

## Big Foot Emergency Food Pantry-2011 Year End Report

Two words come to mind in looking back at 2011. One is relentless and the other is kaleidoscope. 2011 was relentless because we never really got any kind of break in the numbers of people needing our assistance. Normally the number of families coming for help drops off in late winter/early spring and does not come back up again until fall. July should have been one of the lowest attendance months of the year, but we had so many families show up that we had the second highest month ever in our pantry's history. September finished with an increase of almost 50% compared to 2010. The first Friday of October we broke the one day record by over 10%. We set a new three week record in November shattering the old one also by well over 10%. By the end of November we had already exceeded the total number of families we had seen in 2010. Every month this year has been higher than in 2010. Since May we have been seeing 20%-30% new families showing up almost every day we are open. So, it was not a surprise to start breaking records towards the end of the year as they returned. I used to think 2008 was a rough year. 2011 has put that year to shame.

Kaleidoscope comes to mind from a number of various events and people I encountered this year. Anytime you deal with the public you just know that you are going to meet interesting people and get yourself into interesting situations. Volunteering at a place like a food pantry will guarantee it, and 2011 was exceptional in many respects. Like the gentleman upset that he had to be coming to our food pantry, but realizing he had little choice as he had only had some BBQ sauce to eat for the prior three days. Then there was the woman who came in and said it would be the last time we would be seeing her. We asked, "Why? Did you get a good job?" She said, "No. I've been diagnosed with terminal cancer. I'm refusing treatment and moving out of state to spend my last days with my sister." Listening to the homeless person that had been living out of his car and trying to figure out how to afford to relocate to a different state down south. We had several women in tears thanking us profusely while saying that they only about a days worth of food left at their homes and had no idea what they would have done without the food pantry to help them. Actually, more than a few did that. There are times when you just want to give them a big hug and tell them everything is going to be OK, but we sort of are not allowed to do that. We do give them information for ways to get further assistance though. And please keep this one thing in mind, if you live in Wisconsin, call 211 if you need assistance for anything. This three digit number will put you in touch with the professionals that can sort through things and answer all the questions.

Kaleidoscope includes good memories too. A number of high school students and their friends have been helping out on a very regular basis. Volunteering and community spirit are very much alive and active at Big Foot High School. The support and generosity from so many individuals, clubs, organizations, schools, businesses, churches, and other groups has been fabulous. We really do live in a very special community. One big stand out was the Sentry "Fill the Bus" food donation program. Wow. We got over 200 shopping bags filled with food Sentry had packed ahead of time with selected items our pantry specifically needed. When the bus showed up a number of volunteers, Sentry managers, Lion's Club members, at least eight or nine HS FFA students, and I think a few other people were on hand to unload the bus (yes, they did fill it), bring it all into the pantry, sort it all out, fill the shelves, and then clean up. Again, wow. One other special memory was that for a number of years we have received free tickets from the Walworth Immanuel United Church of Christ for their annual turkey dinner to give to any family coming to our food pantry in October and the first part of November. This year 86 pantry recipients showed up Saturday Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> to have a great turkey dinner with all the trimmings.

Last summer I was talking with a woman I knew fairly well, but she did not know I volunteered at the food pantry. When I mentioned that fact she was very interested and I explained things like where we are located (right across from the Walworth Grade School), that although they can only come once a month each family gets about two weeks of very good food-including lots of fresh fruit/vegetable/milk products, and that we service an area of about 100 square miles-Walworth-Fontana-Williams Bay-and most of Linn Township. She knew me well enough that towards the end of the conversation she asked me, "So, just how much do you get paid for working at the pantry?" After I stopped laughing and could catch my breath I explained that everyone working at our pantry is a 100% volunteer and nobody has ever been paid a penny for working there. I believe that is also the case for all of our other area pantries---and also our other area charitable groups. It was a good question.

We did slip a little this year in our cost to feed each person for about two weeks. Up until this year we were able to keep that cost under \$5.00 per person. This year the final figure will be slightly over \$6.00 per person. That's still pretty darn good. We'll try hard to hold that figure for 2012.

Our food pantry is open every Friday afternoon from 2:00-4:00 and each Saturday morning from 9:00-11:00.

If you would like to donate food, then our only request is that you keep it simple. Items like flour, sugar, rice, cooking oil, any kind of beans, macaroni/pasta, canned fruit/vegetables, etc. All of the food pantries in our area would appreciate whatever you could donate or do to help. Financial donations can be really stretched. Twenty dollars allows us to purchase well over 100 pounds of ground beef, cut up chickens, brats, roasts, steaks, similar frozen meats and other needed items.

On behalf of the many needy local families, thank you so much for all your generous support. This is in fact a very special community.

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