



Elmhurst-Yorkfield Food Pantry

40 Years providing Food, Compassion, and Hope to our Neighbors in Need

In 2023, the Elmhurst-Yorkfield Food Pantry (EYFP) celebrated its 40th Anniversary. What began in 1983 in a walk-in closet in the Yorkfield Presbyterian Church (YPC) basement, now includes two locations, including our new warehouse at 501 W. Lake Street, Elmhurst, and serves residents of nine Chicago-area suburbs: Addison, Bensenville, Berkeley, Elmhurst, Hillside, Lombard, Oakbrook, Oakbrook Terrace, and Villa Park. In 2023, EYFP served over 600 families per month at the food pantry and another 120 families through its mobile pantry program. Operating seven days a week, EYFP's dedicated group of over 300 volunteers help recover food products from grocery store partners, stock shelves, assist clients, and manage a Saturday morning mobile food pantry once a month in south Bensenville.

How did it all begin? In 1983, George Egner and some other members of YPC attended a "Hunger in DuPage County" meeting and identified the need for an outreach program at YPC to help neighbors who were struggling to put food on their tables. YPC Pastor Stan Jewel supported the idea and Frank Ehret was the first coordinator, with help from Ozzie Kirkland, George Egner, Frank Hanus and

Dick and Betty Bruce. Food was collected once a month from church members on “Food Closet Sunday” and given out one day per week on Thursdays. Groceries were pre-packed on Thursday mornings and distributed by appointment on Thursday afternoons. About twenty-five families were assisted each month. In 1989 Betty Bruce took over as coordinator- ordering food, scheduling clients, shopping, and driving to Carol Stream to purchase food from Northern Illinois Food Bank. Wanda Maxson helped with record keeping and thank you notes.

In 1992, Lani Allen, a member of YPC, began a food donation program at his employer, Household Finance. Called “Blue Jeans Fridays”, Household Finance employees could wear jeans to work on Fridays if they donated 2 non-perishable food items to the YPC Food Closet. The program was a success and continued for about four years at two different Household Finance locations. Dick Bruce, Bill McMullen and Lani Allen would collect the donation bins and drive them to YPC. Another YPC member, Bill Shepard, was a 5th grade teacher at Lincoln School and every Saturday during the school year students from his class would sort the donations. In the summer, YPC volunteers sorted the donations.

Food donations and client needs continued to increase creating an acute need for more space. In 1996 the Food Closet was moved out of the YPC

basement and into a white cottage on YPC property. Improvements were made to the cottage to better accommodate the needs of the food pantry – a concrete ramp to the basement was poured and external stairs were built connecting the basement to an upstairs office space. The food pantry was open for client pick up, by reservation only, on Thursday afternoons (1 p.m. – 3 p.m.) and Monday evenings (6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.) Wanda Maxson handled phone calls, verified residency, made client reservations and scheduled volunteers. Based on size, families received 2-4 bags of food. About 100 families were served each month.

In 1997, as the order volume increased, NIFB began delivering food to the Food Pantry. Continued growth necessitated the use of additional rooms within the white cottage. Measurements were taken and architectural drawings were developed by pantry volunteers to best utilize the limited space. The kitchen cabinets were removed to provide more storage space. Pantry volunteers described the “precarious” storage and staircase within the house. Enormous boxes filled with canned goods were carried up the stairs and then needed to be carried back down the stairs later in the week. In addition to the rooms in the white cottage, the YPC stage (and later the area below the stage) and a POD were used for food storage.

In 2004, Betty Bruce stepped down as Pantry Coordinator and Jacki Lawrence took over. Wanda Maxson continued to work with clients and schedule volunteers. Jacki handled food drives and NIFB ordering. Debbie Suits in the YPC office handled finances. In 2008, Janet Cox took over as Thursday Client Coordinator and was part of a YPC committee that started thinking about adding another client shift. In early 2009, the food pantry began client service on Saturdays from 9 a.m. – noon and extended its service area to include Northlake, Hillside and Berkley. Janet Cox became a co-coordinator with Jacki Lawrence.

In 2010, NIFB helped the EYFP develop a food recovery program with Jewel Foods for frozen meats, fresh produce and a large amount of baked goods. Additional shelving was purchased, and an additional freezer and refrigerator were donated to help store the recovered food. The food pantry began to offer some client choice items. Larry Studer joined the pantry volunteers and quickly took the lead on recruiting drivers for the food recovery program.

In 2012, the first Food Pantry Board was officially formed, with Jacki Lawrence President, Janet Cox VP, Margaret Schiefer Secretary, Nancy Peterson Treasurer, and Larry Studer, Becky Nemchock and Karen Hyland on the Board. The EYFP incorporated into a non-profit 501 (3) C on July 24, 2012. The official

address – 1083 S. York Road- was created in September 2012. And Thursday evening service (6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.) was added in November of that year. The need for more space was becoming a big issue, again, and serious discussions began to address idea of building a new pantry building.

