has put us to some other uses recently. In 1986

the Kitchen was designated an agency for the fulfillment of mandatory community service sentences. Sentencees assigned to CSK receive the same orientation that other new workers get, though their tasks are more specific; our dining room supervisor has integrated them smoothly into the Kitchen workforce with training and attention. The City of New Haven has also used us to reach risk populations represented in the Kitchen for AIDS awareness classes, and AIDS Project New Haven has sent representatives to distribute information leaflets and answer questions.

On an average day in the Kitchen, some 15 Workfare workers and 15 volunteers work together. The Kitchen volunteers include individuals 'trying out' community service, Yale undergraduates, people who come in at their 'slow' times or to help with holiday dinners, and a core of regulars, some of whom have seen almost the whole course of the Kitchen's growth. Several retirees, for example, have made the Kitchen their post-retirement career. The regular volunteers now form a core of 60 to 75, generally working one day a week. Often small groups from parishes such as St. George's Episcopal Church in Guilford or the Amity High School Volunteers's Club come in. (St. George's has been particularly responsive to the Kitchen's needs and several years ago organized a shoreline salvage operation to procure garden vegetables for us.) Yale student volunteers are usually sparse in the summer; they are replaced by small groups which have included Dwight Hall's Japanese interns (Yale students serve in

turn in Japan) and members of the Dominican order assigned by St. Mary's Church.

Volunteers are generally anonymous while at work and many say they enjoy that quality. The same is true of Board members, whose concern for our guests is reflected throughout the meeting Minutes. For example, one member reminded the Board at an early fall meeting that we did not have enough warm gloves for everyone in the previous year's Christmas offerings. However some of our benefactors have not been able to avoid notice. Bill Liddell, a retired seed-grower who maintains a garden of three-quarters of an acre in Hamden, had a surplus of vegetables a few years ago and decided to offer them to Columbus House. They received them enthusiastically and he began to deliver more. When they could not keep up with his supply, they referred him to the Connecticut Food Bank and he became one of the Bank's major suppliers and its unique provider of supermarket-sized quantities with home garden freshness and reliability. We met him when he stopped by to ask if we could take the contents of some jars of canned vegetables so that he'd have a fresh supply of canning jars, and he now makes direct deliveries to us. Bill often points out that he is not just being philanthropic; he is enjoying a chance to experiment with seed-growing techniques and continue his life-long career. In this sense he is representative of the pattern of mutual benefit that has developed as the Kitchen's needs have become both greater and more specialized. He is also but a larger-than-life version of the earliest volunteers who brought

in bags of tomatoes and squash from their backyard gardens in the first summer of the Kitchen's existence.

As of 1986, annual operating costs at CSK were \$56,000. The largest single source of funding - forty percent or more - remains individual donations; the next largest is small businesses. We received no money from Hands Across America in 1986: its administrators decided Connecticut was "too rich."

On our 1986 budget, we served 57,000 meals. In 1979, on a budget of \$20,000, we served 20,000. The budgets include staff salaries. Adjusted for inflation, our unit costs are down. We have more resources for food but they are uncertain. In June 1986, USDA supplies of canned meat to the Food Bank were either suspended or got tied up somewhere (we never learned the cause) and we fell back upon a reserve of frozen Weight Watchers chicken dinners. After two weeks of it every day, we all started to lose our senses of humor. As frequently as snags in government supplies, the Food Bank has to contend with truckloads of food from out of state (Connecticut is not a significant food producer) that have spoiled en route - and the Food Bank has to dispose of the food properly. We frequently have the problem of too much of the wrong kind of food - starchy carbohydrates when we really need high protein items - just as we regularly see our male guests sorting rather disgustedly through tables heaped with used women's clothing.

Fund raising is gruelling even when the roller coaster is going up. We live in an atmosphere of high uncertainty when our

daily and monthly statistics indicate a change in volume of meals served. We can guess at causes - other providers have expanded or shut down; economies are on an upswing or decline - but often the shifts are short-lived and unexplained. Grant applications are complicated by uncertainty. However this experience is not unique to CSK. Several of our coordinators have been to conferences on food relief held at universities in urban areas. *
*[Footnote: For example, a workshop on soup kitchens at Harvard in 1985 and the first New York City Conference on Computers for Social Change at Hunter College in 1986.] We have found that the Community Soup Kitchen has a great deal in common with other city soup kitchens of comparable age. The greatest similarity is the combination of precariousness and full, strong grass-roots support.

Our founders and first supporters would remember these qualities. They would probably be struck by the streamlined nature of food production and daily clean-ups. They might be most pleased about an unintentional continuum in the ten years of CSK's life: the Kitchen has become a learning resource. Not only has it provided a field of practice for Yale professional schools and the students at T.C.I. It has been an observation and study site for local groups and outsiders (a group of Smith College students visited in 1982 in anticipation of founding their own soup kitchen). Area teachers have used it as an educational and sensitizing resource for pupils ranging in age from 4 years (a class from the B'Nai Jacob Nursery School baked cookies and

served them to Kitchen guests) to the students from St. Mary's High School. CSK staff members have been asked to lecture at regional schools - Skip Ferry visited classes at Yale and Albertus Magnus; dining room supervisor Leslie Stanley has talked to classes at Hampshire College about the social and medical needs of our guests. In October 1986, the Soup Kitchen itself operated off-site at the invitation of the New England Catholic College Students Conference meeting at Albertus Magnus College. The conference members wanted to eat as our guests do, and a team consisting of the CSK kitchen manager, dining room supervisor, and three Workfare workers served an authentic Soup Kitchen meal, interlaced with information and answers to the conference members' questions. A member of St. George's parish in attendance at the conference invited us to do the same at the church in Guilford.

During Holy Week in 1987, the clergy of Christ Church held a Vigil for the Hungry and asked the Soup Kitchen to hold Open House for participants in the Vigil. The house is Christ Church's and the blending of units within it that week enabled us all to give thanks. Our Father's house has many mansions.