



September is Hunger Action Month

The FISH NET

Fall 2022

As Food Insecurity Grows, FISH Opens New Shopping-style and Mobile Pantries to Tackle Community Hunger



Coolers and freezers line the walls of the pantry perishable room with produce and bread in the center of the new shopping-style pantry

It's 9 am and a line is already forming down the walk and into the parking lot at FISH of Vancouver. Though the doors won't open until 10, this diverse group of families, single people and seniors are ready to shop. In April 2022, FISH of Vancouver rolled out a shopping-style pantry that allows guests to choose their own food. It has been an enormous success—both in the increased numbers served and in the positive response from clients.

Throughout the pandemic, we didn't shut our doors, but due to Covid-19 safety protocols, we had to change our operations style. Volunteers packed food boxes ahead of time. Clients queued up outside and picked up the pre-packed boxes of food. The model worked, but it wasn't ideal.

In the new shopping-style pantry, clients are greeted by a colorful mural saying "welcome" in five languages. Clients can choose fresh produce, meat, dairy, plant-based alternatives, bread, staples and other household products.



"Cannery Row" offers canned goods and other staples to households in need as stockers make sure the shelves are full.

An Emphasis on Choice of Foods

"People really have just been giddy about choosing their own food," Operations Manager Anina Estrem says of the new shopping-style pantry (also known as "client choice"). "We accommodate their needs so much better. For instance, a diabetic can best pick their own food." She added, "Clients are telling us they're not going to waste anything, and they got everything they needed."

A mother of four children said, "You can pick out what you need." As she shopped with her sleeping six-week-old infant strapped to her chest, she said no food is wasted. She added diapers to her cart, then headed for the dairy case.

A young vegan client said she appreciates the selection of plant-based foods. When she recently moved to Vancouver, her grocery budget fell short: "I love getting to pick what I want. There's lots of produce, non-dairy milks and yogurts."

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Keeping Up with the FISH Team!

James Fitzgerald, Executive Director

Things have been moving fast at FISH.

From the new awning that shelters our guests from the weather while they wait in line, to moving to a shopping-style pantry so guests can select what is right for their family, to starting a mobile food pantry that can go out to underserved areas...we have been moving.

All these help us have the greatest impact possible on our community, and that is our mission and goal. You helped make this happen. We couldn't do it without you. Thank you so much for caring about our community and helping us help others. As inflation rates take their toll on those most vulnerable, our client numbers have skyrocketed. It has been a challenge to keep our supply up and serve this many, but we are up for the challenge. I am already looking towards 2023 and ways we can continue to improve and move forward. As the mobile food pantry program grows, we know this will serve many families we are not reaching yet. We also want to keep the shopping experience at the pantry full of abundance, nutrition and variety to have a positive impact on people's budgets. We are here to serve and nourish our neighbors. Thanks for being a part of the solution and part of our team.



Anina Estrem, Operations Manager

I've always believed that food should be a shared experience, and that it provides us with much more than just nutrition. Over the last few months as FISH has welcomed guests back into the building, I have witnessed how changing how we distribute food has begun to develop our community in a way I never expected. I now spend my days listening to neighbors exchange

recipes, strangers explain the origins of unfamiliar foods, and even regular visitors who teach me phrases in their native language. There are now children who eagerly start stocking the shelves as soon as their parents enter the building to shop, enthusiastic about making their own contribution to our pantry. Our guests are secure in the knowledge that they will not only leave with the food they need to feed their household, but also to celebrate their culture and their family. Sharing our abundance of food has a powerful impact on our community, and I'm proud to watch FISH grow.

Megan Brown, Volunteer Coordinator

The last few months since our reopening have been a whirlwind, but it feels great to finally welcome guests into the building and see how well our shopping-style pantry works for our clients. As the number of households visiting FISH continues to increase, we are so grateful to have an amazing volunteer team that keeps things restocked and running smoothly. From our haulers to stockers and front desk volunteers, we truly wouldn't be able to keep up without them. We are excited that we can provide an abundance of nutritious food to Vancouver and are eager to continue building relationships throughout our community.



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Anina Estrem, Operations Manager

Megan Brown, Volunteer Coordinator

Plus our dedicated volunteers who donate thousands of hours each year.

