

The Parking Lot Pantry 2020-2022

LCAC Thursday Food Pantry Volunteers

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As summer 2022 comes to a close, those of us who are volunteers at the Lorton



Community Action Center Thursday pantry are also keenly aware that food distribution in the parking lot is ending soon. It is a time to remember our experiences and recognize a meaningful time in our lives.

LCAC services moved online and outside with the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown in spring 2020.

The staff quickly responded to the dual goals of client safety and food need as jobs disappeared and weekly resource procurement for hundreds became a challenge. An additional logistical issue was construction for the new LCAC facility joined with a community center and expanded library.

Staff consolidated distribution into two times a week and moved from the trailer to the LCAC parking lot with stations for protein, produce, cereal, bread, miscellaneous items, diapers, and hygiene. We raised umbrellas for searing sun and erected canopies for rain. Unless there was thunder and lightning, we were out in the parking lot serving our clients. This system allowed clients to park nearby, grab a shopping cart and walk around the stations to select items.



As construction continued and parking eliminated, volunteers and staff walked from nearby streets while clients drove up to receive food in their cars. Construction noise and dust added to the ambience of the Parking Lot Pantry.



Six of us... all retirees and seniors... accepted the challenge to show up Thursday mornings during this time. In the 2 ½ years we have



become a team. We suited up for weather conditions and donned whatever masks and gloves met changing covid guidelines. We have shared irritations like the hose that impeded cart pushing for months; laughed at times we make crazy mistakes; and checked on one another's health. While we grew up in countries and towns far apart and have had different life paths, we share a value system, sense of purpose and spirit of collegiality. The Parking Lot Pantry brought us together and connected us to our larger Lorton community.



Many more have volunteered with us as friends, family, students, clients, county health Covid educators, LCAC volunteers of long-standing, members of local groups, and those meeting various service requirements. Others have worked the pantry evening shift, picked up donations and delivered food to clients.

We have been proud that LCAC has been flexible, adaptable, and consistent. The Pantry has distributed food regularly to hundreds of families throughout the pandemic and construction. We are grateful for our supervisors, Josh Henry and Erin Morris, and thankful for all the work by LCAC Board members and staff.

We have bagged produce, searched for diaper sizes and pet foods, pulled meats



from the iced over walk-in freezer, unloaded & weighed thousands of pounds of donated foods coming in from stores, loaded bags into trunks & seats, taken veggies past their time into the fridge for recycling to pigs,



packed food for people with special needs who need delivery, listened to clients about their difficult situations, watched babies in their grow, and helped clients



food in an assortment of carrying devices.

backseat carriers without cars pack

People ask: Why did you venture out at the outset of the pandemic and continue to distribute food? Why do you work 3 and 4 hours weekly in difficult conditions like heat, rain, and cold? How do you lug bags and push carts with all those supplies from the trailer to the parking lot, and then



take them to client cars through gravel, dirt, mud and impediments like hoses and rocks? How do you learn the needs of clients who speak different languages, have distinctive needs and may be enduring hardship and loss?



Here are our answers.

*I enjoy being around my fellow volunteers on Thursdays who let me be who I am. I enjoy helping My Community and those in Need. It makes my heart feel good when I hear Thanks and see their Smiles on our clients. Lastly I like the LCAC staff and look forward to going to the New Place and help make Food Distro bigger and better. **Suba Saty***



*Knowing that I help people in my Lorton community fills my spirit. I get excited to come every Thursday at 8 a.m., even in bad weather, because I will be part of this incredible partnership of neighbors. We are colleagues who care. It was a privilege to help in the pantry before Covid, and an honor to be in the Parking Lot Pantry. This was the best way to go beyond worry and loneliness during the pandemic and reach out to others! **Pam Cressey***

*I have volunteered at many places in the surrounding area, but I get great satisfaction serving our community, with like-minded people. We all strive to give a little bit extra, to the folks who come to LCAC, for pantry food items. We are all aware, that these past few years have been especially challenging, what with food prices, covid etc. I drive twenty miles to get to the pantry, each week, but I will continue to do it, because we all need to reach out to our neighbors and extend a hand. **Mary Dundon***





The reasons I continued to volunteer through the COVID pandemic remained the same as those that motivated me to volunteer initially. It was particularly vital that LCAC's mission continue and, fortunately, I was able to contribute to my community and make a difference. **Phyllisa Goldenberg**

I've always had a need to serve those less fortunate than myself. In my role I've gotten to know many of our clients, learned about their families, and heard about their struggles. In addition to much needed food for their families I can give them a smile, compassion, and support. I truly feel it is a blessing to be part of this wonderful program. I also have gotten to know my fellow volunteers who have enriched my life with their friendship and who have provided humor and interesting conversations through this whole ordeal. Why wouldn't I do this! **Chris Spengler**



Volunteering to do food distribution at LCAC during the pandemic was somewhat of a difficult decision for me. Prior to the pandemic, I had been working inside the pantry for a couple of years doing background work. I sorted donations, packed groceries, cleaned up, and did generally whatever was needed inside the pantry. Most days, I worked alone. My decision not to have a client facing job was a deliberate one; I thought I was not prepared emotionally to talk directly to people who were in need. When I was asked to do distribution during COVID because of a lack of volunteers, I reluctantly agreed, not realizing that it would be one of the best decisions I would ever make. Despite the virus still in its aggressive stage with many unvaccinated people, I felt relatively safe with the mask policy and the outside distribution setup. Interacting directly with clients



gave me the opportunity to get to know the personalities and the stories behind the names of clients. I felt enriched by the conversations I shared with clients and got a much better understanding of the needs of the community. I developed close friendships with my fellow volunteers and learned much from our shared experiences. It has been a growth opportunity for me that has made me a better person in so many ways. Thank you LCAC for enriching my life. **Margret Hullinger**