

On May 16th, the Antigo Community Food Pantry (ACFP) will celebrate six years of service to the community! This successful endeavor started in 2010 when a handful of people came together to discuss food insecurity in our community.

In response to the growth of families seeking food and grocery supplementation, representatives of four existing church-based food pantries made the decision to work together to consolidate as the Antigo Community Food Pantry. The churches of Faith United Church of Christ, Seventh-Day Adventist, St. John, Antigo, and SS. Mary & Hyacinth, together with county-based and community resource persons, decided to consolidate their resources and expand their scope by bringing together pantries housed in church basements and back rooms to provide a better opportunity to serve the food-insecure individuals as a community.

This became the mission: The **Antigo Community Food Pantry** is a group of compassionate volunteers providing food and resources that sustain health and human dignity. We strive to collaborate, advocate and increase public awareness to achieve food security for everyone in our community.

The committee visited other pantries, conducting research on how to best organize the new endeavor. A corporation was formed and a 501(c)3 non-profit status obtained. The group looked to create a pantry in an easily accessible location that would provide regular hours of service offering a choice of food and access to information on community resources. Through the generosity of Bob Arlen, the organization consolidated their services in the former Arlen's building downtown. As service grew, the need for a larger facility became apparent. In 2015, ACFP moved to its current location when Aspirus Langlade Hospital donated the use of a portion of its building at 2120 Progress Blvd for the ACFP's use. Aspirus continues to support the ACFP today by maintaining the building.

Many of the original people who created the Antigo Community Food Pantry are still involved with its operations. They work steadfastly creating a welcoming environment, seeking donors, and facilitating food donations. Since inception, over 300 volunteers have worked over 60,000 hours to make the ACFP successful. In 2016, a part time manager was hired to oversee ACFP operations. A Board that meets quarterly and a Steering Committee that meets monthly were established to monitor and support the growth of food distribution.

In 2013, Thrivent Financial donated a van to facilitate food pick-up and delivery. You can see this van traveling to Shawano, Little Chute, and Wausau to obtain food from Feeding America and Salvation Army. It makes the rounds in the community to Walmart, Quick Trip, local potato farmers, Dollar Tree, Pick 'n Save, and Sentry. It is an invaluable tool when picking up food from the US Postal Service, Thrivent Cans Hunger, Junior Woman's Club, and numerous other food drives.

The Weekend Backpack Program (WEB) joined the efforts of ACFP in 2015 with the goal of providing children who qualify for free-and-reduced lunch with easy-to-prepare meals on weekends and vacations. WEB meets the needs of approximately 300 children in Antigo and has expanded to White Lake. As an ACFP program, WEB receives input from representatives of

Aspirus Langlade Hospital, Langlade County, the Antigo School District, the UW-Extension, and The Boys and Girls Club. Volunteers who have filled backpacks for WEB have numbered in the hundreds. Lakeside Grocery generously stores and delivers the food distributed through WEB.

Based on the outcome of Langlade Aspirus' Health Needs Assessment, the ACFP adopted a Nutrition Policy in 2017. This policy provides a focus on providing healthy food to sustain healthy lives. In 2017, the ACFP received a grant through the Packer Foundation to purchase fresh produce and create signage emphasizing the MyPlate nutrition guidelines. A recent Remington grant will allow for improvements in refrigerated storage for the increased amount of produce the ACFP offers under its Nutrition Policy. Efforts have been made by ACFP to provide educational resources on nutrition for staff, volunteers, and clients alike.

Incredibly, the ACFP has had over 33,000 visits from families needing food and has filled over 20,000 backpacks since that first date of service on May 16, 2012. Through the efforts of the dedicated volunteers and generous community donors, food insecurity in Langlade County is being addressed with respect and compassion. The efforts of the ACFP volunteers and donors have changed the community for the better. The result is a wonderful example of people from all different walks of life coming together to serve their neighbors and make a difference.

One senior client sums up the impact on her life in this way, "It makes all the difference in the world to me. I could not make it without the help of the Antigo Community Food Pantry."