



FISH FOOD BANK 2020 NEWSLETTER

FISH Food Bank would like to extend its appreciation to all our many donors and supporters. We continue to be blessed with a very supportive community and want you to know that we have worked hard to use your donations to improve the quality of life for our friends and neighbors who are food insecure. We would like to share some of our successes (and challenges) with you as we approach the end of 2020.

President's Message, by Marianne Durkan

FISH Food Bank has been gravely impeded by the COVID pandemic. On a day's notice in March, we had to completely change our distribution model to a drive-in curbside model operating out of our parking lot. This was necessary for the health and safety of our volunteers and clients. We reduced our number of senior volunteers, required masks, and practiced social distancing.



Since March, FISH has seen an overall 30 percent increase in new food requests, many families having never needed to use a food pantry. Our requests for food are up to over 500 requests per month; in Cascade Locks alone, we are up 70 percent in requests.

A silver lining to COVID has been that we have had numerous opportunities to collaborate with other agencies and community groups in providing food. We helped a community outreach group serve people experiencing homelessness and were housed in hotels. We collaborated with the Hood River County Health Department, meeting the needs of families in quarantine. When the fires struck, FISH helped provide emergency food for families who were forced to evacuate.

Our mission, "No One Should be Hungry," continues to be fulfilled by the generosity of our community and county in the form of food and financial donations and by the vast numbers of volunteers who work tirelessly to operate the food bank.

Donor comment: "Thank you for all you do to care for our community. We are blessed by you and your work."

Staff Changes, by Billie Stevens

In September, Lorinda Hoffman, Director of Operations, retired after 15 years of service to FISH. Lorinda demonstrated total commitment to our mission every day and will be missed. Luckily, Marianne Brevard, a four-year veteran board member and co-coordinator of the FISH Summer Feeding Program for Children and Youth, expressed an interest in the job; and we were able to make a seamless transition.

In August, FISH said farewell to Tessa Yoo and welcomed Marly Beck as the new Jesuit /Americorps Volunteer. Marly is a recent Purdue University graduate, majoring and graduating in sustainable farming. At Purdue, she started a community garden and on-site food pantry for students. She is bringing her skills, bilingual abilities, enthusiasm, and "can do" attitude to FISH.

Client comment: "I am blown away. I don't know what to say. This is so much!"

Getting the Most Out of Our Dollar, by Becky Bugge

Along with the extra demand for food during this health crisis, we also experienced the amazing generosity of our community and county. FISH has received monetary donations at a record rate. On the other hand, we have found it necessary to purchase significant amounts of food, in addition to the food we receive from Oregon Food Bank and Columbia Gorge Food Bank. Unfortunately, their supply chain has been disrupted, as has that of local grocery stores. Hence, we found it necessary to go to outside – and more expensive – vendors to supplement the items distributed. Additionally, because of our inability to procure all the traditional food items, we began a short-term, four-month program whereby we purchased \$25 gift cards from local grocers (Safeway, Rosauers, and Mercado Guadalajara in Hood River; Mclsaac's in Parkdale; Mid-Valley Market in Odell; and Columbia Market in Cascade Locks). Until the end of October, we provided our clients with one card a month for them to supplement items they do not receive from us. Our clients have been both surprised and extremely grateful for this extra help, plus the program enabled us to support our local grocery stores in their time of crisis.

FISH also provides our clients, and everyone in their families, with masks as they drive up to receive their gift of food.

In addition to individual and business donations, we have received some grants and are currently applying for another emergency grant through United Way of the Columbia Gorge.

Finally, FISH normally receives large donations of food and funds through holiday school drives/fundraisers. Unfortunately, with instruction being held remotely, that will likely not happen to the extent it has in the past.

All that being said, FISH Food Bank greatly appreciates and values all of the generous donations we have received this year. We could not operate the food bank without the support and generosity of those who care about their friends and neighbors in need.

Client comment: "Heroes work here! You really take care of your clients!"