In 2014, the Board hired a professional fundraiser, Lea Ann Skogsberg, and formed a Capital Campaign committee – Becky Nemchock, Kathie Watts, Jeff Skinner, Nancy Peterson, Judy Ekblad, Julie Hennein, Jim Hooker and Lisa Miller. Jacki Lawrence secured an architect, Jim Ruprecht, on a volunteer basis, who had recently served as a Northern Illinois Food Bank chairperson. Jim walked through a number of scenarios with the board and took board members on field trips to numerous food pantries in the area. Jim developed three different renderings for buildings located on the YPC property. YPC Pastor Mike Toburen met with the YPC Session as well as the Chicago Presbytery about the possible new building. YPC agreed to donate land to the pantry if three specifications could be met.

- Pantry hours of operation could not conflict with scheduled church events.
- Adequate parking needed to remain for church parishioners.
- No debt could be incurred at the time of groundbreaking by the pantry or the church.

Fundraising began in earnest, with appeals to 100+ Women Who Care, the Elmhurst Chamber and its members, YPC members, and the larger Elmhurst community. EYFP received its federal tax exempt status February 12, 2014 and approval from the Illinois Department of Revenue on June 6, 2014. Once the tax exempt status was approved over \$200,000 in pledges were received for the new facility.

Within 15 months, enough money was raised (nearly \$900,000) to break ground in a public ceremony on August 11, 2015. While fundraising, paperwork, and construction for the new pantry was taking place, the existing pantry was operating at full capacity and the client base was continuing to grow. EYFP launched its first website in 2015. September 26, 2015 was the final day of serving clients in the white cottage. And the cottage was demolished on October 21, 2015.

The new 2,500 square foot pantry officially opened on January 2, 2016. The building was ADA-compliant, with new shelving, refrigerators and freezers, plus a waiting room for clients with a bathroom. Clients were able to sit in a separate waiting room and then walk through the pantry with a shopping cart and a

volunteer. Clients could choose the food items that matched their family preferences, thereby decreasing food waste.

In 2017, EYFP began delivering to Greencastle, a low-income senior community with 80 apartment units in downtown Elmhurst, as many of the Greencastle seniors could not drive to the food pantry. Milk and egg deliveries to EYFP began in 2017. Special holiday distributions were added - turkeys for Thanksgiving and hams for Christmas and Easter. In June 2017, Jacki Lawrence stepped down as Food Pantry Coordinator. In November 2017, Kathie Watts was hired as the first Executive Director of EYFP and Larry Studer was appointed Board President.

Covid-19 hit in March of 2020 and pantries throughout the country closed their doors. But client needs were greater than ever and EYFP wanted to find a way to stay open. On March 16, 2020, client choice was replaced with pre-packed bags of food. By May 2020, a comprehensive plan was developed to re-introduce client choice. Clients remained in their cars and selected food items from printed shopping lists, available in English and Spanish. Then, masked volunteers shopped the pantry shelves and placed groceries into client's trunks in a contactless format. The EYFP did not miss a client service day during Covid-19.

In 2021, more staff was added to help with pantry operations. Deb Rutter was hired as Pantry Manager, to coordinate the large Saturday client pick-up, work with Greencastle, and organize large food drives. In 2022, Janet Cox stepped down as volunteer coordinator and a new paid Volunteer Coordinator position was created and filled by Bob Cieslak. In fall 2022, to recognize our outstanding volunteers, the Board sponsored a Volunteer Appreciation Night at Angelo's Ristorante in Elmhurst. The Fernandez family, owners of Todo Imports of Chicago, donated a refrigerated box-truck to the pantry. Thompson's Rental Station in Bensenville performed a lot of repair work on the truck, donating significant time and labor. Additional mechanical repairs were done by Hodges Westside Truck Center in Marengo, IL, and paid for by Itasca Bank & Trust. The addition of this refrigerated box truck helped facilitate food recovery efforts.

EYFP began offering food to a largely migrant community in south Bensenville. Children from these families attend Elmhurst District 205 schools and parent liaisons and school personnel approached EYFP with requests for assistance for these families. A Mobile Food Pantry was scheduled for the first Saturday in April 2022 in the commons area of the Elm Court Apartment complex and was well received by the community. This program is ongoing and approximately 120 families are served at these monthly mobile food pantries.

In 2023, EYFP client needs continued to increase, requiring more food. The Food Pantry was over-crowded with food. What had once been a beautiful client waiting room was stacked to the ceiling with food. More food storage space was required and EYFP signed a 5-year lease for warehouse and office space at 501 W. Lake Street, in Elmhurst. This new warehouse space included a large walk-in freezer and cooler, lots of shelving for storing food and a large space to process NIFB deliveries and large food drive donations as well as space to organize Greencastle deliveries and Saturday mobile food pantries. A fundraiser was held in fall of 2023 at River Forest Country Club with over 300 people attending and over \$50,000 raised.

As it has done for the past 40 years, EYFP has changed and adapted to meet the needs of our clients. Our client population is diverse – those unemployed or under employed who find it difficult to make ends meet, single parents with little or no support, senior citizens on fixed incomes, those with disabilities, and those dealing with medical issues. EYFP pantry staff and volunteers have worked hard to feed this diverse group and will continue serve our clients with compassion and hope.