

Community Pantry receives \$10K donation

Written by By Jonathan Gregg Sun Correspondent
Friday, 21 July 2017 04:23



Mormon stake delivers check

Nationwide food insecurity is a significant problem. According to the USDA Economics Research Service website, almost 13 percent of the US population is food insecure, meaning they either don't have steady access to food, especially nutritious food, or worse don't have steady access to food at all. This problem is especially acute in households with children as well as households in poor and/or rural areas.

This can create enormous suffering, and it is exactly this kind of suffering that the Community Pantry strives to overcome.

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The pantry is tucked away on Hassler Valley Road, just off I-40 exit 22. Like any organization, the pantry has operating costs including maintaining the vehicles used to pick up and transport the donations from various organizations throughout the community.

One of those vans is almost 20 years old, and in need of replacement. If it broke down “it would not only prevent people from getting some of their food, it would also have a negative impact on their proper nutrition” said Alice Perez, executive director of the Community Pantry.

Perez submitted a grant application to the Mormon church for help funding a new van and after a thorough review of the application, an award of \$10,000 was approved by the local Gallup stake. Gallup stake president Tommy Haws said the approval made sense as “we have always been very supportive of the food pantry, and many of our members use it.”

With those vans, community and volunteer support and other resources, the pantry feeds 3,000 families a month. Their affiliate in Grants feeds 500 families a month. The programs they use to do this operate under three primary categories: those that are income based, those that are for emergencies and available to everybody and those that are open to the public with no restrictions.

Income-based programs such as the Food For Kids program help reduce food insecurity for school aged children. For the nine months the year school is in, with the exception of extended breaks, this program provides over 700 kids throughout McKinley and Cibola county with nutritious food each week.

The pantry itself does not decide who gets the food though, rather the school counselors who know the children best make the decision. The food is given to the kids in a confidential manner to avoid any kind of labeling or potential embarrassment. There is also the Emergency Food Assistance Program which distributes food commodities to over 2,500 families a month.

The Emergency Food Box Program provides families with up to two weeks of food, up to four times a year. This program is especially useful for families who are above the income guidelines for food assistance, but suffer an emergency such as a car breaking down that requires them to put the money that would normally go towards food towards taking care of the emergency.

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The Free Produce Program is free and open to the public on a first come, first serve basis. This program provides free produce from to the community each week at no cost and with no income restrictions. The best time to get this produce is on Wednesday, and the program runs through the week until supplies run out.

The Dollar Stretcher and Meat Box programs are another resource, providing various food supplies and meat at a significantly reduced-price relative to store prices. Again, this is open to the public with no income restrictions.

In addition to its food distribution activities, the pantry also has available a commercial kitchen, as well as the Hope Garden.

This kitchen is used by organizations such as the Girl Scouts for community activities, but is also available to the public at the rate of \$15 per hour. This is a great opportunity for an enterprising entrepreneur to have access to certified commercial kitchen to get their business going at a very low cost.

The Hope Garden, in addition to Hoop Houses and an orchard, has an area where community organizations as well as individuals can grow fresh organic produce in a set of 60, 4'X8' beds (10 of which are wheelchair accessible). These cost \$15 each for a season, or \$30 each for a year.

To continue the work it is doing feeding the community, the pantry relies heavily on volunteers. No special skills are needed, anyone that is 17 or older can help, including those doing community service.

Those under 17 can still help out, but they must have someone 18 or over with them. Groups are also welcome, but should check with the pantry first on scheduling. Anyone wishing to volunteer should inquire in person at the pantry.

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