Site News, by Site Coordinators

The Parkdale and Cascade Locks sites continue to operate during the pandemic, with Cascade Locks experiencing an increase from approximately 45 families to a record high of 90 families. Unfortunately, the Mid-Valley site located at Mid-Valley Elementary School was closed and will remain closed until in-school classes resume. Please visit our website for time of operation for Parkdale and Cascade Locks.

USDA Farm-to-Family Food Boxes, by Billie Stevens

FISH Food Bank was able to participate in the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm-to-Family Food Box Program aimed to support local and regional businesses by purchasing and distributing agricultural products to communities in need. Contracts were awarded to distributors whose operations were significantly impacted by the closure of restaurants, schools, and other food-service entities. FISH participation began in June and continued weekly through the end of October. Each client received several boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products, and meat—all in addition to the traditional food they received from FISH. The boxes were filled with high-quality, season-appropriate fruits and vegetables. Double Mountain Brewery invited FISH to store the food boxes in their warehouse, and a group of volunteers transported the boxes of food to FISH each distribution day.

“I made room for everything in my refrigerator and won’t need to shop for a long time”

Rotary Assistance, by Billie Stevens

FISH has hundreds of outstanding volunteers to help stock shelves and do set up, but, at the end of March, it became clear that FISH needed to change from a shopping-cart model to a delivery-to-the-car model for distribution. Because our volunteer base for distribution consists largely of folks in the vulnerable category, we needed a larger volunteer pool. Rotary stepped up to lend a hand with every distribution in Hood River. Originally, they thought it would be only for a few



months. Under the direction and leadership of Paul Crowley, members of the Hood River Rotary Club are entering their eighth month of volunteering three times a week at the Hood River site. These 25 different Rotarians are taking daily shifts, giving over 800 hours of volunteer time! They are committed to continuing to support FISH, even through the winter months. FISH has established new and lasting friendships with the volunteer Rotarians.

In the words of Paul Crowley, “It is not unusual to see a tear falling down the cheeks of clients who need our help.”

Harvesting my Thoughts, by Marly Beck

Eating food is often depicted as a moment of gathering. Sharing bread, coming around the table, and cooking together are all the most visible images we use to describe how food creates shared memories. When I garden, I have always found solace in imagining the moments that the food I’m cultivating would then go to families. The past few months, my time working in the garden has demonstrated how



eating is not the only way that food, and the FISH and Spirit of Grace Garden, brings people together.

With harvest starting at 8 a.m., I never expected kids to want to come more than one time. Yet, after my first few weeks, we had the same kids volunteer regularly.

They ranged in age, from little ones barely in elementary school, to high school students, considering their college options. Admittedly, I expected all the kids volunteering, regardless of age, to drop off once school started. They would be immersed in their friends, homework, and after-school activities.

Instead, if anything, they got *more* interested in the garden as the season wore on. The first few visits were the same: rather quiet, and we made easy conversation about their own gardens and how we cared for different plants. They stuck close to a parent if they had one there. By the second or third visit, they were moving independently in the garden and telling me everything! They told me what they were reading, who the good teachers are, and even about how their friendships have been affected by the pandemic. One day, gardening and hearing about the drama in one of the ZOOM classes, I realized that, because of the state of the world, this garden was a major opportunity for socializing. For some of them, I and the other garden volunteers were the precious few other people they got to talk to.

After this realization, I started treating the garden time like it was for them—a time of gathering. In a COVID-19 world, the FISH and Spirit of Grace Garden not only provides fresh and healthy produce, but also some much-needed community.

Volunteer comment: “A single tear shed from her left eye and slowly slid down the woman’s cheek. She quickly composed herself and offered heartfelt thanks.”



FISH Food Bank is a nonprofit entity operating in Hood River County and Mosier, serving an average of over 500 hungry families each month. We are fortunate to be in an area that supports the Food Bank with generous donations of food and with outstanding monetary donations and grants. You can visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FISHhoodriver> to learn more about FISH. In addition, our web site at www.fish-food-bank.com will give you information for donating electronically through PayPal. Or, you can use the enclosed envelope and send your donation to 1767 – 12th Street, No. 147, Hood River, OR 97031. Call us at 541-386-3474 if you have any questions. From all of us at FISH, thank you for your continued support and generosity! *....because no one should be hungry....*