

STATION SPOTLIGHT

Concern for Neighbor's Food Bank

by Felicia Hallenbeck

The Concern For Neighbors Food Bank is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to collecting and distributing food to low income families and individual adults living in Brier, Lynnwood, and Mountlake Terrace. The food bank opened its doors in 1971, through the collective efforts of several South Snohomish County churches. At that time, the food bank operated out of the basement of a private home. Staffed by only five volunteers, the organization initially served 18 clients.

Today, the organization relies on the volunteer efforts of approximately 60 individuals to feed between 150 to 170 clients/families per week. (This number is currently down from 180 to 200 clients at the same time last year.).



The number of families served may soon increase, however, due to the passage of the Farm Bill which includes \$8.6 billion in cuts over 10 years to the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (better known as SNAP). An estimated 1 in 6 Washingtonians currently rely on SNAP benefits.

Although Concern For Neighbor's Food Bank's mission is simple: "To reach out to hungry neighbors with supplemental and nutritious food items," I quickly discovered that the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the warehouse, trucks, storage containers, and office are much more complex. The majority of food supplies come from [Northwest Harvest](#), Snohomish County Food Coalition, and [Food Lifeline](#), as well as local grocery stores and bakeries (through the [Grocery Rescue Program](#)) located in Mount Lake Terrace, Seattle, and Lynnwood. Additional and supplemental food supplies come from individual donations, community/school/church and company food drives, and the direct participation of Concern For Neighbors Food Bank's volunteers in various parades and festivals, as well as generous cash donations from a few charitable foundations.



The 60 volunteers are responsible for the transportation, sorting, warehousing, organizing, safe-handling, and distribution of several thousand pounds of food on a weekly basis. In addition, record keeping and reporting are paramount to running this efficient and streamlined organization. A database is maintained

to determine not only the number of individuals being served by CFN, but also their ages. This information is provided to [Northwest Harvest](#), Snohomish County Food Coalition, and [Food Lifeline](#) in the form of monthly reports which allows these organizations to statistically manage their distributions. For instance, a greater number of infants served, would result in a larger supply of baby food coming to a particular food bank. Additionally, this information is crucial to writing grant requests, and keeping track of non-food items required by Concern For Neighbors Food Bank such as food-grade gloves and produce bags.

Drivers routinely pick up produce, meat and poultry, dairy, and bakery goods four days per week. They weigh the food at each location and provide the contributing company or agency with a receipt for their donation. The food is then transported back to Concern For Neighbors Food Bank, weighed, recorded, and safely stored in refrigerators, freezers or storage containers.

On Mondays, volunteers start their day as early as 7:00 a.m., sorting produce, moving canned and dried goods based upon sell-by dates up into distribution shelving, packing bags for distribution, cleaning, recording, reporting, organizing, and warehousing food; all the while following strict food-handling and food-safety guidelines.



On Tuesdays, volunteers again begin the day as early as 7:00 in the morning, preparing for the arrival of clients/families. As clients arrive, any new clients are interviewed to determine the number and ages of individuals within the family. This information is then recorded, and they are directed to sign-in along with returning clients. As all clients sign in, they are given a badge with two numbers - one to indicate their place in line and one to indicate the number of individuals within their family. They are then directed to the warehouse where additional volunteers provide them with their meat/poultry, bakery items, produce, dairy, and canned/dry goods. Distribution hours are from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Additional clients are served by appointment only at 5:00 p.m., if they cannot pick up their food within the allotted time frame.

Since I visited on a Monday, I wasn't able to witness what I can only assume would be an extreme high level of efficiency required to serve a large number of individuals within this two-hour time frame. These volunteers (many of whom have been there for over five years) run a tight ship. They are certified in food safety and handling, and highly skilled in organization. They work together as a cohesive unit and the camaraderie between them is palpable.

These volunteers share their time, labor, skills, and innovative ideas for the good of the community. One volunteer, in fact, came up with and oversees a composting program so that badly-bruised or overly-ripe produce would not go to waste.

If you are interested in joining this wonderful group of individuals, please contact John McAlpine at (425) 374-6374 or email him johnm@ccsww.org for more information.

To learn more about Concern For Neighbors Food Bank, please visit their website at <http://concern4neighborsfb.org>.

You can also follow the links in the article above to learn more about the Grocery Rescue Program, Snohomish County Food Coalition, Food Lifeline, and Northwest Harvest.