

2009

In God We Trust!

By
Sandy Donovan, Founder/Director
Chelmsford Community Exchange Inc.

I have always said that the food pantry is God's Pantry not mine, even though I am the founder and director. God works thru people whether they realize it or not. This is very noticeable by the huge donations we received of food and gift certificates last week when the "Chelmsford Women of Today" had their annual collection of food at Market Basket for us.

The pantry was busting at the seams on Wednesday evening from all their donations plus the food we gathered at the food bank, bought at supermarkets and donated food from Jones Farm. By the end of the night from all the families that had come we were not bursting at the seams anymore. Many families were very happy with all the food they received that night.

The typical week 16 years ago when we first started was 39 to 42 families a week. This week we served a total of 136 households. Within these households many families are doubling or tripling up. We have one family that houses a family of 5 that is homeless in another community. This makes their household a total of 13. That is going on here, too!

Within our community there are many sad stories of the struggles people are facing everyday. Would you ever guess by looking at them or where they lived in this town!! The answer is "No".

This is why I do not take any government grants because if I did there would be many people I could not help. The poverty threshold guideline for a family of 4 is \$22,050 up to almost \$40,000 a year. It is hard enough to come to a pantry to get help without making it harder for people to get that help. Our

government has not changed the formula since it was first started in the late fifties. This is strictly a political issue and many people are left without anywhere to turn except a food pantry to help them over the hump. People may come every week if they need to and we don't pick out for them they can choose their own food. We cater to special diets to the best of our ability and if there is a food or beverage they need I will try to buy it at the supermarket for them. We stay open until all families are taken care of beyond our official closing time.

We give out shampoos/conditioner, toilet paper, soap, laundry detergent, on occasion when it is on sale, dish detergent, cleaning items and other non-food items that people can not afford to buy. I buy these when they are on sale to help make things a little easier for them.

I shop at 5 supermarkets plus farms to get healthy food for our families. Some weeks I am shopping everyday as we run out of things, especially juices or iced tea (which cannot be heated up, too) as the demand is becoming greater every week. If juice or a special diet item for those that are diabetic or have high blood pressure is on sale I take advantage of that sale, too.

They are not clients but families. I refuse to use institutionalized words describing people coming to the pantry. We are all one family in God. One should always remember that could be them in that line. How would we want to be treated? Sometimes it is not easy as I need to make people think about the glass being half filled or half empty. People know I am feisty but say, "You really care", and I do. Many tears have spilled over the years for these families when I come home be unknowns to them. I pray for guidance and the families, too.

Donelan's is one of the supermarkets I go to in Lincoln and they go beyond the mile to help and support us in anyway they can. It makes worth the trip once a week to go there. They bend over backwards to help us. They are unbelievable with their support of the pantry.

Stop and Shop will be giving us the annual check for the fund

raiser they are doing for the food pantry this year. This will certainly help our budget, too. We are very grateful for this check.

All the supermarkets do try to help but are constrained many times by their corporations.

Because of all the support we receive from every aspect of our community and beyond we are able to help many families in other areas, too. Like fuel fill ups for heat, water bills, gas for a car (we do this once for a family), car repairs, needed clothes (like winter coats) and other emergencies that come up for families if there isn't anywhere else to turn for this needed help. They are given gift certificates never cash for these items.

I work with St. Vincent DePaul Society at St. Mary's in Chelmsford and Our Lady of Hope in Ipswich. This frees up their monies to help in other areas.

We never turn anyone away and we always have enough food to help out. Families tell me they save an average of \$50.00 to \$100.00 a week on food by coming to us. This frees up money for other things that are needed or if they don't have any money to speak of it gives their families a full stomach. For a single person it is \$25 to \$40 a week.

I will open for emergencies on the days we are closed. I don't want anyone going hungry if I can help it. It isn't any fun to tell your children, "We have no food left or what is left we must save until tomorrow". I have been there when I lived in Michigan and my former husband was laid-off because he made too much money for food stamps on unemployment. There wasn't any such thing as a food pantry in Michigan in 1980-1981. The food budget for ten of us went from \$200.00 plus a week to \$25.00 a week. It gives a person a "gift of understanding of those waiting at the pantry for food".

You have no idea how you have helped many families. I see more

and more children asking for food for us instead of presents for their birthday parties. That tells me parents are instilling the gifts to others instead of themselves. Parents are such role models and don't realize what an impact this has in all areas of their families.

To make a monetary donation please make the check payable to Chelmsford Community Exchange, PO Box 394, Chelmsford, MA 01824. We are still in the Old Town Hall, One North Road, Chelmsford thanks to our Town Manager, Paul Cohen. We are very grateful for this as it keeps us centrally located. We do have people walking to our pantry for food and this makes it easier for them and easier for people to donate to us. For further information go to our web site at:

Chelmsford Community Exchange Inc.

<http://homepage.mac.com/poptech/Pantry/Pantry.html>

Add it your favorites and it just says "The Pantry".

Again, I am most appreciative and grateful for all your support over all these years. You are having a greater impact then you realize. Every donation no matter how small or is helping to make life a little easier for others.

Thank you and may God Bless all of you!