

# Fair Haven Food Pantry Lessons Learned

**History:** The Fair Haven Food Pantry informally began as people started asking the church administrative assistants for help. After the sanctuary was built in 1967, a newly formed Society of St. Stephen created a small pantry in the narthex closet just inside the entrance. The food pantry eventually moved to a donated shipping container east of the Scout Hut and after that proved too confining and uncomfortable, into the Scout Hut itself.

In 1988, a catastrophic burglary stripped the building of all the food and some equipment. The response from the community was tremendous, and donations made possible the purchase of the current food pantry trailers. In 1989, the food pantry reopened in its current location. For the next 30 plus years, thousands of people in the Spring Branch community have been fed by the Fair Haven food pantry trailers. Now is the time for the next phase in the Food Pantry's evolution.

The following is an explanation of the Fair Haven Food Pantry pre pandemic operations and services.

**Rules and restrictions:** The food pantry restricted the frequency and area served by zip codes because the pantry could not keep up with the food demand. Four zip codes on the south and north of I-10 were chosen to try to cover the Spring Branch/Memorial area. The zip codes are the following:

- 77024
- 77027
- 77041 (Carverdale only)
- 77043
- 77055
- 77056
- 77079
- 77080

The frequency rules are the following:

- Regular
  - Three times with at least a week between each of the visits
  - After the third visit a wait of 3 months is required
- Seniors (65 or older) may receive food every two weeks
- Disabled may receive food every two weeks

## Operation:

The pantry uses an interview process with a volunteer that checks for client address eligibility and date frequency rules. The pantry is open Monday to Friday 10 AM to 2 PM. Food sourcing is done through various vendors.

The food pantry fulfills many functions and services which are listed below:

- Food for clients (Regular Sack)
- Senior Citizens (Regular Sack)
- Disabled clients (Regular Sack)
- On Demand Food for clients with food restrictions
- Adult Protective Services (APS Sack)
- Homeless "To Go" Sacks (Homeless Sack)
- Emergency food (Short Sack)
- Provides cookies/desserts for functions such as Easter Egg hunt, church receptions and funeral receptions
- Provides food to social worker at Brompton Square Apartments for youth programs
- Hygiene packs on request if available
- Pet food on request and if available
- Diapers on request and if available

The pantry is currently 100% volunteer run and most of the volunteers are over 65. The pantry does not accept any government food. There is a realization that the Fair Haven food pantry will evolve after the pandemic. Over the last few weeks, 26 volunteers have been interviewed. The interview included standard questions but may have varied somewhat based on special knowledge that the volunteer may share. The interview volunteer length of service varies from 4 months to 35 years. The interview process objectives are:

- Understand the current processes
- Provide information / documentation to help move forward
- Create a Lessons Learned document that includes
  - What went well
  - What could be improved
  - Changes volunteers would suggest if money was not a concern

*For more detail, the pre-pandemic completed processes are documented in Basecamp.*

## What the Food Pantry does well:

- **Volunteer-client relationships**
  - Respectful of the clients
  - The majority of volunteers try to help the clients get the resources that they need even if not available at Fair Haven Food Pantry (IE: A referral to Mam, help to call United Way at 211)
  - Talk to people that are lonely
  - If known clients, try to cater to special needs
  - Provides hope to people
- **Service**
  - Outreach program for Fair Haven
  - Serves the community
  - Served senior citizens and disabled twice a month.
  - Provides food for people in need in Spring Branch
- **Represents the Christian faith**
- **Volunteer Organization**
  - Independently funded
  - Volunteer staffed (no payroll costs)
  - Historically, a volunteer organization over the last 30 years
  - Director handled the volunteers well and resolved volunteer issues efficiently
  - Jobs for volunteers with different skill levels
- **Financial Stewardship**
- **Coordination**
  - Organization uses standardized processes that work well within the food pantry limitations
  - Food packets nutritionally balanced
  - Coordinated the food sourcing so food available for the clients
  - Coordination with other organizations and churches who support the Food Pantry

## What the Food Pantry could do better

Following is a list of suggestions from the volunteers. The number of volunteers that suggested an item may vary from 1 to 5.

