

Starting a Food Pantry at your Library

Megan Bruggeman & Kathleen McPherson-Glynn

2022 MLA Fall Retreat at Chico Hot Springs



Presentation objectives

- ▶ The goal of this presentation is to:
 - ▶ Share our experience starting a public library food pantry
 - ▶ Discuss the role of food pantries in libraries
 - ▶ Answer questions you may have about starting a food pantry in your library

How it started

- ▶ The Bozeman Public Library Food Pantry began in May 2022.
- ▶ This program began as a collaboration between Kathleen and Megan. We have both had experiences with patrons (children and adults) asking for food. Then, during an April 2022 meeting, we brainstormed ways this issue could be addressed within the library. The library food pantry idea was formed.
- ▶ The Gallatin Valley Food Bank agreed to provide nonperishable food donations, and with their backing, the library department heads accepted our program proposal.

Our Experiences

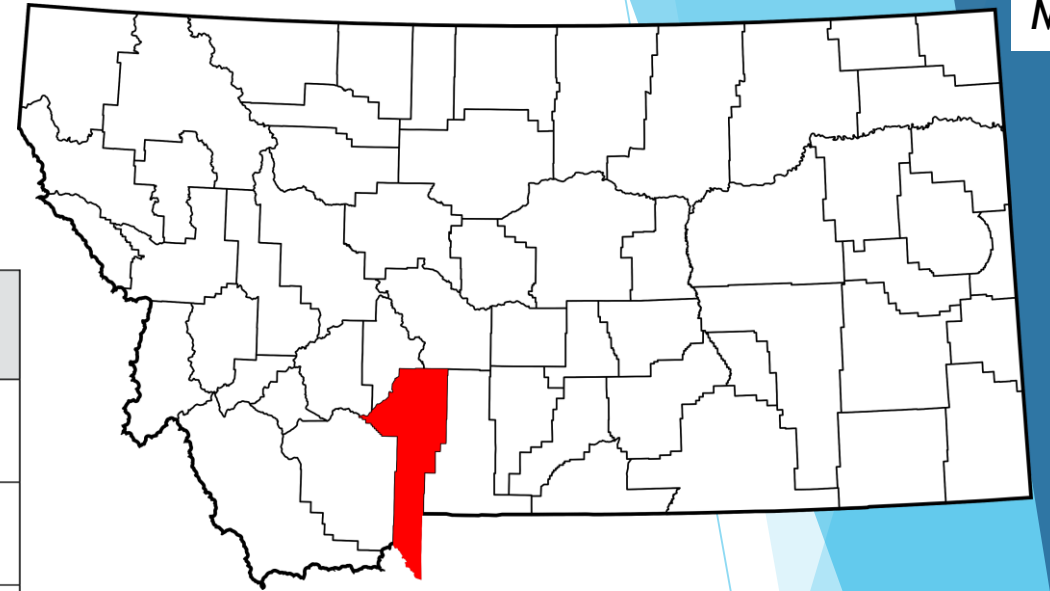
- ▶ Kathleen in Youth Services
- ▶ Megan at the circulation desk
- ▶ Has anyone else had patrons express hunger or food insecurity?



The Need in Gallatin County

Megan

2021 POVERTY GUIDELINES FOR THE 48 CONTIGUOUS STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,880
2	\$17,420
3	\$21,960
4	\$26,500
5	\$31,040
6	\$35,580
7	\$40,120
8	\$44,660

1 in 7
Gallatin County residents (13%) live below the federal poverty level.

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,540 for each additional person.

The Need, continued

- ▶ Food insecurity is the “the lack of **consistent** access to enough food for every person in a household.” Poverty is one of the strongest predictors of food insecurity.
- ▶ Food insecurity is common. The USDA estimates that until a family’s income is 185% above the poverty line they are at risk of experiencing food insecurity. Nearly 96% of Gallatin Valley Food Bank customers live below this benchmark.



What are the effects of food insecurity?

- ▶ Serious **health complications**, especially when people facing hunger are forced to choose between spending money on food or spending money on medical care.
- ▶ Damage to a child's ability to learn and grow.
- ▶ **Difficult decisions** such as choosing between paying for food and heat, electricity, rent, or transportation.

Hunger Action Month.

FEEDING
AMERICA

Food or electricity?



Food or childcare?



Food or medicine?



Food shouldn't be an impossible choice.

Our Goal

- ▶ We proposed that having a food pantry in the library, with nonperishable items for snacks and meals, would help to address food insecurity in our community.
- ▶ This program is consistent with the Bozeman Public Library mission:



“The Bozeman Public Library creates opportunities that inspire curiosity, exploration and connection.”

- ▶ Patrons cannot take full advantage of the library’s opportunities for curiosity, exploration, and connection if hunger and food insecurity are major stressors in their lives.

Why Food Pantries are appearing in Public Libraries

Libraries gain a lot by being a food distribution site

- address local hunger
- bridge the gap in social services: food bank hours, etc.
- support vulnerable populations
- attract new user groups
- increase the library's visibility as a community asset
- position the library an important stakeholder in community well-being



Examples of public library food pantries

Kathleen



Woodstock Public Library
Woodstock, Illinois



Belgrade Community Library
Belgrade, Montana



More examples of how you can create space for a small food pantry.

