

FOOD PANTRY HIGHLIGHT: NORTHSIDE FOOD PANTRY BY LAURA WILKER

Hunger can affect all walks of life. 31% of Marion County residents needed food assistance in 2023. Northside Food Pantry is here to assist anyone who needs food in and around Washington Township. We are located at Second Presbyterian Church, 7700 North Meridian Street, Indianapolis, and you will find us at the north end of the church. Our food pantry is open three days a week: Tuesday 12:30 – 3:00 pm, Wednesday 4:00 – 6:00 pm and Saturday 10:00 am – 12:00 pm.



When We Started

The Northside Food Pantry began in 2009 in a small closet of the church because we saw a need in our community. We would give out a bag of groceries to people who were referred to us by the Washington Township Trustee's Office. In May 2014, we moved to a newly expanded space which is now home to Northside Food Pantry. During the pandemic, we shifted to serving our clients from their cars. They would complete a grocery list and our volunteers would shop for them. We did this method until November 2021, when we returned inside with masks. Currently, we are one of the few pantries in central Indiana that still use a client choice method of shopping.



Who We Serve

Northside Food Pantry serves residents in and around Washington Township. We serve zip codes 46205, 46208, 46220, 46226, 46228, 46240, 46250, 46260, 46268, 46280. Eligible clients may shop two times during a calendar month, but not twice in the same week. We serve anyone who needs food at least once. If they are not in our serving area, we will refer them to food pantries in their zip code by using the Community Compass app. In 2022, we began a Home Delivery Program through Gleaners to help bring food to those who may not be able to shop in a food pantry because of lack of transportation or health issues. Gleaners provides us with a list each week as well as non-perishable food boxes and some produce. Our team of 6 volunteers delivers, on average, 15 families per week. In 2023, NFP made home deliveries to 673 families.

What to Expect

The shopping experience begins with a “greeter” who welcomes the client and determines their needs including any prayer requests they may have. From that point, they shop for bread, milk, eggs, fresh produce, non-perishables items such as canned fruits and vegetables, canned soups, pastas/rice, ready meals, canned chicken or tuna, cereals, beans, peanut butter/jelly, baking items and meat. One time per month they may choose personal care and household items. We also provide diapers and wipes upon request.

Our Volunteers

Our volunteers are the heart of our food pantry; it is because of our volunteer base's strength that we can serve up to 75 families each shift, three times per week. Many of our volunteers regularly sign up each week. It takes about 80 volunteers per week to run our food pantry. This includes donation pick up drivers, pantry sorting and stocking, and pantry shift volunteers, like shift leaders, data entry, intake, client liaison, extra help, and car loaders.

Where We Get Food

We are a Gleaner's partner, which provides us the ability to receive donated and purchased food through their extensive food network. They help establish local retailers we partner with to receive donated food weekly; they include Target, Aldi, Kroger, Trade Joe's, Fresh Thyme, Fresh Market, Starbucks, and Thornton's Convenience Store.

We also receive donations from Midwest Food Bank, Northside Baptist Food Pantry, our Second Presbyterian Church members, community organizations such as Butler, Corteva, Porch Indy, First Congregational Church, Helpings of Hope and Jovial Farms.

In 2023, Corteva donated a total of 1891 lbs. And 2022, we donated 1565 lbs.

Second Presbyterian Church also has our own community garden that supports our food pantry. The garden is on the south end of the church property. Last year, we received 2,400 pounds of produce harvested by our garden team. They provide us with produce including lettuce, kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, green onions, peppers (sweet and hot), leeks, green beans, zucchini, eggplant, yellow squash, butternut squash, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and some melons.



What is the Impact

In 2023, the Northside Food Pantry served 8500 families and 33,477 individuals (about twice the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden); this is an increase of over 20%. And we are seeing a similar upward trend with our expenses, which through April are up 30% over last year during the same time period.

Because of these numbers, we are continually looking for ways to increase both our food and monetary donations so that we can remain sustainable into the future.