



Creating a Hunger-Free Community

Pantry Times

Spring 2024



We believe in handling food respectfully and eliminating food waste.

Empowerment & Dignity: Facing Homelessness

Sam, who works at a local store, shared his story about how he has experienced significant life challenges recently, leading him to ask for food support. Because of his limited income, he could not afford the co-pay for his health insurance. Sam fell on the ice this winter and broke his arm. Not being able to work while he was recovering created a perfect financial storm. Making his monthly rent payments, paying for food and utilities, and covering medical costs left him in dire circumstances. Something would have to go. Because Sam had relied on Helena Food Share in the past, he knew he would have access to food each week. Covering his rent was not so easy, and the prospect of facing homelessness became a scary and almost inevitable reality.

Fortunately, Sam has been able to cover his rent so far and still has a home to call his own. Many others who come to Helena Food Share are less fortunate. This past year, 16% of the households coming to shop in the Pantry reported being either homeless or in transitional housing. They might be living in their car, a camper, or staying with a friend or relative. Like Sam, many experience an unexpected event

that alters their life in ways that create barriers to getting the nutrition they need to survive. Without a home, there is no place to prepare food. Coming to the Pantry to do a weekly shop is no longer an option. Storing food, including fresh produce, or cooking a meal becomes impossible.

As the number of customers reporting they no longer have a home has grown, Helena Food Share has added shopping options to assist these customers in managing food. If they don't have a place to store food, shoppers can come twice a week for a basket shop. This option lets



Basket shops make it easier for customers without homes and kitchens to pick up and store food.

them fill a standard shopping basket with what they need for a few days. It's an amount they can likely take in a bag or backpack. These customers often seek

food that is easy to open and doesn't require heating or further preparation, so ready-to-eat meals are essential items in the Pantry.



Emergency Food Packs contain high-calorie, easy-to-eat food.

Another program that has seen significant growth this past year is Emergency Food Packs. They provide an immediate option for quick calories to those who've gone without food for some time. They are always available at Helena Food Share and 16 partner agencies and organizations in the Helena area.

By prioritizing approaches that uphold the dignity and agency of unhoused individuals, such as listening to their stories, understanding their challenges, and offering choice in food options, we are able to meet the immediate need in our community. Your support makes this possible.



We believe in handling food respectfully and eliminating food waste.

Volunteer Spotlight: Kay Bills-Kazimi

In every community, some unsung heroes quietly dedicate their time and efforts to make a difference in the lives of others. Kay Bills-Kazimi is one of these heroes and a leader among the many dedicated volunteers who help ensure no one goes hungry. She exemplifies the unwavering commitment that is the cornerstone of support for countless individuals and families in Helena.

Kay's journey with Helena Food Share began in 2018 when she decided to lend a helping hand to those facing food insecurity in the Helena area. Since then, she has become an integral part of the organization, extending her kindness and expertise to various facets of the Pantry's operations.

One of Kay's primary roles at Helena Food Share is assisting customers as they arrive, offering a warm welcome, and meeting their needs with efficiency and empathy. Her gentle demeanor and genuine concern create a welcoming atmosphere, providing food and a sense of dignity and belonging to those seeking assistance. She knows that it's not easy to ask for food support.

She also provides support for her fellow volunteers. In addition to her frontline duties, Kay goes above and beyond by supporting the Pantry staff in numerous ways. From washing volunteer aprons to helping restock Pantry



shelves, she tackles every task with a can-do attitude.

When asked about washing aprons, Kay laughed and said, *"Oh, that's the least I can do,"* but Pantry staff see the importance of this contribution beyond the task itself, *"Washing aprons may seem like a simple task,"* shared Volunteer Coordinator Cathy Ransier, *"but in the bigger picture, it is huge and indicative of what Kay brings to Helena Food Share. Here is a volunteer taking care of all the volunteers by ensuring everyone has a clean apron for their shift."*

When asked about her experience volunteering at Helena Food Share, Kay noted the deep gratitude shown by customers. *"They're so appreciative of the food and the overall care and support from everyone."* When talking to customers new to Helena, she often has the opportunity to refer them to additional support services in the community, such as housing, medical care, and clothing. Kay added, *"A lot of people don't want to be seen*

asking for food assistance. Some are just getting by and yet are still so appreciative of the help we can give them with the extra food."

Kay's commitment to alleviating food insecurity stems from her background as a Physician Assistant, where she witnessed firsthand the critical need for food support in the community. Drawing upon her experiences working in various clinics, she brings a unique perspective and understanding of the challenges faced by those struggling to put food on the table for their families.

