

February 2023
FISH Food Bank
Coordinators Newsletter

It is already February and we are off to a fast start with the new year. There are changes coming next month with the SNAP (old food stamp program) benefits that may affect our clients. There was a temporary boost to SNAP benefits put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, known as emergency allotments. This allotment will end nationwide after the February 2023 issuance. In addition, households that receive SNAP and Social Security benefits will see a decrease in their SNAP benefits because of the significant cost of living increase to Social Security benefits that took effect on Jan. 1, 2023. We are seeing the affects at FISH, in January at the Hood River site the client numbers were up 25% and county wide 19% over last year.

Last week on one night we talked to 4 different families that were sleeping in their car because they had nowhere else to go. One family felt OK because they had a full tank of gas, so they could keep warm. Another client belongs to a 24 hour fitness businesses and she says she goes in at midnight, works out, takes a sauna and sleeps a little during the really cold times. While our goal is to provide food, we have been able to help a little outside of the FISH mission. Hector ran into one of these families at a local store and bought them a blanket to help them keep warm. One of these clients had just a thin coat. The Next Door Inc., volunteer heard our conversation about warm clothing and was able to take him to her office and give him a warm coat and sweaters. It appears that many families are not having a great start of the year.

As we shop with the families, we often hear the stories of how they are navigating through life. Some of the stories are positive and some break your heart. Ann had an interesting encounter with a young man, this was her experience: "A young fellow, mid-twentyish with a family of two came to the food bank. We chatted, he picked out the stuff, I packed it...everything was going smooth. Until, after the pasta and soup isle, he got some Mac'N'Cheese and then froze. I was rounding the corner and noticed he wasn't following. He was standing still and immobile looking at the diaper display. He is a young guy with snowboard boots on, and not moving. So, I asked, "do you need diapers?" Finally, he said yes, in two months he will need some diapers. Newborn size. So, I encouraged him to get a package and start stocking up. He said he almost fainted, the blood ran away from him...this is the first time he ever thought about diapers. He picked out a package and then we were looking at the baby food. He froze again. Diapers and baby food had never ever occurred to him. No doubt the baby food will not be needed for a while but he got practice. After we made it past that kiosk we did a high five."

Not all conversations are as positive. One young woman, who is also pregnant but with twins, continues to struggle. Her family had no money in the bank, their rent was due, their car insurance was due, they have a storage unit with items from her late Mom and

that payment was due. Her oldest son is in middle school and on the wrestling team. She asked me if I knew how much a young teen can eat? She said as a family they are out picking up bottles to try and get a little extra money. The best we could do is fill her basket with food but hopefully that takes a little burden off her shoulders.

Another example was a young lady was sharing how she had to choose between food and paying her electric bill. So, I assured her she could get food at the food bank, pay the electric bill.

On the lighter side, I was shopping with a young couple who just moved here from the Philippines. As we were shopping it became obvious, they were not familiar with some of our foods. For example, they picked peanut butter, then I asked if they would like some jelly. The wife said, "how would I use it?" I explained people often put it on their peanut butter to make PBJ's, so she decided to try it.

While the start of the new year is should be a new beginning, for many of our families it appears they continue to struggle. Thanks for helping them through these hard times.

Billie Stevens
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What Did 2022 Look Like?

It is always interesting to look back, so here are a few quick snap shots of 2022:

- *After almost two years of greeting clients at the car, the Hood River FISH siite finally opened back up to Client Shopping, in May.
- *Last year FISH Food Bank served 1785 different families at least once.
- *FISH provided food 4787 times to families. Some families only need our help once other families need our help more often.
- *FISH currently has registered 1293 clients registered in the Link2Feed program.
- *In 2022 there were 420 different individuals who volunteered at FISH.
- *In 2022 volunteers donated 10,590 hours to FISH Food Bank, which equates to about 5.3 full time employees. One report states each volunteer hour is worth \$29.95. So, using this figure, the value of the volunteer time given to FISH in 2022 was \$314,744.55. This may be a little high but each volunteer is an important resource.
- *The average number of volunteer hours donated during the month in 2022 was 883 hours.
- *The average number of volunteers working each month in 2022 was 113.
- *Every volunteer is valued and every hour donated is a benefit to FISH. Some individuals have given an extra number of hours. Many individuals have donated hundreds of hours to FISH. Here are a couple of volunteers who deserve to receive an extra thank you for all the time given to FISH:

Becky Bugge donated 719 hours to FISH

Nick Kirby donated 660 hours to FISH

Vicki Kelsey donated 430 hours to FISH

Marianne Durkan donated hundreds of hours which she never records.

