



Empathy Strengthens Client-Pantry Connection

When determining how best to help someone in need, the most effective approach is to simply ask them.

That philosophy has helped Jessamine Stone go from a dissatisfied food pantry client to a very satisfied coordinator of the same pantry, with a happy client group to match.

Years ago, Jessamine went to her local pantry in Groton to help with feeding her family of eight and wasn't pleased.

"I did not have a good experience as a client, and because of that I swore off pantries," she says. "In 2015 when I was working in Enfield and started taking people to that pantry, I saw a completely different side."

It was that positive feeling that made her reconsider taking over the Groton Food Providers pantry in 2018 after initially declining the request from the pastor of the Groton Assembly of God.

"I wondered if I could make it accessible and friendly, and a couple of days later I went through the line and saw that things hadn't changed a bit," Jessamine says. "I told him I would do it, but there were conditions."

The stigma of using a pantry had to go, and the quality and quantity of the food had to increase. He agreed.

Going from client to coordinator wasn't without its bumpy patches.

"I bumbled through 2019," she shares, "then we had the pandemic, and I learned a lot very quickly. I'm so glad I had that first year before."

Part of increasing people's comfort level in using the pantry was getting to know everyone personally, which Jessamine tackled head-on.

"The first six months I ran the front desk," she explained. "I wanted to know everyone's name and be the face they remember. That's easy when you serve 20 or 30 families, but when we started serving 100 families, it became a little game. I had ways to remember names, and I'd say, 'Don't tell me...'"

Having staff that shares her mindset is incredibly helpful, says Jessamine. "I love how impressed they were that we took the time to get to know them."

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Caring and Abundance for Your Neighbors in Need

Diapers are an expensive necessity that can deeply impact a family's budget. Families with young children or seniors often find themselves making difficult choices, particularly during a time of rising inflation.



The Food Bank of the Southern Tier works with an ever-increasing network of partner agencies to reduce this burden for impacted families and individuals through its Diaper Bank Program.

“We started the Diaper Bank Program knowing diapers and adult incontinence products are basic need items,” says Sarah DeFrank, Director of Policy, Programs and Partnerships. “The expense can have a negative impact on a limited household budget.”

The program started as a pilot with 10 organizations within our network of partners in mid-winter of 2021 and has grown rapidly. There are currently 56 sites across our six-county area that have diapers available for clients, including 48 pantries.

Nearly 260,000 diapers — all for babies — were distributed in 2021; in 2022, about 394,400 children's diapers were supplemented by 17,600 adult incontinence products.

Preliminary results show pantries implementing the program more than double the number of children ages 0-4 being served.

This growth illustrates the need, Sarah says, particularly among our underserved populations.

“One of our region's underserved populations are families with young children,” she adds.

“Seniors are identified as underserved in Schuyler and Broome Counties. Seniors on fixed incomes, especially senior women, are considered an at-risk population.”

And it equals a significant expense for both. According to the National Diaper Bank

Network, baby diapers can run \$70-80 per month, or about \$900 a year, and adult incontinence products can cost \$80-160 a month, or nearly \$1,200 a year.

Sourcing and delivering diapers to organizations such as Tompkins Community Action allows our partners to distribute to a wide range of families in need.

Glenda Abbey, Program Compliance Leader at Tompkins Community Action, is the coordinator for their food pantry. Glenda states that through their online ordering system, families can call and schedule appointments to receive what they need.

Both adults and families with children benefit greatly from the program, where they can access two weeks' worth of diapers every other week. Diapers are also offered in their Head Start program — and if parents need them for home, they're able to provide help.

“**We also provide food for supportive housing next door, and some of the residents need diapers as well for their little ones, so we box diapers up with the food we deliver to them.**”

In addition to families with children, Glenda loves to hear feedback from seniors and adults who benefit from this program.