Embodying the spirit of volunteerism and community service makes Kay one of our heroes. Her contributions serve as a reminder that even the smallest acts of kindness can make a world of difference in the lives of others. Her dedication inspires us in our work to create a hunger-free community.

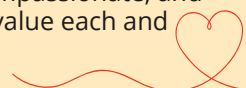
Appreciating our Volunteers

National Volunteer Appreciation Week was April 22-26, and Helena Food Share was proud to join in the celebration, honoring our fantastic volunteers. The week's activities included:

Lunch served daily, and drawings for these exciting prizes:

- ♥ Airplane flight over the Helena Valley with Dramstad Flying Service
- ♥ Fly Fishing on the Missouri River with Micah Fields
- ♥ Myna Loy entertainment package

We currently have **218 active volunteers, 114 working each week in the Pantry.** They are dedicated, compassionate, and a whole lot of fun. We value each and every one of you!





We believe in handling food respectfully and eliminating food waste.

Rescuing Food *to Nourish Hearts, Reduce Waste & Strengthen Community*

Regular readers of the Pantry Times may have noticed that each issue features a statement that is part of the Helena Food Share philosophy – statements that guide our work and represent our culture. This issue features a recent addition to our philosophy statements but one that has been a part of the heart and soul of the organization since its inception: ***We believe in handling food respectfully and eliminating food waste.*** Care for the food we manage is essential for every program we offer, whether it is Grocery Share, Kid Packs, Emergency Packs, or our Senior and Nutrition programs. And it is the foundation of our Food Rescue program.

Each weekday, staff and volunteers drive to stores in the Helena area to pick up food donated by the stores. Once it arrives at Helena Food Share, volunteers sort and distribute the food in the Pantry for customers. At each step, clear safety protocols ensure food is handled with care. Dave Anderson, who has been a Helena Food Share driver for 12 years, shared this about the responsibility, *“Each driver and volunteer keenly understand that the food will go to the homes of those we serve, so all along the line, we handle it the way we want our food to be handled.”*

Not only does Food Rescue provide food for those in need, it also keeps food that would

otherwise go to waste out of the landfill. The food donated by stores is still good; it is simply time for the stores to move it out and make room for new items.

Volunteers carefully examine all donated food, checking for expiration dates and spoilage. Any spoiled food is boxed and made available for local farmers to pick up and share with their animals.

Helena Food Share’s new facility, opening later this fall, will provide additional opportunities to reduce food waste in the community and deliver new food options for customers. The commercial production kitchen will enhance the ability to prep and repackage

surplus produce from local suppliers, farms, and area gardens and expand food rescue from local commercial kitchens. Kitchen staff & volunteers can



Steve from Helena Food Share picks up donated bread from Great Harvest Bread Co. during a Grocery Rescue stop.

freeze items for later use and prepare pre-packaged heat-and-serve meals, enabling us to distribute even more food that might otherwise go to waste. We are proud of our work to strengthen families, our community, and the Earth.

Pantry Times | Spring 2024

Pantry Times is a publication of Helena Food Share.

Contact Us:

(406) 443-3663

To Volunteer: ext. 106

To Donate: ext. 103

To Get Help: ext. 110

Helena Pantry:

1616 Lewis Street, Helena

East Helena Mobile Pantry:

50 Prickley Pear, East Helena

Office: 1437 Helena Avenue, Helena



HelenaFoodShare.org



Creating a Hunger-Free Community

PO Box 943, Helena, MT 59624

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
HELENA, MT 59601
PERMIT NO. 266

Pantry Times
HelenaFoodShare.org



We believe in handling food respectfully and eliminating food waste.

Please join us for



EMPTY BOWLS HELENA

Help *fill empty bowls with nutritious food* for our neighbors in need!

Join us for soup prepared by local chefs and ceramic bowls handcrafted by Helena artists, along with bread and desserts donated by our favorite hometown bakeries.

Not able to join us? You can still help fill empty bowls by donating today. Your gift and all proceeds from the event will provide nutrition for the empty bowls of our neighbors in need.

TICKETS are LIMITED and AVAILABLE NOW at HelenaFoodShare.org/EmptyBowls2024

THURSDAY-4:30 P.M.
MAY 16, 2024

HELENA CIVIC CENTER

TICKETS: \$50
INCLUDES
A HANDMADE BOWL, FOOD & DRINKS



Thanks to our Presenting Sponsor:



Stockman Bank
Montana's Brand of Banking

And to our sponsors:



HJHUDSON CONSULTING

