



*Creating a Hunger-Free
Community*

Pantry Times

Fall 2023



We believe by sharing food, we share hope.

Stories from the Pantry: More Than Food

Helena Food Share staff often share stories from their time with customers and volunteers in the Pantry. Interacting with customers and learning about their lives brings awareness of the real and often challenging needs, and the remarkable ways they are met by our community. Providing food is just one part of the story. Here are some stories that opened our eyes.

A customer found themselves homeless and living in their car. Making the challenge even more complicated, their car died and left them stranded without money to fix it. Learning what had happened, the Helena prayer group they were a part of helped with a down payment on a new car, and one prayer group member offered them a job and a place to live. The customer was elated when they shared their story. They now have a place to live and a working car. A challenge we see too often, transformed through the generosity and care of our neighbors. ■

A woman who lives near Helena said she comes to the Pantry because the available produce and nutritious food options are essential for her family and, with rising prices, are

no longer affordable. She assists her four children in attending college, saving every dollar she can for that effort. When we last talked to her, she beamed when telling us about her youngest, who was at their college freshmen orientation. ■

A customer who works at a store in Helena occasionally needs extra food support to help him make ends meet when additional expenses arise. Every time we see him at his store, he says “hi,” which brings us a big smile, knowing we’ll get to do the same the next time he comes to Helena Food Share. ■

Our intake volunteers welcome new customers to the Pantry and ask the necessary questions to track the growing need for food support. The first time a customer comes to the Pantry, they’re often unsure about what to expect and nervous about how they’ll be seen. A staff member shared that while working in their office, they overheard one of our volunteers greet a customer and tell them she loved their shirt. The customer acknowledged the compliment and seemed immediately at ease. Soon after, another customer sat down. She greeted them and commented

on how lovely their scarf was. Similarly, the customer accepted the compliment and seemed more at ease.

Providing food to those in need is often viewed as a handout, bringing to mind an image of someone with plenty handing something essential to someone in need. Helena Food Share endeavors to change that



Volunteers stocking the Pantry with food for the day.

perception. Our volunteers take seriously the part of our mission to serve our neighbors in need by sharing food in a respectful and dignified way. We see it happen in so many of their interactions with customers. This volunteer discarded the old paradigm by acknowledging a similarity and personal connection – seeing the person before the need. ■



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Donor Spotlight: Joe and Loraine Wodnik

As donors, Joe and Loraine Wodnik have unique insights into Helena Food Share. Joe is a staff driver, picking up rescued food from area grocery stores each morning. Loraine volunteers Thursday afternoon in the Pantry as a Greeter, welcoming customers and checking them in to shop.

Joe came to Helena Food Share as a volunteer in 2015 after retiring from his work for the State of Montana. During the pandemic, Joe stepped in to help as a temporary employee. He agreed to make it permanent six months later, becoming a vital part of the Program Operations team. When asked about the transition from retired volunteer to employee, Joe said, *"It's such a great group of people to be around, and I really believe in the mission. When people are hungry, nothing else matters."* Joe added, *"The volunteers are such an interesting group of people from different backgrounds. It's really fun to find out what some of these folks have done professionally and who are now giving back their time."*

One of those fantastic volunteers is Loraine, who, after seeing how much her husband enjoyed volunteering for Helena Food Share, decided to do the same when she retired from her job at the State. Over time, Loraine chose to return to work, as long as she could continue her volunteer work at the Pantry.

Loraine shared why keeping her volunteer shift was significant. *"I like this type of interaction—the idea of treating people with dignity and helping to make someone's day a little easier. It's difficult for some people to walk in the door. When someone says it's their first time there, I try to look them in the eye and say, 'Welcome, we're glad you're here.' I think it helps diffuse a little of the nervousness. Over time, customers tell me stories of overcoming challenges, starting new jobs, and their children's achievements. Some have shared that I've made a difference in their lives, making me want to come back each week. Joe and I have known hard times and what it's like to go without. It's satisfying to now help somebody get through their day."*

Joe and Loraine shared why they donated to Helena Food Share's new Community Food Resource Center. *"It's important for us to feel like there is a place where we can contribute our time, energy, and money to make a difference in our community. Helena Food Share ticks all of those boxes. When this capital campaign came up, it was a natural fit as a way to make a difference. We understand the need and the importance of having a top-notch facility for our community."* Joe continued, *"The need for the new facility is obvious once you are part of the operations and see how limited the space is. Having the space to bring in more available food is critical. As we've seen, the need is certainly not going away. What strikes me about Food Share and other organizations in Helena is the generosity of those who support them. This is such a generous community, and we are so happy to be a part of it."*



Gifts designated "Building Campaign" will help build the new Community Food Resource Center.



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The Gift of Growing & Sharing Food



Joel shows off celery, kale and onions donated from a Helena Valley grower.

Gardeners and produce growers throughout the Helena Valley donate fresh produce to Helena Food Share each summer. Over the past three months, cars and trucks bearing fresh tomatoes, corn, cabbage, kale, carrots, cucumbers, apples, herbs, peppers, squash, zucchini, and so much more have made their way to the Pantry to share summer's bounty. Between July 1st and October 6th, growers donated 26,580 pounds of local produce.

In addition to gardeners dropping food off each week —some donated and some purchased, many producers at the Helena Farmers Market donate food to Helena Food Share each Saturday that they haven't sold by the end of the Market.

A couple of weeks ago, one of our long-time producer partners, Terry Johnson, owner of Johnson's Nursery and Gardens, shared these thoughts after

bringing in a load from his farm.

"Friday, I brought in my weekly produce. I wanted to thank you for that opportunity, but I also wanted to share an experience I had. As I was leaving in my truck, a very nice middle-aged lady approached my truck on the passenger side. I stopped and rolled

down my window. These were her words:

'I saw you bring in that produce, and I just wanted to thank you for doing that. It means so much to me and my children. I have been out of work for four months, and getting produce is so wonderful.' As her eyes began to tear up, she went on to tell me how her kids love vegetables versus other items like donuts. I can't begin to articulate what that moment meant to me. Lisa and I are very fortunate in our lives, but interactions like that are

so precious and so heartfelt. I'm thrilled to play a part in Helena Food Share and the surrounding community. What a gift!"

Thanks to Terry and Lisa and all who have grown food for our neighbors this summer, we have had a Pantry and Farm Stand filled with nutritious food each week. Their green thumbs, hard work, and generosity enrich lives, creating a hunger-free, healthier community—sharing food and sharing hope.



Potatoes donated in October accounted for 2,000 lbs of the produce from local growers.

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Pantry Times is a publication of Helena Food Share.

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To Donate: ext. 103

To Get Help: ext. 110

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HelenaFoodShare.org



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2023
TURKEY CHALLENGE
Food & Fund Drive

Donate & Learn more at:
HelenaFoodShare.org/turkey-challenge/



**Will Match
Up To \$10,000
Donated
NOV. 17**

**NOVEMBER
17th**

Bring food or funds to the Library on November 17 to provide holiday meals for our neighbors in need. We'll have lots of fun, food and holiday activities too!