



Creating a Hunger-Free Community

Pantry Times

July 2021

The Face of Hunger: Mobility Challenges



Eric Gool (right) puts together grocery boxes from the Mobile Pantry van for his fellow residents.

Eric Gool, a Veteran and resident of the Freedom’s Path community at Fort Harrison, often helps his neighbors with shopping and preparing meals. Many of the 63 residents at Freedom’s Path are low-income Veterans, some with families, who either don’t have transportation or the physical abilities to come to Helena Food Share when they need food support.

Jason Bridger, Peer Specialist at the VA Montana Healthcare System contacted Helena Food Share about helping Veterans that live on the campus who are

unable to get into town for their basic food needs on a regular basis. “This has been a huge impact with getting our Veterans with transportation and income challenges, food that will help supplement their needs for the month,” said Jason. Now, with monthly stops at Fort Harrison, the mobile pantry allows Eric to help his neighbors bag and box their food selections just outside their front door.

Other mobile pantry stops include the M.E. Anderson apartments in downtown Helena and Aspen Village on Helena’s east side. Both locations currently have about 25 residents who are seniors or persons with disabilities that hamper their ability to access the Lewis Street or East Helena pantries.

Crates of staples, produce, meat and dairy products are loaded into the van, driven to one of the three locations, and parked outside where residents can easily access the food they need.

As with most issues surrounding food insecurity, the challenges people face

to accessing food resources is multi-faceted. For many, physical or mental challenges make it hard to drive themselves or use public transportation. Others simply don’t have the means to secure transportation.

Your support of Helena Food Share has played an important role in creating the Mobile Pantry program. With the addition of this program we have been able to meet the needs of our neighbors who sometimes have been unserved.

Understanding the many faces of hunger is essential for creating a hunger-free community and meeting the unique needs of those with mobility challenges.



The van allows easy transport of food crates to various locations for convenient shopping.

Nola Freestone and Bob Levitan: Volunteer Couple Carrying on Their Family History

Volunteers at Helena Food Share are the lifeblood of every program. Whether greeting customers at the pantry entrance, helping them with their shopping needs, building Kid Packs, tending plants in the garden, loading commodities boxes in cars for seniors, or any number of helpful administrative or operations tasks, the hundreds of volunteers who give of their time and talents are simply amazing.



to create a beautiful family quilt out of her father's ties, all of which were made by her mother. She collected the ties after her parents passed away and decided the best way to keep them in the family was to sew the ties into a quilt to raffle off among family members. Nola completed the quilt this spring and held the raffle in June. One lucky family member got to take home the quilt and Nola and her family donated all the proceeds to Helena Food Share.

Nola Freestone and Bob Levitan are two volunteers who have filled many roles at Helena Food Share through the years. This soft-spoken couple both find the work an important way to give back to their community. Giving back is just a part of who they are.

Nola, who also volunteers for the R.S.V.P. program in Helena, calls each senior customer in the Helena Food Share database every other month to remind them when it's time to pick up Senior Commodities, or when they can pick up their summer Farmers Market coupons. Not only important reminders, these calls are also a good opportunity to check in with senior customers and to share a welcome conversation.

Bob has volunteered at Helena Food Share for four years and has helped with almost every activity

in the pantry—stocking shelves, assisting customers, picking up grocery rescue items at local stores, distributing Kid Packs, and loading senior commodities. “My mom donated to Helena Food Share and instilled a sense of volunteerism in my family,” shared Bob. “When I retired, I knew this would be a good place to volunteer as a way to give back to my community and to work with many of my friends who were already volunteering there.”

Many other local organizations receive Bob's time and talents as well. Bob builds set designs for the Grand Street Theatre, clears trails for the Prickly Pear Land Trust and is a member of the Birdseye Volunteer Fire Department.

This past year, when staying home because of the pandemic, Nola used her sewing talents

Helena Food Share and the wider Helena community are all the better for having Nola Freestone and Bob Levitan among us. “The satisfaction of the work and getting to know the customers in the pantry is a wonderful benefit of volunteering,” said Bob. Nola added, “It feels good to be able to give back and help our neighbors.”



Nola's handcrafted quilt of her father's ties. (Photo Credit: Nola Freestone)

Grocery Rescue Heroes

Helena-area grocery stores are a big part of creating a hunger-free community. Each week, Helena Food Share drivers pick up food donations at local stores for distribution in the pantry. Last year this was just under one million pounds of food. Program Operations Director Kim Dale and lead grocery rescue driver Dave Anderson recently visited each store to say thank you. Dave presented the store managers below with a one-of-a-kind Helena Food Share cutting board to express our gratitude. Photos were unavailable for The Bagel Co., Bimbo Bakeries, Costco, Great Harvest Bread Co., Super 1 Foods, Walmart and Wheat Montana. Thanks to one and all! The current level of food support wouldn't be possible without their generosity.



Eric at **Albertson's**



Scott at **Big Lots!**



Pat at **Bob's Valley Market**



Doug at **Heritage Food Store**



Rick at **Natural Grocers**



Laughing Water at **Real Food Market & Deli**



Paul at **Safeway**



Mel at **Target**



Sara at **Van's Thrftway**



Jason at **WinCo Foods**

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Pantry Times is a publication of Helena Food Share.

Contact Us: (406) 443-3663

To Donate: ext. 104

To Volunteer: ext. 106

To Get Help: ext. 110

Our Pantries:

1616 Lewis Street, Helena
50 Prickley Pear, East Helena

Office: 1437 Helena Avenue

[HelenaFoodShare.org](https://www.HelenaFoodShare.org)





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Kids Need YOU. Join the Challenge!

In Helena, 1 in 5 kids struggles with food insecurity. Simply put, these children don't always know where their next meal is coming from. Kid Packs are helping. These food packs provide high-calorie, kid-friendly food. Each pack is assembled weekly by volunteers and costs \$4.85. With 1,100 packs going home with kids every Friday, the annual cost of the program is over \$200,000.



Helena Food Share seeks community partners to help ensure children in the Helena area have food during the weekend. **Talk to your employer, church, or group today about becoming a Kid Pack Challenger!** It's a fun way to engage staff, colleagues, members, and customers in raising money to help local kids. Your support will help local kids have enough to eat every weekend.

For more information on how you can join the challenge,
Visit: [HelenaFoodShare.org/kid-pack-challenge/](https://www.helenafoodshare.org/kid-pack-challenge/)
Email: liz@helenafoodshare.org
Call: (406) 443-3663, ext.104

Together, we can provide our local kids with the nutrition and peace of mind they need to learn, grow, and play—you know, kid stuff.

Join us at this year's *Symphony Under the Stars* Saturday, July 17 at Carroll College

Cans collected from holding down blankets will be donated to Helena Food Share that evening—a great way to keep your blanket from blowing away and to help out your neighbors in need. Thank you for your support!

Estate Planning: **Leave A Legacy of Caring**

Providing for Helena Food Share with a gift in your estate planning will assure your caring and compassion live on by helping to provide food to all who need it in our community.

For more details about making a gift in your estate, please contact

Liz Harrison
liz@helenafoodshare.org
406-443-3663, ext 104.