

ALASKA



FOOD COALITION

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"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

Winston Churchill

Turning Clients into Volunteers

Volunteers are truly the heart and soul of most food pantries. Engaging high quality volunteers takes time, and volunteers rarely recruit themselves. Food pantries have a natural, in-house resource for volunteers – your clients. Volunteering is especially important when people feel they cannot give money but can give time. Such substitution is particularly viable for people who are already committed to your cause. There are many reasons why people volunteer, here are a few:

- Help others
- Make a difference
- Find purpose
- Enjoy a meaningful conversation
- Connect with your community
- Feel involved

- Contribute to a cause you care about
- Meet new people
- Develop new skills
- Use your skills in a productive way
- Get out of the house
- Feel better about yourself

Just Ask

Don't assume clients know that you need volunteers; they need to be asked. Approach everyone that comes through the door by posting a recruitment flyer where clients can see it when they sign in. Terry, a client and volunteer at St. Francis House is one of several client-volunteers at this Anchorage food pantry. Terry commutes 3 hours via public transportation and still finds time to volunteer. She is a terrific advocate for the pantry's volunteer program and often wears a small, hand-made Post-It size sticker she created (agency approved) on her lapel that says "I'm volunteering today, have you?"

What Works in Homer, AK

"Clients are humble" says Diana Jeska, executive director of the Homer Community Food Pantry. "Most people don't want to be here," she said. "They apologize. They say, 'I've never really had to be here before.' It's a hard thing to realize you need help." Close to 50% of the volunteers who help at this pantry have been clients. "That's a good volunteer, I can tell you. They know what it's like to be hungry. They're compassionate." http://homernews.com/stories/093009/news_2_001.shtml

Reciprocal Giving

"We have so many people here who start out as a client and then they volunteer back their time; it's a way to get people back into giving," says Karen Myers, executive director of Helping Others Through Extending Love In the Name of Christ, (HOTEL INC) Bowling Green, KY. When someone needs more than food, HOTEL INC tries to provide financial assistance for necessities like rent and utility payments. In turn, the client is expected to give back. "What makes us unique is we do reciprocal giving," Myers said. "If you come in with a utility bill for \$200, we ask that you give back and pay that back to the community." Clients can work off their bills by volunteering at HOTEL INC or any of the organization's community partners. Volunteer time is valued at \$10 an hour, so it would take a client 20 hours to work off a \$200 bill. <http://www.wku.edu/spiritofengagement/wordpress/?p=207>

The Value of Service

Rene's story starts in 2004 when a stroke cost him his job and his ability to earn a living. Unable to work, he was barely making ends meet. Today, Rene is a volunteer mainstay in the church pantry. According to Reverend Cathi Feldpausch, the nourishment he receives from First Baptist Church pantry of Ferndale, IL provides much more than fuel and energy to sustain his ailing body. It offers nourishment of the soul, relationships without judgment, and a safe place to continue trying to figure it all out.

http://www.gcfb.org/site/PageServer?pagename=story_renestory_home

As unemployment increases, more people will a) be looking for new jobs; b) have lots of unwanted time on their hands; and c) welcome opportunities to build new skills that will help them in their job hunt. It's a real plus to be able to avoid a "gap" on a resume while job hunting—a relevant volunteer experience can do that while also providing some structure to a suddenly-empty daytime schedule. Do you offer volunteer positions that allow someone to learn a new skill or apply expertise in new ways? Are you willing to write letters of recommendation for a successful volunteer? Actively recruit unemployed people; approach them with: *You are still wanted for your talents! As you seek new work, spend part of those long days with us. Keep your resume current and help others at the same time.*

Sample Flyers

Create and post flyers in your pantry. Make sure you include a contact name and phone number. Here are a few sample ideas:

WE



VOLUNTEERS!

GET INVOLVED!

**VOLUNTEER
HERE**

Contact:

VOLUNTEERS

MAKE FOOD PANTRIES

HAPPEN!

Resources

8 Tips for Recruiting & Retaining Volunteers in Tough Times

http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/01-07-09_volunteering_in_tough_times.cfm

Implementing a Volunteer Plan – Mobile Meals of Toledo

<http://www.mobilemeals.org/media/pdf/July09.pdf>

The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online: <http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> for additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: afc@foodbankofalaska.org

NEXT MONTH: CSFP, CACFP, TEFAP – What Do They Mean?