

Mobile Food Pantry Meets Needs of Hungry Neighbors



The Bridge Mobile Food Pantry

“The Bridge” addresses a need in the Perham area

Picture yourself as a resident of a small Minnesota town that is too small to support a food shelf. If you needed emergency food assistance for your family, where would you go? Could you afford to drive to a nearby town? What if you didn't have access to a car or couldn't drive? What if the food shelf was only open while you were at work? This service gap exists for many food insecure Minnesotans, especially those that have mobility challenges. An aging population and the rising cost of fuel make the problem even more acute. The Bridge Food Pantry in Perham, MN identified similar needs in their own service area. They noticed that roughly 50 percent of the people they served lived outside of Perham, making it challenging for some clients to make it to the food pantry during hours of operation, and for others to make the journey at all.

In 2016, The Bridge Food Pantry received a \$49,000 grant from Hunger Solutions Minnesota to develop a Mobile Food Pantry. They chose to purchase and modify a hydraulic-equipped trailer called an ice castle, which can be lowered to within 8 inches from the ground. This feature, combined with ramps and extra-wide doors, make the mobile food pantry fully accessible to people using wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

Mobile Pantry Yields Early Success

The Bridge Mobile Food Pantry officially launched on Jan. 3, 2017. It makes monthly stops in four communities: Richville, Ottertail, Vergas and Dent. Four volunteers staff the mobile pantry at each site. Over the months of June and July, the Bridge served 26 families on 44 visits. According to John Leikness, The Bridge's Executive Director, 17 of these families were first-time clients. He expects this

number to increase as people become more aware of the mobile pantry. “PartnerSHIP 4 Health was instrumental in helping us get launched as quickly as we did,” said Leikness. “The partnership has been very beneficial to us.”

As part of an ongoing relationship with The Bridge, PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), the local Statewide Health Improvement Partnership lead, provided funding for an organizational system that makes it easy to fill the trailer with food, allows clients to view and select available items, and ensures that everything stays secure during transport. The mobile pantry is required to be filled with the same selection of foods that clients can find at The Bridge in Perham, so a system that makes the best use of available space in the trailer is vital.

The Bridge Mobile Pantry is a good reminder that flexibility and accessibility are the keys to addressing community health challenges.



PS4H provided funding to outfit the trailer.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Janet Lindberg
PartnerSHIP 4 Health
218-998-8334
jlindber@co.ottertail.mn.us

John Leikness
Executive Director
The Bridge Food Pantry
218-346-6181

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