

# Filling the Gap

## *An Inside Look at the Bemidji Food Shelf*

The Bemidji Community Food Shelf is a non-profit organization located in downtown Bemidji, Minn., that has been serving the local community since 1982. It was founded by a group of 12 churches who joined together to fill the need for food that was greater than any one church could handle by itself. They now employ 17 member churches and serve approximately 75 families a day, totaling 2,909 in the past year. They are open to the community Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, each week from 10:00am – 3:00pm.

This story is an inside view of what goes on daily to keep the food shelf running, and how those involved are doing their part to cut down on food insecurity in our local area.





Volunteers start arriving at 8:00 a.m. each day and begin by having a meeting with one of the staff directors, where they all introduce themselves and explain what positions each person will be working that day. They work to unload trucks, stock shelves, and organize things until customers start arriving at 10:00 a.m.

Taken on Oct. 19, 2018.





Volunteers unload boxes of donations from Lueken's Village Foods, in the warehouse portion of the Food Shelf. The bulk of donated food comes from local area stores, averaging around 20,000 pounds a month. They also get donations from Walmart, Target, Marketplace Foods, Hardee's, and Big Apple Bagels, all on a regular basis, though the amount of each donation varies greatly. Taken on Oct. 19, 2018.





Theresa weighs boxes as Conan brings them to her after a load comes in from Target. As the trucks are unloaded, each box or bag must be weighed and the temperature taken as soon as it arrives, according to standard health codes. Taken on Oct. 19, 2018.





Elaine, a Food Shelf staff-member, primarily spends her time in the kitchen. Here she hands out hummus and pretzels to families as they come in and wait for their interviews. Some days when she has more time she will cook a complete dish with ingredients that can be found in the shopping area. She also provides nutrition information and recipes to families when she can. Taken on Nov. 21, 2018.





Once the boxes are weighed, volunteers unpack them, then inspect and sort the goods. Anything that can't be used is composted and put to use in their garden in the summertime.

Taken on Oct. 22, 2018





In 2017, 858,000 pounds of food was distributed at the Food Shelf, averaging around 5,000 pounds a day. Of that food, two-thirds of it was purchased from the Food Group in Minneapolis and North Country Food Bank in Crookston, with their \$165,000 annual budget. Taken on Nov. 21, 2018.





Volunteers organize and stock the bread in the shopping area. They enjoy seeing each other and catching up with one another while they work. An average of 30-35 volunteers a day work at the Food Shelf, totaling around 700 a year. Taken on Oct. 19, 2018.





Each person or family that comes in has a short interview with a volunteer staff member, where their family size and needs are determined. They then get one of these shopping list sheets and a clipboard, before entering the store section of the building to begin shopping. Taken on Nov. 21, 2018.

Ticket # \_\_\_\_\_ (Lavender)XX- Large Household  
 Client Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Item #	Item Name	Qty Allowed	X
1.	Meat	15 lbs.	
2.	Fresh/Powdered Milk	4 cartons	
3.	Eggs	3 dozen	
4.	Margarine	6 sticks	
5.	Vegetables Canned	6 cans	
6.	Fruit Canned	6 cans	
7.	Beans Assorted	7 cans	
8.	Tomato Products	5 cans	
9.	Dry Beans	2 packages	
10.	Canned/Boxed-meal	XXX	
11.	Peanut butter	3 jars	
12.	Hot/Cold Cereal	3 choices	
13.	Soups	7 cans	
14.	Pasta or rice	4 packages	
15.	Canned Meat	4 cans	
16.	Mac & Cheese	5 packages	
17.	Juice/Beverages	1	
18.	Sweets	2	
19.	Sugar/Baking	2	
20.	Snacks	2	
21.	Potatoes	15 lbs.	
22.	Miscellaneous	2	
23.	Pancake Mix	2 packages	
24.	Personal Care	1	
25.	Produce	2 bags	
26.	Crackers	6 sleeves	
27.	Breads	1 loaf, 4 other	

Total lbs    Cart lbs    Food lbs

Shopper Initials: \_\_\_\_\_





Rose is a frequent customer at the food shelf. She has four children and it is a helpful resource to supplement when things are tighter, especially in the winter since she is a seasonal worker. She wishes more people that donate food understood that the people shopping need nutritious options practical for daily living, items such as clam juice are not as helpful when people are really in need. Taken on Nov. 12, 2018.





Skyler, 8, enjoys coming to the food shelf with his mom, because he loves looking at the books they give away, but he doesn't enjoy the shopping part quite as much. Taken on Nov. 12, 2018.





During June, July and August in 2018, area households made 12,464 visits to the Food Shelf and took home a total of 20,923 pounds of food. Each monthly visit provides families with enough food for about 10 meals. Two-thirds of the food that is distributed is purchased with donated funds, which are always less in the summer. Taken on Nov. 12, 2018.





Donna and Elaine take a short break after a busy morning of stocking shelves, before the shopping room fills up with customers.  
Taken on Oct. 19, 2018