At Martha’s Table, we believe in the power of community – a strong community. For over 35 years, we have offered a continuum of support — through which we offer access to healthy food and quality education — in order to strengthen the lives of children and their families, and build stronger, healthier communities.

**Healthy Start:**
Our Healthy Start program provides nationally accredited, high-quality early education programming and the health and life supports to ensure a great start for children from 3 months to 13 years of age. In addition, we offer dedicated out-of-school time for early childhood and elementary age children, offering activities and academic support for our older students. Our Healthy Start program is also complemented by a critical family component, which engages parents in their child's success.

**Healthy Eating:**
Through our Healthy Eating program, we make it possible for individuals and families to access healthy and fresh food that would otherwise be too expensive or out of reach.

We believe it is vital that we address both hunger and nutrition by utilizing the most effective strategies that lead to the best health outcomes. This is the goal of our Healthy Eating Program, which includes our Joyful Food Markets in D.C. elementary schools; our lobby market at our 14th Street site and at community locations; McKenna’s Wagon, our daily mobile food truck which serves homeless and hungry residents in downtown D.C.; and the healthy meals and snacks served to students in our on-site educational programs.

**Healthy Connections:**
As young people progress through middle school, high school, and college, we support youth with service, leadership and work opportunities as they mature as learners, leaders, and earners. At the same time, we work with the parents of our Healthy Start students to become family visionaries and leaders on their family's path toward a self-defined vision of success, and also provide ongoing support services into adulthood -- for example, through free clothing and housewares from our thrift store, Martha's Outfitters.
Providing Meaningful Access to Quality Food
Patty Stonesifer

This October, we celebrated World Food Day – a day of action against hunger, where people around the world come together to declare their commitment to eliminating hunger. And while many often think of hunger and food insecurity (the inability to access a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) as foreign challenges, it’s critical to note that these are issues that affect us here in the US and—more specifically—here in the District of Columbia.

Food insecurity is a major issue for DC children and families. According to a new report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), one in six in DC households—15.9% of survey respondents—reported in 2014 that they struggled to afford enough food for their households. Feeding America notes that 30.5% of DC children live in a food insecure household.

At Martha’s Table, we know what meaningful access to quality food looks like. It looks like the grocery store where those of us who have a choice choose to shop. It’s a joyful environment of ample choice, with food demonstrations and nutrition knowledge at every corner.

And in an effort to provide this type of access to families all over the city, we’ve launched a new initiative called Joyful Food Markets, in partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank. Joyful Food Markets are free, monthly grocery markets in which students and their families can shop for up to 23 pounds of fresh produce and non-perishable groceries per enrolled student.

Joyful Food Markets are upbeat and enjoyable, and you’ll feel that positive energy from the moment you step into a market. Families are surrounded by lively music, they taste fresh-cooked food samples that they can recreate at home (using the food available at that month’s market), and they can watch their kids enjoying the ‘Kids Cooking Corner,’ where they learn to make everything from spinach smoothies to kale chips. And while we aim for the market experience to be joyful and fun, our overarching goal is to make certain that these children and families have access to healthy, nutritious food, as well as the nutrition knowledge necessary to ensure their health.

We’re not just providing families consistent access to healthy and nutritious food – we’re shifting practices towards healthy food, we’re encouraging young children to establish lifelong healthy eating habits, and we’re supporting schools in engaging children and their families on a regular basis.

Joyful Food Markets represent a unique partnership that ought to serve as a national model for how communities can tackle challenges. We’re uniting an entire community: the food sector, nonprofit organizations, health organizations, government, schools, and community members.

At Martha’s Table, we believe that strong children and strong families are the foundation of strong communities. And by providing families all over the city with increased access to and knowledge about healthy, nutritious and affordable food, we are not just strengthening the families who live in those areas—we are helping to make the communities themselves stronger.