She was recently able to provide urgent help for a very appreciative daughter whose mother's order of incontinence products was delayed through insurance. The ladies could immediately pick up an order while the issue was being resolved. They were both grateful not to have to worry about the financial strain they would have faced in the interim.

In addition to providing for their local community, Tompkins Community Action reaches out to other agencies to help as many people as possible. “When we have more to offer,” Glenda states, “we give them to whoever needs them.”



Leader of the Pack Event Deepens Partnership

The Food Bank recently welcomed a leader in the community for a special Leader of the Pack event.

More than 100 employees of Corning Incorporated came together to help the Food Bank in a couple of important ways.

The Leader of the Pack event saw 10 teams compete to pack bags used for the Food Bank's Backpack™ Program — which supplies weekend food for students in every district in our six-county service area — in the fastest time.

Donations from the event brought in just over \$91,000, an extension of the generosity Corning Incorporated employees have shown to the Food Bank over the years.

“Partnering with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier fits perfectly with the Corning Foundation’s mission to enhance and sustain vibrant Corning communities,” says Corning Foundation President Andrea Lynch. “The goals of the Corning Leader of the Pack were to raise funds, educate employees on food insecurity in the region, and have fun volunteering with colleagues on-site at the Food Bank.”

Coached by Food Bank staff, the teams raced against the clock to see who could be the quickest to pack a total of 720 bags.

It's All Legal posted a time of 54 minutes and 18 seconds to win the title, followed by *Together We Serve* and *Backpack Snack Packers*.

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“We have volunteers as young as six to adults in their 80s, and probably 70% of our volunteer staff started as participants,” she says. “We want to see as much diversity as possible, and to have different experiences represented. I always say I’m spoiled. I have such a great team.”

Small changes can make a big difference, especially in a pantry setting.

“It’s about making an inviting environment. It’s giving people back their dignity.”

“I hear over and over how different things are,” she adds. “We knew it was working because people started bringing their friends. Many people come in with their heads hanging, but they figure out quickly that’s not what we’re about here. It’s giving people dignity. It changes the dynamic of the situation. It’s knowing that for some of them, it’s the highlight of their week. What a change from ‘I need to get out before anyone sees me.’”



Creative Thinking Makes Impact in Your Community

Big issues require creative solutions.

Just ask Bridgette Vannorman of Windsor Human Development.

Making creative use of the Food Bank's Impact Grant program, Bridgette was able to purchase an SUV to replace her previous delivery and pickup vehicle — her own 15-year-old Honda Civic.

Bridgette was given a series of milestones to meet in order to qualify for the grant. This included setting up procedures for determining and tracking usage. To show commitment, Bridgette needed to raise the first year's operating costs in advance.

"It elevates the idea that solutions are in the community," says Amanda Palme, the Food Bank's Senior Community Impact Manager. "It was a true collaborative effort."

The impact was immediate and profound for Bridgette and her son Trevor, her right hand in operating the food pantry. Bridgette is now able to continue the work that earned her the Food Bank's Jack Balinsky Charity & Justice Award last year.

"In the short time we have had this incredible gift," she says, "we marvel at how much more efficient we are and cannot fathom going back to how we were functioning before."

An example of increased efficiency is deliveries made in Windsor and the surrounding area.

"We could only deliver to people close by as we were only able to pack one or two

orders depending on how many people we were packing for," Bridgette explains. "We are now able to pack these large orders and route ourselves in the most economical way possible. Before, we would have to run back to the pantry to pick up the next order."

The delivery vehicle has increased productivity when picking up supplies as well.

"An Aldi trip would require us to have to split up our shopping over two days," she says. "We are also able to leave food in the cases or boxes, where before we would have to re-box when we got back to the pantry."

It was the same for picking up donated and gleaned goods and produce. "Many times, we would not be able to take all that was offered to us," she shares.

For Bridgette and Windsor Human Development, the message is simple: "It's not just about food. We try to help however we can. And the SUV is a tremendous asset in that mission."



Food Bank of the Southern Tier

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