

SSCRC Food Pantry News

2015 at the Food Pantry

Overview

With nearly two and a half years of service, the food pantry continues to be a valuable resource to the community. In 2015 we served 942 households, or an average of 79 households per month. In November, we set a record, serving 118 households in one distribution.

Nearly half (47%) of the households we served lived in our church's zip code, and another third lived in the zip codes immediately surrounding our church. Most of the households we served came from immigrant and minority backgrounds and English was not their native language. On average, each household received about 37 lbs. of food per month, which cost us \$5.57 per household per month.



Volunteers and shoppers at the food pantry in November.

Exciting Changes

Each month, the food pantry needs volunteers to order, pick up, sort, set up, and distribute food and to clean up after the food pantry.

Until recently, most of the volunteers have been church members, but beginning in May, we have had food pantry participants as volunteers each month. So far, eleven participants have been volunteers, and some of them have been volunteering regularly. Since we first asked a

few people to volunteer, others have stepped forward on their own to ask how they can help. We have also had a large group of student volunteers, mostly from Northwood High School. Lately, it is not uncommon to have more community volunteers than church volunteers during distribution.

We look forward to strengthening our new community relationships.

Food Pantry Quick Facts

- On average we served 79 households per month in 2015.
- In November 2015 we set a record, serving 118 households at one distribution.
- Households choose their own food and on average leave with a little more than 37 lbs. of food. 37 lbs. of food costs us about \$5.50.
- It takes as many as 40 volunteers per month to make the food pantry run smoothly!



Doug and a student volunteer check in participants while others wait.

Volunteer Spotlight: Ruth

Ruth was one of our first community volunteers. She stepped in to help in May when we were short on church volunteers. She's volunteered every month since then.

Ruth lives at Arcola Towers, and has been coming to the food pantry for food since we first opened. She also participates in the Bible Study that SSCRC offers at Arcola Towers.

Ruth has three sons and ten grandchildren. She is retired from working for the food service at the Navy Medical Hospital. She likes

taking care of her grandchildren and helping people in her apartment building. She also enjoys volunteering at the SSCRC Food Pantry as well as at the food pantry at her church. Ruth loves her volunteer work because it gives her a chance to talk to people, to make sure people get something to eat, and to get out and help others.

She says that our food pantry is helpful for her because although she planned for her retirement, she has a limited income and has some significant medical expenses. She



would like to find work, but has been struggling with finding a job that fits her abilities.

We are grateful to be working together with Ruth to serve the community.

The Food We Offer

Have you ever wondered what food we offer at the food pantry? Each month, we offer most of the typical food pantry "staples," such as cereal, pasta, soup, boxed side dishes, canned meats, beans, green vegetables, corn, and tomatoes. We also offer condiments and baking items.

When we can, we offer peanut butter and jelly, rice, canned fruit, shelf-stable milk, and pasta sauce. These last items are not always available or may be available in a limited quantity.

We also offer bread and fresh produce. We've had a wide variety of produce, from potatoes to okra, and from apples to plums.

Participants walk through the pantry and select the items they want. While we limit the number of items people can take from a category (i.e., one can of black beans or two boxes of pasta), we allow households of 5 or more to double that number. They might also have choice within a category, such as what kind of cereal they want.



Providing choice reduces food waste and offers more dignity to food pantry participants.

Many participants have said they like the SSCRC food pantry because of the choice and because of the produce.



Where Does the Food Come From?

We get the food for our food pantry from the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). The food bank works with over 400 community organizations in the DC Metro area, including nearly 200 partners in Maryland. In 2014 the food bank distributed 42 million pounds of food through its partner organizations.

The food bank receives most of its food as donations. Donations may come to the food bank because

Most of the food we purchase costs us \$0.19 per pound. Bread and produce are free.

they are nearing or past their “sell by” date (although they are still good to eat), or because they were not made quite right (e.g., too many or too few raisins in a box of raisin bran.)

Much of the produce that the food bank receives in donations is similar to the quality you could find in a grocery store, but sometimes they get octopus-shaped carrots or three-pound

zucchinis. Sometimes they have 50 pound bags of beautiful potatoes, and sometimes there are rotten potatoes scattered throughout the bag.

As a CAFB partner, we are able to purchase this food at a very low cost. Our cost supports the operations of the food bank. Most of the food we purchase costs us \$0.19 per pound. Bread and produce are free.

Occasionally we purchase food from the CAFB that costs more than \$0.19, but is still less than what we would pay in a grocery store.

The food bank charges more for these foods because they had to buy them in order to make them available. Some foods that are considered staples are not always available to the food bank. For example, rice is not often donated, so the food bank purchases it. They also try to offer some healthier options, like reduced sodium canned goods. If these items aren't donated, CAFB will purchase them to be sure they are available.



In November, participants selected produce from sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, white potatoes, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and apples.



At the end of the distribution in November, all the produce is gone and most of the canned goods have been distributed.