FISH Inaugurates Mobile Food Pantry, Improves Access to Healthy Foods

If you see vegetables and fruits flying down the street, don't worry! That would be our new "FISH on the Move" mobile food pantry with its colorful graphics. Our new food truck will allow us to reach out to underserved areas in need of healthy foods.

Thanks to funds from Hurley Development, Crossroads Community Church and LSW Architects plus services donated by Specialty Graphic Solutions and Riff Creative, we were able to purchase a gently used truck and have the interior professionally fabricated with stainless shelving, counters and a commercial refrigerator and freezer. With the colorful wrap added to the truck, FISH and nourishing foods will truly be "on the move."

The new mobile pantry was dedicated in June 2022 with an appreciative crowd and comments from officials and our project sponsors. The pantry now is scheduled for food distributions at community locations serving food insecure households. Clients choose from a wide variety of produce, staples, dairy, meats and more that allow them to assemble complete meals. Reaction has been joy and gratitude for the much-needed food.

You, too, can help FISH distribute food on the go. Volunteers are signing up to join mobile teams. If you are interested, contact our Volunteer Coordinator Megan Brown at the FISH Volunteer Hotline, 360-566-3243.

Photos: Upper right, unveiling the new mobile food pantry, Right, the front view, Lower photos, some of the unveiling ceremony crowd on June 9, 2022. Photos by Riff Creative.



FISH Volunteers Get the Job Done!

Volunteers are the lifeblood of FISH. Each day, two shifts of volunteers share their time to ensure that no one in need of food goes hungry.

Volunteers make sure that the pantry is stocked with produce, staples and more, and that our guests are warmly welcomed. They drive, sort, stock, check clients in and out, give out sack lunches and keep the warehouse and pantry running. In their absence, food insecure families would go without nourishment. FISH simply could not operate without them!

Why do they volunteer?

“When I was younger, in my 20’s, I didn’t always know where my next meal was coming from,” says John Mangan. “Now I look to answer that question for those in need, as I was.”

Tani Thomas understands the sheer joy and purpose that volunteers feel. “I am grateful to have volunteered at FISH for over eight months now! I’ve enjoyed connecting with and supporting my community to make a difference in people’s lives.”

Good company! Trish McDermott shares a Buddhist quote “‘Appreciate good people. They are rare to come by.’ At the food pantry, I come in contact with tons of good people.”

FISH is filled with good people. Contact Volunteer Megan Brown for more information about volunteering!

8 Reasons to Volunteer at FISH

You will improve lives of all ages.

You will stretch family budgets.

You will nourish children.

You will support our seniors.

You will strengthen our community.

You will make new friends.

You will enjoy a purposeful life.

You will have fun!

Are you interested in volunteering?

Contact Megan Brown,
FISH Volunteer Coordinator at
meganb@fishvancouver.org
or call the Volunteer Hotline, 360-566-3243

Check Us Out!

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question
is, What are you doing for others?”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

FISH Volunteers Make Sure that Healthy Foods are Available for All



FISH haulers take our two vans out at 8am each weekday and pick up food donations from grocery stores and the Clark County Food Bank. They join other volunteers in unloading donations to be stocked in the warehouse and pantry.

Our Volunteers in Action – Are You Ready to Join Our Team?



Front desk volunteers welcome and check clients in. They find each client's account on the computer and get a cart ready for them to start shopping.



Snack window volunteers serve sack lunches that include a ready-to-eat sandwich, drinks, chips, and other individually packaged snacks.



Stockers fill shelves with dry goods and nonperishable items from the warehouse and also keep the meat, veggie, and dairy coolers and freezers full of fresh and perishable items.



Check out volunteers weigh each cart before it leaves and record the weight on each individual ticket.



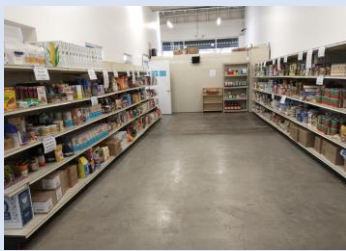
Warehouse workers sort and put away food that comes in on our vans. They also help keep the warehouse clean and organized!



Mobile pantry team members load the truck, transport and distribute food at locations around the community. This is our newest volunteer position!