Steps to starting a Food Pantry

- ▶ Identify the need (would the community benefit from this?)
- ▶ Find funding/ how will the pantry be supplied?
- ▶ Who will manage it (daily food stocking, etc.)
- ▶ Identify the furniture to be used for the pantry (we used an out-of-use cart)- will furniture need to be purchased and, if so, where will the funding come from?
- ▶ Make clear and inclusive signage (We use: “FOOD PANTRY - FREE Take what you need”)
- ▶ Find an accessible location
- ▶ Keep track of statistics (weight of each food delivery, etc.)

Other considerations

- ▶ We considered where to position the food pantry to minimize stigma. It was first placed out of the circulation desk's view in the library lobby, then moved to a location near the entrance to get a sense of our user group.
- ▶ Accepting on-site patron donations. Talk with your local food bank.
- ▶ Where will the extra food be stored?

Financing the Food Pantry

Highlights from FY 2020-2021

Gallatin Valley Food Bank



983 FAMILIES SERVED MONTHLY	11,796 FOOD BOXES PROVIDED	9,714 VOLUNTEER HOURS
417 SENIORS RECEIVED MONTHLY GROCERIES	31,848 SUMMER MEALS SERVED TO CHILDREN	9,602 WEEKEND KIDSPACKS DISTRIBUTED
765,326 POUNDS OF FOOD RESCUED FROM GROCERY STORES	7,443 POUNDS OF FOOD DISTRIBUTED TO FAMILIES EVERYDAY	908 FOOD BOXES DELIVERED TO PEOPLE'S HOMES

- ▶ In the beginning, the food pantry was supplied solely from Gallatin Valley Food Bank donations.
- ▶ GVFB delivered 3-5 crates of food one to two times per week in the first few months.
- ▶ We now receive about 3 crates once a week as GVFB has high demand.



Financing the Food Pantry, continued

- ▶ In June 2022, we received a \$1,000.00 donation from a community member through the Bozeman Public Library Foundation. This allowed us to purchase nonperishable food from Costco to supplement GVFB donations.
- ▶ Using this money, a total of 368 pounds of food was purchased. By generously filling the food pantry every morning, this food lasted 2-3 months.



Financing the Food Pantry, continued

▶ The main purchases at Costco:

- ▶ Individual Ramen (Cup of Noodles)
- ▶ Canned tuna
- ▶ Apple sauce and fruit cups
- ▶ Granola bars (usually Chewy brand)
- ▶ Individual Macaroni & Cheese
- ▶ Soup with pop-top lids
- ▶ Baked beans
- ▶ Individual packets of Indian madras lentils (pre-prepared food from the brand Tasty Bite)
- ▶ Individual oatmeal packets
- ▶ “Breakfast essentials” nutritional shake power packets (Carnation brand)
- ▶ Children’s protein shakes (sometimes- these are expensive)



Financing the Food Pantry, continued

- ▶ In September 2022, the food pantry became a donation site. A donation box was placed next to the food pantry for nonperishable food donations.
- ▶ There is a wish list of items on the donation box:
 - ▶ Granola bars
 - ▶ Microwavable meals (ramen, easy mac, etc.)
 - ▶ Peanut butter (16 oz.)
 - ▶ Canned tuna
 - ▶ Canned soup (preferably with pop-top lids- so that a can opener is not needed)
 - ▶ Individual instant oatmeal packets
 - ▶ Individual fruit/veggie cups and pouches
- ▶ The wish list items can be eaten right away or easily prepared.

Financing the Food Pantry, continued

- ▶ Some of the food items are of a lower nutritional value, but they are affordable and ease hunger. GVFB offers fresh food and their hours are posted on the Food Pantry.
- ▶ Everyday donations are checked and anything perishable or within two years of expiration (per GVFB's recommendation) is thrown away. Acceptable donations are then transferred to the food pantry.



Financing the Food Pantry going forward

- ▶ The food pantry will become part of the budget for the Adult Programming & Outreach department in the upcoming fiscal year.
- ▶ Bozeman Public Library Foundation may provide additional funding.

Healthy Kids Packs

Healthy Kids Pack

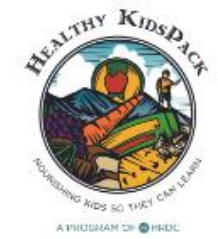


Now Available at the Library!

Empowering kids with nutritional resources during the school year.

The Healthy KidsPack Program is a weekly supplemental bag of groceries that provides healthy foods to children across Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson counties. Nutritionally balanced, kid-friendly foods are packed and distributed to local school children every Friday during the school year. The KidsPack program is open to all students at participating elementary schools regardless of their family's income.

To sign up or learn more, talk to your school's front office or ask for a registration form at the Library's Youth Services Desk.



Kids Summer Lunch Program

Total meals for 2022= 3,266
Just lunches

Total meals for 2021= 7,217
Lunch and Breakfasts

This is a federal (USDA) program administered by OPI here in Montana. But school districts, libraries, churches and other nonprofits operate the SFSP across the state and country.



