Mobile Food Pantry
10 Years : Fueling Families
2010-2020
Neighbors Rely on the Mobile Food Pantry

Married nearly half a century, Clara and Charlie are accustomed to caring for each other. Clara helps her husband—a Vietnam vet—combat cancer and diabetes. They know good food is essential to keep Charlie healthy and happy, so after years of working two jobs each, they now rely on the Orange Mobile Food Pantry for nutritious food.

When the Food Has to Travel

Putting a pantry on wheels was a novel concept for us back in 2010, but we could see that not everyone in need had easy access to traditional food pantries. And so, the Mobile Food Pantry (MFP) was born.

The Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, Better Living Foundation, Perry Foundation, Bio-Cat, and the MLG Foundation helped us get our start, funding the purchase of the first refrigerated truck and lots of fresh food. Since then, more than $1 million has been donated to keep the wheels turning.

Serving 3,620 people each month

The first MFP distributions took place in Albemarle, Nelson, and Buckingham counties. Later, we identified additional communities with unmet needs and forged new, local partnerships to expand the program. Today we operate 12 monthly distributions at 11 sites.

When the program first started, clients lined up on foot and carried food back to their cars. To better serve seniors and neighbors with disabilities, we shifted to drive-through distributions. Today, during the COVID-19 pandemic, food is pre-packed in warehouses and clients stay in their cars while volunteers fill their trunk.

Communities come together to serve

Mobile distributions are energy-filled and efficient. Volunteers and staff rhythmically unload food from the refrigerated truck and load goods into clients’ cars. Many volunteers are regulars, but newcomers are always welcome. Take Kelly and her sons, Brady and Rudy, who volunteered in Scottsville for the first time in March. Thirteen-year-old Rudy said, “We have food, and we want everybody else to have it, too.”

Because many rural residents lack transportation, clients often pick up food for homebound neighbors or family members. “Even after the truck pulls away, the MFP doesn’t end,” says Melissa Wender, program coordinator. “People might [stop] at three places on their way home to deliver food to others.”

Fresh produce is a guarantee, but dry goods, dairy products, and frozen meat are common, too. So, what’s on the menu? In early July, Nelson County visitors received this nutritious mix: squash, cherub tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, four-cheese ravioli, and chicken fillets.

The MFP proved that local delivery is an impactful strategy. Direct, mobile intervention helps the Food Bank navigate around food access roadblocks.