FISH Looks to the Future with New 2022-24 Strategic Plan

Throughout its more than 50 years of service to the community, FISH has always had dreams. Those aspirations have led us to purchasing a building, adding professional staff and working with our dedicated volunteers to ensure that families and individuals in need have access to healthy foods. In the summer and fall of 2021, we completed our third Strategic Plan, which provides direction as we move into new ways of distributing food and serving our community. Our 2022-24 Plan focuses on four key goals. Each has multiple strategies, milestones and target dates for implementation. We have great plans, some already completed, and look forward to achieving them all!



Goal 1 Facilities

Maintain a facility that is safe, stable, accessible and innovative for effective food distribution.



Goal 3 Financial Sustainability

Strengthen fundraising strategies to sustain success and support a long-term vision for financial health.



Goal 2 Operations & Programs

Enhance operations and programs for client and community needs including a shopping-style pantry and mobile food pantry.



Goal 4 Impact on Hunger

Cultivate and steward relationships, leadership, equity and initiatives to address root causes of hunger and create a food secure tomorrow.

There are many ways to help combat hunger at FISH of Vancouver!

Join the FISH Team

- Volunteer to work a weekly shift at FISH or join the Mobile Pantry Team. Call Megan Brown for details at the Volunteer Hotline, 360-566-3243

Make a Financial Contribution

- Go to our secure Donate button at www.fishvancouver.org
- Become a Sustaining Member by becoming a monthly donor
- Donate to FISH on Sept 22, Give More 24! Day at www.givemore24.org
- Hold a fundraiser for FISH
- Become a BFF (Business Friend of FISH)

Involve Your Organization – Businesses, churches, service clubs and more...

- Sign up for volunteer projects, hold a food drive, organize a fundraiser

New FISH Pantry Design Opens for Shopping

Continued from page one

Food Insecure Households are Growing

Like other food pantries nationwide, our numbers are skyrocketing. The highest inflation rate in 40 years is hitting our clients hard. Food inflation is particularly high. In the past year, we've experienced a 96% increase in the number of clients.

Many are coming to our pantry for the first time because their budgets can't stretch any further. About 30% of our clients are children; 25% are seniors. Refugees from Ukraine and other countries are a growing number.

A guest in her 50s was injured in an accident, became disabled and lost her job that paid a living wage. Her husband, 62, still works, but his income doesn't stretch far enough. "We completely rely on FISH," she said. "It's a blessing to be able to pick our own food."

"Congratulations on opening your choice pantry!" Dr. Katie Martin, author of *Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries* (Island Press, 2021) told us. She has documented the tremendous impact of client-choice pantries throughout the country.

Volunteer Libby Bryant said: "Here we empower people. It gives people a sense of control for those who feel no control in their lives."

Improving Health, One Family at a Time

We are now offering much more fresh produce. One regular client, who has picked up lots of salads and coleslaw, credits FISH with her father losing 12 pounds and getting his diabetes under control. Another discovered the joy of a new, sometimes maligned vegetable. "I tried Brussel sprouts for the first time last week. Both my husband and I took a bite and thought, shoot! What have we been doing? We loved them!" We made sure they received more.

"I come for the produce," another guest says. "Produce costs way more than meat now, so I can get all the vegetables I need since it's free so I even have a little bit of food stamps left at the end of the month." This is music to our ears because so many in the community run out of SNAP benefits (food stamps), and food, in the middle of the month.

This is why we are here. No one should go hungry.

Update: Don't miss a great article about FISH in the national *Food Bank News* at www.foodbanknews.org!





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**GIVE
MORE 24!**

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

GENEROSITY 
RISING

**YOU can make a major difference on
Thursday, September 22!**

When you support FISH of Vancouver on Give More 24! Day you can:

- provide food for a family of 4 or more for a week and beyond
- supply our new Mobile Pantry with nutritious foods
- purchase a cart or a pallet full of food for our new Shopping Style Pantry
- fill the gap to allow us to serve our skyrocketing number of clients

Donating is easy to do. On September 22, go to
www.givemore24.org/organizations/fish-of-vancouver to make an online
donation. Matching dollars from generous donors will be available while they last!

Thank you for helping to combat hunger in our community!