Pantry Program to Receive Overhaul

Did you know 25% of Bloomington residents are living at or below the poverty level and 10,465 residents received Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in 2015? Unsurprisingly, last year MCUM’s emergency food pantry received 17% more applications for basic needs assistance than in 2014. This year, MCUM has already seen an additional 14% increase in point-in-time applications compared to 2015.

To better meet the increasing demands, MCUM is about to begin a process to physically and programmatically convert its food pantry from a traditional model to client choice. “We believe this conversion will allow MCUM to feed 9% more people annually,” said MCUM’s Executive Director, Erin Predmore.

The pantry conversation process is two-fold: physical updates and programmatic updates. Facility renovations will remove several walls that sanction the pantry into a dark, maze-like, storage facility, creating a more open floor plan in the 1,700 square-foot pantry. The updates will maximize floor-to-ceiling shelving space for storage and build a room for clients to select groceries in a shopping-like fashion. The Jack Hopkins Social Services Funding Committee awarded MCUM with a grant to sponsor the bulk of the cost for this first step.

Programmatically, a shift to client choice will help MCUM support more Monroe County residents on their returns to self-sufficiency. The pantry’s current model of providing pre-bagged, identical sets of groceries to households certainly helps the agency feed people in need, but does not reflect the uniqueness of clients’ situations or needs as well as a client choice model would allow.

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Current Needs

Food Pantry
- Canned tuna
- Dry beans
- Canned meat
- Canned fruit
- Pudding

Cleaning Closet
- Diapers (sizes 4-6)
- Baby wash
- Baby lotion
- Baby powder
- Hair shampoo & conditioner
- Deodorant (men and women)
- Laundry soap
- All-purpose spray cleaner
- Dilutable cleaner
- Razors
- Socks
- Feminine hygiene products
- Body lotion
- Canvas grocery bags

Childcare
- Working new or used digital cameras
- Shoe box-sized plastic containers
- 15 quart containers

Opportunity House
- Paper and plastic bags
- Volunteers!

First Presbyterian Food Drive
MCUM extends a huge thank you to First Presbyterian Church! They hosted a food drive that helped to raise over 600 pounds of food, completely filling up MCUM’s truck! Their hard work and commitment to raising food will make an impact not only on our community as a whole, but on the lives of so many families in need. Thank you First Presbyterian Church, we appreciate all that you do!

Pictured Left: Jim Rusie, coordinator of the food drive.
Pictured Right: MCUM’s Anna Ropp loading MCUM’s truck to the gills with donations!

Keeping Families on Track
Recently, a family of five: mom, dad, two teenagers and their newborn baby sought assistance during a difficult time. Mom was still on maternity leave because the baby was only a few weeks old and dad lost his job around the same time the baby was born. They had applied for food stamps right away, but because the system moves so slowly, they had were told there may be a delay before they received them. When our caseworker provided them with their food, tears of joy rolled down mom’s cheeks as she expressed her amazement at the amount of food in the bags. The family also received diapers, bottles and other baby basics as well as items from MCUM’s hygiene and cleaning closet. After a few weeks, we received a phone call expressing the family’s gratitude for MCUM’s support. Mom was also happy to tell us dad was hired at Cook and the family was back on track!

With your generous donations, MCUM can support for families who otherwise would have no food to put on the table.

School’s Out for Summer!
Ever wondered why MCUM’s emergency services program is busiest during the summer? If you’re thinking it has something to do with schools being on break, you’re right...

This school year, 5,212 children in the county participated in the free or reduced meal program (often also including breakfast). That’s 40% of all Monroe County students. During the months school is not in session, parents and guardians are scrambling to keep their shelves almost 75% more stocked. Please consider hosting a special summer food drive to help our friends in need.