*We should also thank the different business that have volunteered during the year: First Interstate Bank, Insitu, Dutch Bro's, Pacific Source and TCC Verizon. Special thanks to the many High School student who have given time. Plus, a very special thank you to Next Door Inc., who have been sending volunteer to assist with Spanish language since July.

Volunteers for Hood River FISH:

The following groups are responsible for organizing the volunteers for February at the Hood River site.

February 6-8-10 Riverside Community Church

February 13-15-17 Hood River Alliance Church

February 20-22-24 Rotary

Feb 27-March 1-3 St. Mark's Episcopal

Please note that since we have been having higher number of clients, averaging about 30 families a night, it is important that we have at least 3 volunteers who are working in the shopping area. Plus, it helps to have someone at the desk too. There are additional volunteers who also come to help, so at times we may have 5 volunteers helping shop. With this number of volunteers, we are able to stay pretty close to the normal closing time.

However, the night we had 48 families we did run over a little. I want to complement all the volunteers in their work with the families. You are positive, helpful and you are able to keep them moving through the food bank. I need to send a special shout out to the Wednesday night Unitarian Universalist Fellowship shopping group because they were able to give out 10 Seaweed Tonic jars to the clients. So far, they win the prize, as it takes a little bit to convince the clients to try this product.

Little Extra Help??

There are a few volunteer spots where FISH could use a little extra help, if it is something you might be interested in please contact me and let me know.

***Hood River Monday Night Distribution—Car Greeter**

This position works as a team member to greet the cars and give them a number to mark their place in line and then to keep the flow of the clients coming into the food bank. Requirements: Enjoy talking with people and do not mind working outside. (You can come inside and get warm or cool.) Time requirement: 2:45 PM to 5:00 PM. This is a team position and having two people work this position assures the position is covered when one of the team members has to be gone.

***Hood River Monday or Friday Night—Registration Desk**

This position works at the registration desk as a team member (most of the times.) You will help with the registration of the clients and entering into Link2Feed, if you desire to learn the program. Requirements: Enjoy talking with people, enjoy paperwork and knowing Spanish is a plus but not required if comfortable working with Spanish speakers. Time requirement: 2:45 PM to 5:00PM.

***Helping Unload Oregon Food Bank Truck**

This position works as a team member with about 10 individuals, where you help put the food from the Oregon Food Bank truck away on the shelves or in the freezer/refrigerator. Requirements: Able to lift about 30 pounds and enjoy being with a great team of workers. Time requirements: 7:30 AM for about 1 hour, every other Thursday AM.

Information Gathering at Shopping

Last spring the Oregon Food Bank conducted a survey of our clients and how they felt we were doing. On the most part everyone felt we did a great job, which is nice to hear since we were still just taking food to the cars.

One suggestion they had was to ask our clients if there was any additional food they would like to see on the shelves. So, FISH is asking volunteers when working with clients, try to remember to please ask them if there is anything else they would like to have offered at the FISH food bank. If they have a suggestion, we have a paper on the entry door to the shopping area in Hood River and at the desk at other sites. Please write down their ideas.

While we cannot guarantee that we could get the food they suggest, but we want our clients to know we are listening to their needs and concerns.

Good Bye to Hector

Hector Hernandez-Sataray has been a part of the FISH Food Bank since he was a freshman in high school. He worked almost every Saturday distribution until he graduated from High School. Then he moved on to college to become a nurse. We were able to then bring Hector back as a summer/term break employee in several different positions.

We are proud to say that Hector will be graduating in May but sad to say his tenure at FISH is coming to an end. He just left to finish his last term in college. However, he says he might come back during his spring break. It is exciting to be able to watch a young person grow from a shy quite boy into a very self-secure young man.

On one of his last night's working we needed to take food to an older lady but we were not able to get it to her until we closed at about 5:30 pm. Hector volunteered to take it over, which demonstrates his willingness to go the extra mile. However, before he left, I called the client to let her know that a young Hispanic man with a black mask would be coming to her door. I didn't want to scare her, she just laughed. Good luck Hector.

FISH Board Meeting—February 8

The February FISH Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 8 at 12:00.

Important Dates to Put on Your Calendar

February 8	FISH Board Meeting, 12:00 Noon
February 9 and 23	Oregon Food Bank Truck delivery, 7:30 AM, Hood River FISH Tucker Road Site. Always keep an eye on the weather and watch for alters of time changes.

“This institution is an equal opportunity provider.”