

Tuesday's Table | Ian's Recipe for Giving Back



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Ian's Recipe for Giving Back



From left: Courtney Oates, Alenys Borrás, Ian Burge, Lucy Mitchell, Jennifer Gallagher

It started like any other volunteer shift.

A group of students from Johnson & Wales University's College of Food Innovation & Technology arrived at Nourish Up, ready to pack boxes of nonperishable food. They were young, bright-eyed, and full of energy—the kind of energy that fills a room with laughter and camaraderie even when the task is humble. That day, they assembled what we call 7-day boxes: a week's worth of nutritionally balanced meals, designed to bring dignity, health, and hope to those who need it most. Cans of beans, vegetables, tuna, grains, and fruit moved from hand to hand, finding their place in the sturdy cardboard boxes that would soon land in the kitchens of families in Mecklenburg County facing food insecurity.

Among them was Ian.

A soft-spoken, thoughtful student, Ian moved with quiet purpose. You could see the care in the way he packed each box—as if he knew what it meant to be on the receiving end. And, as we later learned, he did.

After their shift, we led the students on a tour of our facility. When we paused at our soon-to-be Meals on Wheels commercial kitchen, still under construction but already humming with promise, the room changed. For culinary students, a professional kitchen is more than stainless steel and stovetops. It's imagination made tangible. A playground. A dream.

Ian stood still for a moment longer than the rest. His eyes swept the room, and then he said it.

“When I was little,” he shared gently, “my mom had to rely on a food pantry to feed our family.”

There was no shame in his voice—only truth, and gratitude. He told us how, once his family got back on their feet, his mother insisted on giving back, volunteering wherever and whenever she could. That experience—of need, of grace, of reciprocity—stayed with him. Shaped him. Now, here he was, sleeves rolled up, heart wide open, following in her footsteps.

We were moved. Deeply. But Ian wasn't done yet.



Two months later, his professor reached out. They were stopping by Nourish Up with something special.

When they arrived, Ian and a classmate were carrying pots, bowls, and the unmistakable aroma of something warm and wonderful. Using mostly the same nonperishable ingredients from the 7-day boxes they'd packed that day, they had developed a recipe, Turkey Lentil Soup, and were here to serve lunch to our staff.

It was delicious. Hearty, nutritious, made with love and intention.

But the most nourishing part wasn't the soup. It was Ian's message: that a little can go a long way. That even with humble ingredients, we can create something meaningful, delicious, and dignified. That giving back can be as simple and as profound as a bowl of soup shared with others.

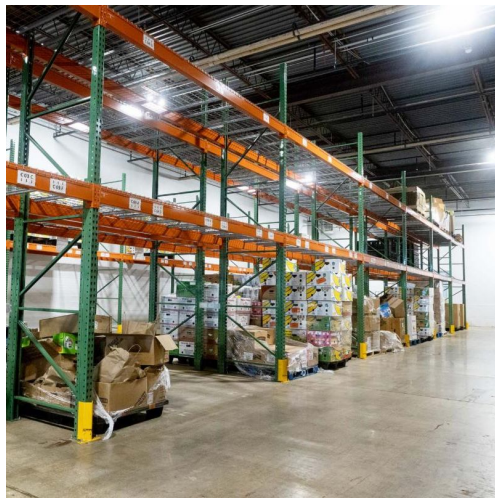
In that moment, the full circle of his story came into focus. A child once fed by strangers, now feeding others. A student, inspired by his past and empowered by his education, choosing to lead with compassion and creativity.

At Nourish Up, we talk a lot about food—about its power to heal, to sustain, to connect. Ian reminded us that food is also a story. His story. His mom's story. And now, part of ours.

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**It is our mission to nourish our neighbors
with food and compassion.**

Nourish Up provides groceries, meals, and hope through a network of food pantries, grocery home delivery, and as the primary Meals on Wheels program for Mecklenburg County.

www.nourishup.org



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