MCUM also gladly accepts paper grocery sacks for the food pantry. Paper bags hold more than plastic and stand up nicely. Please ask for paper when you shop and bring them to MCUM to reuse.
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In addition to changes to the physical pantry, converting to client choice will include training volunteers to interact with MCUM’s clients, updating staff roles so case workers can spend more time on case management and plans for clients, and, ultimately, creating a system where clients choose the food items they take home for their families.

While MCUM's clients all face unique circumstances, most have very little freedom to make choices when it comes to most areas of their lives: housing, transportation, clothing. Client choice pantries empower clients with flexibility and educate them on comparative and complementary shopping and budgeting techniques, which helps save their limited financial resources for other necessities, reduces food waste, and, most substantially, improves their self-efficacy. Spillover benefits associated with improved self-efficacy include an increased ability to save money, better health, and improved social reasoning abilities.

MCUM gained a volunteer coordinator in August 2015 in partnership with Indiana University's School of Public & Environmental Affairs (SPEA). Already, the addition of this position to MCUM's staff has increased outreach and volunteer recruitment capacity through Indiana University, Ivy Tech Community College, and the Bloomington Volunteer Network. The conversion from a traditional to client choice pantry would increase the importance of recruitment and retention, as the new model would increase pantry volunteer hours by 67%. However, rather than bagging or sorting groceries in a solitary environment, volunteers will escort clients through the selection of items. Survey data from multiple client choice pantry volunteers indicate the active, social, and involved volunteer experience is more personally rewarding, increasing the likelihood for volunteers continuing to serve the agency.

Although the recent increase in need for food assistance and drop in donors has kept pantries struggling to keep up with the demand, the client choice model allows pantries to accept a wider variety of products because clients select food from what is available. Several times in 2015, MCUM ran out of canned fruit, which is not surprising considering the pre-bagged requirements call for 13 cans of 6 different kinds for each family of 3 people. By not requiring identical criteria for each household, management of MCUM’s food pantry’s stock will be simpler and will increase MCUM’s ability to shop at the Hoosier Hills Food Bank, where dollars are stretched up farther than purchasing food items retail.

We are so excited to share this news and we hope you will join us this fall to tour the new pantry! The client choice model will ensure MCUM can feed as many hungry people as possible while focusing strategically on financial self-sufficiency for those who are ready for that level of support. Thank you to the Jack Hopkins Social Services Committee, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, and our generous individual donors for the support.

Interested in supporting this project!? You can donate online at www.mcum.org/donate

Cleaning Closet 101: Fast facts you should know!

• Hygiene items and cleaning supplies cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits/food stamps.
• The average human uses 399 sheets of toilet paper (about 1.5 rolls) per week.
• It is legal for an employer to turn a candidate down for hygiene-related reasons.
• In Monroe County, only 4 agencies distribute cleaning and hygiene products. MCUM is the only one to offer this service 5 days per week.
• Last year, MCUM gave 10,276 items to 5,136 people.
• We ALWAYS need donations for our closet!

Thank You!

This month, we would like to express our appreciation for...

• First Presbyterian Church for donating 617 pounds of food and coming for a tour of our facility.
• The YES Club at Tri-North Middle School for volunteering at MCUM last month.
• Student volunteers from the Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute (UIIF) for helping with various projects around the agency.
• Mary Therese Bonaguro, Sydney Clute, Alex Diaz, Meredith Gorman, & Kelsey Oehler for their help planning this year’s Spring Luncheon.
Did you know MCUM is one of few agencies in Monroe County that distributes hygiene items and cleaning products to households struggling with poverty? Did you know these items cannot be purchased with food stamps.

Imagine trying to obtain employment or just trying to maintain a sense of dignity without soap, toilet paper, or laundry detergent. Pretty hard! We are in desperate need of hygiene and cleaning products for our closet. Please help restore humility to our friends who are struggling by donating these types of items ASAP or text “gift” to 812-619-9919 to make a financial donation.

Save a tree!
Sign up to receive our new eNewsletter. Email kbroadfoot@mcum.org to make the switch!