

Food Pantry Seeks NRC Aid

The Native American people that NRC serves are strong in tradition and values; they are a revered part of the American culture, yet many of their basic human needs go unmet. One of those needs is nutritious food. NRC has 14 different ways that it provides food through program partners. One of those ways is providing food to reservation pantries.

On the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana, two of NRC's program partners are working together to fight hunger in 5 communities. They came to NRC for help. These partners, Darlene and Bernadine, reported that need in the surrounding area had escalated beyond the level that other food pantries could meet. Through a donation of saleable goods, Bernadine started a thrift store; she now gives a portion of the proceeds to Darlene, who uses them to stock the food pantry.

A resourceful pair, both partners recently traveled to Rapid City, SD, to attend an Open House for program partners and to share their growing concerns about being able to meet the amplified needs of their people. Darlene expressed concern that working families with children are now asking for assistance; these are not her typical clients. Darlene faces a regular fear that the food will run out and she will be forced to start turning away families or tighten the criteria for receiving pantry assistance. She also fears that families will spend their last resources traveling the distance for food supplies and go home empty-handed.



Darlene's pantry does receive regular food shipments from National Relief Charities, but her concerns lie with the number of new families coming to her for help. Her food boxes are first come, first serve for eligible families. NRC's most recent shipment to Darlene was increased to serve 300 people— but it only lasted one week.

Besides the food NRC donates, Darlene purchases food through the state food bank system. However, the increased demand means many items ordered are unavailable. Darlene has to purchase these from the local store, to ensure her needy families are getting balanced nutrition.

When Darlene does purchase these supplemental items, her problem is compounded. Supplies at the local stores are limited and prices are very high. If she were to purchase the canned goods needed to supply these families, the store and her budget could be wiped out quickly.

For pantries such as Darlene's, the most helpful types of food are meats that do not require refrigeration and items that can be stored in a small space. Typically, storage is limited. Darlene and Bernadine dream of having a warehouse the size of NRC's, to expand their thrift store and provide more funding for their food pantry. They are always looking for an angle that will let them serve more people.

Darlene is very appreciative of her partnership with National Relief Charities. She knows when a new food supply will be coming and what will be in the shipment. This helps her plan better for other items she needs to purchase. This enables her to serve more people in her community and to hopefully alleviate the number of Native American families on Fort Peck whose basic human needs are going unmet.