

FISH Food Bank

December 2019

Coordinators Newsletter

I hope everyone had a delicious and enjoyable Thanksgiving. We are now headed into the holiday season at full speed. This time of year at FISH is always hectic, and this year is no exception.

This last month the number of new clients at the Hood River site seemed to continue to increase. In the last half of November, the average number of families served was about 25 at each distribution. During just November, there were 44 new clients or clients who have not been in the food bank for over three years. Almost half of these families had no permanent address and were basically unhoused. We are not sure why there is this increase in numbers. On the positive side, we have plenty of food, so we never ran out, and everyone who wanted a turkey was able to receive one for Thanksgiving. We will continue to get the "Santa Dinners" from Safeway. They consist of a turkey breast, frozen potatoes, gravy, and stuffing.

We are also excited to announce that we can take a new step to help families in the middle valley area, as we will be opening a new School Site Pantry at the Mid-Valley Grade School. This site will be open on December 10. The current plans are it will be open two days a month. The school district has graciously provided a small space, and we are good at utilizing the space to make a shopping style food bank.

Because it is in the school, we have agreed that if a teacher suspects a child or family needs a little food, they will be able to access the site. It is also a hope that families that need food will stop by this site right after school. While it is focused on the school, it is also open to the general community.

The Mid-Valley School FISH Pantry will be open on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month (unless there is a holiday.) It will be open from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM. Clients will need to enter from the west end of the Mid-Valley School.

Many thanks to all the people who have stepped up to make this site a reality. So far, all the people helping at this site have other roles with FISH, and several are back from the original Mid-Valley FISH Site.

We have missed having a site in the mid-valley area. While we are starting small, with this school pantry, we hope it will continue to grow. I hope you have a wonderful Holiday Season.

Billie Stevens

FISH Food Bank

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Link2Feed Up and Running

I think most people are aware that FISH has decided to go with the Oregon Food Bank and change our record system to a national program called Link2Feed. We spent all of November asking clients to complete a paper registration form. All the clients then had to be entered into the new system.

Thanks to the hard work of Kim Spots, Becky Bugge, Leslie Hilde, and Tessa Yoo, we had all the clients who had completed the form early enrolled in the new program. That took a mega amount of time, and Kim led the charge on this, by coming and working daily to enter the information.

We are currently on step 2: Giving everyone a new card, and starting the new recording system.

What does this mean for the distribution of the food? Two important things: it does take time to enroll new clients, make cards, sign in at both the computer and on the paper. It requires patience on the part of the volunteers shopping with clients as they may be slower being ready to shop. Please do not talk to the people taking in the information and registering the clients. It is supposed to be confidential. And it can take a little time.

The second and most important part is, when possible, we need at least one individual who is comfortable working on the computer at the desk. This person will need a little training, which you could do on the computer and then I have to provide a passcode to get into the computer system. Most of the groups have at least one person trained already. If not, I will work with you.

It will take a while to get it all organized, so if things do not go smoothly, just remember our rules. We can always go "old school," and the most essential part is to have clients sign the USDA form, and we can work around the other. Remember - if the client receives food, then we have accomplished our goal.

Winter Weather

Winter is not officially here until for a couple of weeks, but you may want to ask the people in Parkdale if winter has arrived. I just want to remind you about the guidelines for FISH Food Bank if the weather is dicey.

Once again, it is a general policy of the FISH Board that the FISH Food Bank does not close, if at all possible. While we want all the volunteers to be safe, our clients do not always listen to the radio, so it is hard to get the information out that FISH is closed. Consequently, they tend to come to get food, even if the weather is terrible.

At the Mid-Valley School Site, if the school is closed because of bad weather, then the site is closed. No one is allowed in the school on those days. For the other sites, we need to evaluate the situation.

If you coordinate the volunteers for your group, I would recommend that you identify a few volunteers who do not mind driving in bad weather and alert them if it looks like the weather will be bad. It may not take a full crew, but clients do come. We know the grocery stores are busy when a storm is coming - they also come to FISH too.

Holiday Closures and Changes

FISH Food Bank will observe the following closures or date changes:

Mid-Valley FISH School Site: Open December 10 and changed to Monday, December 23

Cascade Locks: Distribution Day December 18 and 28 (One week earlier than normal)

Hood River FISH Site: December 25-Christmas **Closed**

Hood River FISH Site: January 1-New Year's Day: Hood River FISH **Closed**

Parkdale FISH Site: No Changes this year

Youth Energy

Over the last month, we have had several different youth groups helping at FISH. I find it so encouraging to have the youth help as they learn the importance of giving, and they are so full of energy.

The youth group from the Riverside Church helps during Riverside's distribution week. Elaine Thompson leads this group and does an excellent job of coordinating them. Then a youth group from the Hood River Alliance Church gave the Immanuel Lutheran Church a hand in distribution one night.

The Wildwood Academy brought 40 students over to lend a hand. They made easy work of taking apart the Rosauers Giving Bags. The preschool group from Horizon Christian School also helped put the food from the Rosauers Giving Bags on flats. We are working on finding a time for the Spirit of Grace youth group to help.

It is always a pleasure working with these young people. The biggest problem is they work so fast, we have trouble finding work for them to do.

Extra Help During the Holidays

FISH is so lucky to have many wonderful volunteers. During December, we will get a lot of extra food from different food drives, so I will be putting out a request for a little extra help. Please share this with the volunteers you work with.

We know there will be a large amount of food from the High School food drive, which usually comes on Thursday or Friday before Christmas. On Monday, December 22, we will get food from the Columbia Gorge Dance Academy winter program. A lot of other small food drives arrive almost daily.

I will put out a call for help when I know the exact day for some of these food drives. But if you would like to just drop by the Hood River Site, they always have lots of work. The day starts around 8:15 AM, and they are usually done around 11:00 AM. I am sure the other sites could use an extra hand too. Just give Glenna or Martha a call to find out if they need anything.

Thanks to Everyone for their Generosity

The FISH Board would like to thank all volunteers for their help throughout the year. Helping others is always on people's minds this time of year, but the volunteers at FISH give year around. Each month it

takes about 175 different volunteers to prepare the FISH sites and help with the distribution of food. Throughout the year, we have the help of about 450 different volunteers. It would not be possible to do what we do without the help of everyone!

A very special thank you to everyone for your help in assisting FISH help those in our community who need a little extra help.

“This institution is an equal opportunity provider.”

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

from the Hood River County FISH Food Bank