- **Review Bar Code Process** – At one point, there was a problem with clients returning goods to grocery stores for cash. The solution was to put a vertical magic marker line through the UPC / bar code. This action adds physical effort and significant time to the food check in process. Question if this is still an issue since many stores require a receipt?
- **Mission Statement** – Volunteers have different views on the purpose of the food pantry. This would resolve.
- **Internet access for the entire building** – Internet is only available in the office. It makes helping clients more difficult.
- **Security** – Some volunteers have felt threatened by clients and don't know the security number or procedure.
- **Stock Rotation** – Most of the time stock rotation is LIFO (Last in First Out) because of the way the food is stacked. Most volunteers do not know of any guidance on stacking. Some cans have been thrown away or put on the "free" shelf because of expiration dates.
- **Food Distribution**
  - **Quantity** – Some felt that not enough food provided
  - **Quality** – Some felt that the quality could be improved especially the protein
- **Handicap access** – There is no handicap access. Volunteers handle these clients manually.
- **Building Improvement**
  - **A/C**
  - **Cleanliness & Paint**
  - **Safety** – Uneven steps, lifting of heavy boxes
- **Review date rules**
- **Review zip code rules**
- **Bilingual** – More bilingual volunteers. Not all days had a fluent volunteer available
- **Interview**
  - **Improve Privacy** – Interviews are done in an open room that provides little privacy
  - **Manual Cards** – Volunteers question if the manual cards are needed since the information is in the computer. The belief is that this is a liability release for the food pantry. Is there a legal reason for this card?
  - **Address Verification Rules** – Many clients do not understand what type of document is needed to verify address in the last 30 days. Fair Haven rules vary from other Food Pantries
- **Shopping Option** – Some volunteers felt that clients would have more control if they could "shop" on a point system instead of being given a pre-selected box of food
- **Volunteer training** – Consistency of how volunteers treat clients
- **Homeless Experience** – Review the homeless process and services offered
- **Heavily Lifting** - Either some younger volunteers or equipment such as 2-wheelers to help with the heavy lifting.
- **Pickup at Kroger by volunteers with National Charity League has not been reliable**

## What would you change if money were no object?

Following is a list of items that the volunteers suggested if money was no object. Some of the items are also listed in the what could we do better.

- **Review Eligibility**
  - Review zip code restrictions
  - Review frequency rules
  - Service gap 55 to 64. The 55 to 64 group may have issues finding employment but are under the 90-day requirement
- **Physical Building Update**
  - Air Conditioning
  - Bathroom
    - Floor Supports
    - Update bathroom
  - Updated phone system
  - Alarm system sensors
  - Repair
    - Paint
    - Clean
    - Repair various items in disrepair
  - Storage space
    - Increase space
    - Better stock rotation
    - More refrigerators and freezers
    - Remove broken freezer
  - Handicap access added
  - Permanent parking signs
- **Client interview process**
  - Expand interviewing process to better fit the needs of clients
  - Language Issues - Spanish speaker or translation software available
  - Consistency in how volunteers treat clients
  - Explain to clients the documentation required in more detail
  - Privacy for client interview
  - Consistency in document requirements for clients
- **Modernize / upgrade computer system**
  - Update or replace system
  - User friendly system
  - Review master data manual card requirement
- **Security**
  - Issues with some clients
  - Supply available security number to call
  - Client photos

- **Food**
  - Increase quantity
  - Improve variety of protein
  - Improve rotation system
  - Review sack mix
  - Resolve/understand Food Bank issues
- **Organization**
  - Establish an oversight committee to help with the following
    - Delegation
    - Communication
    - Finances
  - Mission Statement
  - Processes
    - Documentation
      - Review if process still needed (IE. Marking UPC codes)
      - Document processes
      - Create Hand out information sheets for new volunteers
  - Training for volunteers
- **Increase services offered**
  - Pet food
  - Hot Food Available
  - Increase Homeless services
  - Psychologist on hand for counseling
  - Shopping option
  - Clothing