12-1pm Monday - Friday

12 other free lunch sites around Gallatin Co.

Getting the Word Out

Kathleen

Local News



LOCAL NEWS

More than books on shelves: Bozeman Public Library starts mobile food pantry

Edgar Codillo

1,000 pounds

The Bozeman Public Library Food Pantry has distributed 1,000 lbs of food to the community since the program began on May 2, 2022.

Donations from the Gallatin Valley Food Bank and the Bozeman Public Library Foundation make this program possible. Thank you!

Social Media

Bozeman Public Library

Insights: Last 28 days: Aug 17 - Sep 13

- People reached: 4,417 (+20%)
- Post engagements: 634 (+20%)
- Page likes: 62 (+15%)

Bozeman Public Library is pleased to announce a new program for the community: the first ever Bozeman Public Library Food Pantry. Located in the library lobby and open during library hours, the pantry is open to all students at participating elementary schools regardless of their family's income.

Donations from the Gallatin Valley Food Bank and the Bozeman Public Library Foundation make this program possible. Thank you!

418 People reached, 17 Engagements, -1.4x lower Distribution score

Bozeman Public Library

Published by Kathleen McPherson Glynn (Library account) · May 6

The Library has partnered with HRDC and the Gallatin Valley Food Bank to bring nutritious food to families experiencing food insecurity. In addition to the new Food Pantry in our lobby, families can pick up Healthy Kids Packs at the Youth Services Desk.

Healthy Kids Pack

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20 people reached, 23 Engagements, +1.2x average Distribution score

Web Page

Bozeman Public Library

Services Events eLibrary About I Want To...

Food Pantry

Bozeman Public Library is pleased to announce a new program for the community: the first ever Bozeman Public Library Food Pantry!

Library patrons and community members are encouraged to take what they need at no cost. The food pantry is located in the library lobby and open during library hours. This program is made possible by the Gallatin Valley Food Bank and donations to the Bozeman Public Library Foundation. We are proud and humbled to fight hunger and food insecurity in our community.

Please contact Megan at mbruggeman@bozeman.net with any questions about this program. If you would like to donate to the Bozeman Public Library Food Pantry, please do so through the [Bozeman Public Library Foundation](#) and note that you would like your donation to go to the Food Pantry. Gallatin Valley Food Bank also accepts donations of food or funds, for more information visit their [website](#).

Hours: Mon - Thurs: 10 AM - 6 PM, Fri: 10 AM - 6 PM, Sat: 10 AM - 2 PM, Sun: 1 PM - 5 PM

Come Visit: 625 E. Main Street, Bozeman, Montana 59715, PH: (406) 592-2400, FAX: (406) 592-2424

Bozeman Public Library

How it has been going

- ▶ Patrons from all age groups and walks of life use the food pantry.
- ▶ A few library staff have expressed concern about patrons “taking advantage of the food pantry.”
- ▶ We must assume positive intent. A person’s situation or need cannot be judged solely on their physical appearance. Proving worthiness is not our job.
- ▶ Our job is to freely offer this service with the resources we have in the hope of positively impacting our community.

How it has been going, continued

- ▶ The food pantry has received overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- ▶ From the start, patrons have asked how they can contribute to the food pantry. The community wants to be involved.
- ▶ When food is put on the cart, it is gone within a few hours.

How it has been going, continued

- ▶ The food pantry has distributed **1,862 lbs.** of food to the community since it began in May 2022.
- ▶ Gallatin Valley Food Bank has provided **78** crates of food, totaling **1,494 lbs.**

Bumps in the road & limitations

- ▶ Publicity started before our first delivery from the food bank was received.
- ▶ Patron removing food and worrying about food safety- conversation about expiration dates with the food bank.
- ▶ Unhelpful donations (molded carrots, old socks and shoes, expired sardines, etc.)
- ▶ Scope creep: Unlimited money could be spent keeping the food pantry stocked. Hunger and food insecurity is an unsolved global problem and the food pantry will never be able to fill the need.
- ▶ Food/drink library policy and food allergy concerns

Food Pantries in different types of libraries

- ▶ Food pantries can be useful in school and academic libraries
- ▶ BUT . . . Be sure to check what your community already has, so you don't duplicate.
- ▶ MSU - Bozeman - Renne Library at MSU does not have a food pantry. Instead, there are hunger relief resources throughout campus, like the "Bounty of the Bridgers" campus food pantry, which is run through the MSU Office of Health Advancement.
- ▶ Public Schools may have the Health Kids Packs



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HRDC

Bozeman Public Library

Healthy KidsPack

To sign up or learn more, talk to your school's front office or ask for a registration form at the Library's Youth Services Desk.



Sources

- ▶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - ▶ <https://www.hhs.gov/>
- ▶ 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
 - ▶ <https://www.census.gov/>
- ▶ Feeding America
 - ▶ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/>
- ▶ Gallatin Valley Food Bank
 - ▶ <https://gallatinvalleyfoodbank.org/>
- ▶ Out of Reach, National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019



Questions ?



Comments ?