



NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

*Interfaith Social Services
gears up for a busy holiday season*

BY VIVIAN SIEMPOS HIDAS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIKA FERNANDES



"At one point or another, everyone needs help in their life," says Executive Director Rick Doane. "We help people overcome."

It's 10 a.m. on a Tuesday morning and the food pantry at Interfaith Social Services in Quincy is already bustling. Volunteers dart down narrow aisles, flanked by tall metal shelves stocked with donated food, and busily fill brown paper bags with grocery staples like bread, eggs and colorful fruits and vegetables.

Despite the cramped quarters, Interfaith's food bank, The Pantry Shelf, has an astounding output. Between July 2014 and June 2015, the facility distributed 855,674 pounds of food to struggling families, children and seniors on the South Shore.

"At one point or another, everyone needs help in their life," says Executive Director Rick Doane. "We help people overcome."

Founded in 1947, the non-religious organization was created to help improve the lives of families and individuals in need on the South Shore by delivering compassionate, client-centered programs focused on hunger, mental health and emergency assistance. Thanks to the assistance of corporate partnerships and local volunteers, Interfaith is helping to eliminate hunger on the South Shore.

Three main sources supply the food on the pantry shelves. First is the Greater Boston Food Bank, which delivered 429,805 pounds of food this past year, which

amounts to 50 percent of the pantry's distribution. Community donations like school food drives make up 5 percent of the pantry's distribution (approximately 35,016 pounds of food). Restaurants and supermarkets make up the remaining 45 percent of donations (approximately 385,250 pounds of food). Donations include day-old breads and baked goods, cheeses, prepared sandwiches, rotisserie chickens and much more. Interfaith's volunteers and staff work together on what they call a "food rescue mission" because if it weren't for their intervention, this perfectly good food would end up in a landfill rather than in the hands of those who need it most.

Doane has made it his mission to ensure that the food pantry supplies fresh produce along with non-perishable goods, so that individuals and families can reap the health benefits. Last year, he went so far as to purchase 5,603 pounds of produce from a local produce wholesaler and the high cost of this endeavor helped inspire the creation of Interfaith's new Harvest Helpers program. Local gardeners participating in the program are asked to plant an extra row of vegetables in their garden to give to the food bank. Locally based Keohane Funeral Home partnered with Interfaith to donate seedlings as well as produce from gardens at their two locations.



A Support for Families

Some of the needs met by Interfaith relate to the general wellbeing of the families and young children that they serve. The organization hosts a Halloween costume drive each year so that kids don't go without a costume as well as a backpack drive that provides back-to-school supplies to children, which eases the burden on parents.

Interfaith has established a sister program called the Learning Pantry that provides various experts and counselors who take the time to offer support to the people who visit the food pantry. This is in addition to the counseling services that Interfaith offers because their ultimate goal is not only to offer

emergency assistance, but to also make lasting, sustainable changes in the lives of the individuals and families they serve.

Doane, who has been with Interfaith Social Services for six years, credits the success of the organization to the level of community support they receive. Since there are only a few paid employees, volunteers are essential. Last year 866 volunteers spent hours assisting clients, answering phones, sorting clothes and more. There are 100 regular volunteers that spend at least three hours per week helping various programs. Cindy Lee is one such volunteer.

Lee, who has been a regular volunteer since 1996, works four days a week for a total of 20-25 hours. In 2002 she became the volunteer manager of the Bureau Drawer Thrift Shop—a place she first visited as a child, when she would tag along with her grandmother, who was one of the founders.

The thrift shop receives approximately 200 bags of donations a week, which must be sorted by volunteers. Anything they cannot use they recycle. It is important to note that 100 percent of sales at the shop directly benefit Interfaith's programs. Last year they raised \$70,000. Lee helped create and implement a Career Closet program, which provides professional clothing to low-income job seekers.

When Lee is recruiting new volunteers, she explains that while they will be giving back, they also get much in return—including a second home, a second family and a place where you always feel welcome.

"Everybody is here for the same reason," says Lee. "I have met people who have become life-long friends."



Feeding a Need

Here are a few of Interfaith's 2015 statistics

- 17,621** Hungry individuals fed through the Pantry Shelf food program
- 361** Children who avoided homelessness thanks to the HomeSafe program
- 7,106** Households served by the Pantry Shelf
- 350+** Easter Baskets distributed to the children of food pantry clients
- 15,410** Boxes of food donated by local supermarkets and restaurants
- 855,674** Pounds of food distributed by Interfaith volunteers
- 733** Households served that had never been to a food pantry before
- 2,275** Counseling sessions provided to local residents who had no place else to turn
- 500+** Backpacks distributed to the children of food pantry clients
- 8,454** Bags of clothing donated to the Bureau Drawer Thrift Shop
- 391** Households that received budget counseling through the HomeSafe program
- 2586** Calls for assistance logged by the counseling center
- 3,537** Bags of food donated by local businesses, houses of worship, schools and individuals
- 37,703** Bags of food distributed to hungry South Shore residents
- 911** Individuals who received help from the HomeSafe financial assistance program
- 5,027** Hungry children served by the food pantry
- 150+** Outfits of professional clothing distributed to low-income job seekers
- 2,996** Visits with grieving families and suffering patients at BID-Milton Hospital
- 776** Households received Thanksgiving meal baskets
- 623** Children who received Christmas gifts
- 23,990** Hours donated by Interfaith volunteers
- 200+** Halloween costumes distributed to the children of food pantry clients
- 866** Community members who volunteered serving their neighbors in need

*HomeSafe is a financial assistance and homelessness prevention program that helps with things like budget counseling, financial assistance and overdue rent and utilities assistance.



Executive Director of Interfaith Social Services, Rick Doane, credits much of the organization's success to the tireless efforts of community volunteers.

The Business of Giving Back

Many local businesses on the South Shore have been big supporters of Interfaith, including Arbella Insurance. Founded in Quincy in 1988, Arbella is committed to giving back to the community they work and live in, which is why they created the Arbella Insurance Foundation. Beverly Tangvik, president of the Arbella Insurance Foundation, has been there since the beginning of their partnership with Interfaith Social Services and says that when employees volunteer during the workday (something that is encouraged by management and the company) they come back to their jobs happier and re-energized because they can see first-hand the positive impact they are making.

"We really believe in what they do and I'm really proud of what we've been able to accomplish," Tangvik says of their partnership. In 2013, to celebrate Arbella's 25th Anniversary, the company gave \$50,000 grants to 25 charities of which Interfaith Social Services was one. "It was one of the proudest moments of my life," Tangvik says of the generous gift to Interfaith, which helped fund much-needed building improvements. The passion of Arbella's CEO and president, John F. Donahue, and the executive team, all of whom volunteer at Interfaith, has helped boost volunteerism throughout the company.

October is the beginning of the busy season at Interfaith Social Services. With the holidays rapidly approaching, the team is planning for frozen turkeys and the transport of countless gifts. From the managers to the people packing grocery bags, their work is fueled by a desire to help their neighbors and a commitment to make the world a better place, one family at a time.





Each year, Interfaith Social Services distributes thousands of pounds of food to South Shore families in need.

Ways to Give Back

Donations of food, gently worn clothing and lightly used household goods can be dropped off Monday through Friday at the Interfaith Social Services offices in Quincy. Financial contributions are also appreciated and are used to help offset the cost of counseling services. In preparation for the busy holiday season, the organization also seeks "adoptive families" willing to donate Christmas gifts to children of families in need. 105 Adams Street, Quincy, at the intersection of Adams St. and Burgin Parkway, 617-773-6203, www.interfaithsocialservices.org

The 18th Annual Feed the Hungry Gala is Interfaith Social Services' biggest fundraiser of the year. Held at 6:30 p.m. on December 4 at Granite Links Golf Club in Quincy, this fun social event features carnival style games, live and silent auctions and entertainment. Chefs from top Boston area restaurants serve up mouthwatering treats and local wine and spirits distributors showcase their products. One of the featured auction items this year will be a private dinner for the winner and 10 friends, prepared by Chef Paul Wahlberg of Alma Nove in Hingham. 🍷