



# FISH Hospitality Pantries Press

## Volunteering and the Power of Mercy

Early on pantry mornings, when volunteers begin to gather at our Northwest Knoxville location, you cannot help but notice their diversity. This diversity is a striking feature of FISH Hospitality Pantries.

Like our guests, our volunteers come from near and far, their faces reflecting those of our guests. They come from all over Knoxville; they are Black and White and Latino; they are Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and Baha'i; they speak with the accents of their homelands in Central America, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and East Tennessee.

And as you see them walk in, with a purpose and focus reminiscent of folks arriving for weekly worship, you may wonder: Why do they come here?

- **Some come from churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples, living out their faith in the world.**
- **Some come from our pantry lines, inspired by the welcome they received and wanting to be a part of that.**
- **Some come from organizations and associations, out of a spirit of volunteerism.**
- **Some come from schools or church youth groups to fulfill service hours.**
- **All find something together that is needed and lifts their spirits.**

**One thing all of us at FISH have experienced is the giving and receiving that occurs between pantry guests and volunteers.**



**Brooks Eggers** first came to volunteer with members of her church, Erin Presbyterian, two and a half years ago. She always has a smile on her face as she goes about her work outside the FISH Northwest Pantry, coordinating the volunteers who offer produce to guests. The pantry is her happy place, Brooks says. "I'm happy wherever I am, but I am happiest here. We are a family."

*Brooks Eggers says, "I am happy wherever I am, but I am happiest here. We are a family."*

**Keziah Roscoe**, who works on the produce line, has only been volunteering for a few months but says she is here to stay. Keziah came to volunteer with her mother, after a friend, Rosemond Leonard, longtime Northwest volunteer, told them about the pantry. "You can't get my mother away from here now!" she says.

**Tan Nguyen**, who arrived from Vietnam seven years ago, has been volunteering at the East Pantry for five years. A pediatrician for 25 years, Tan does not have a U.S. medical license and so is unable to work at a hospital here. "I really miss when I am living at the hospital, the same as my home," he says. Still, he is happy to be here, adding,

"I love America. It is better here—education, health care. And in America, freedom. We don't have [freedom] in my country." And his happiness extends to volunteering: "I am happy here. I can help poor people. Last week, I became American citizen. I want to do a job as American." He hopes in the future to get a work license, perhaps in radiology. He says he would like to volunteer at a medical center. But for the time being, Tan has found a way to care for people here.

**Ted Mohundro**, the South Pantry Coordinator, who has been volunteering for eight years, expresses his commitment to his work at the pantry like this: "We are all the same...and we can show compassion for each and every one...this is my calling. Everybody has a gift. Everyone! This is my gift, and I'm sharing it with everyone else."

These are only a few of the many volunteers who have something to tell you about their work at FISH Hospitality Pantries, who come

back week after week, year after year. What calls to them? What keeps them here?

We have all heard that it is better to give than to receive. But what if we can do both simultaneously? **One thing all of us at FISH have experienced is the giving and receiving that occurs between pantry guests and volunteers.**

Garrison Keillor, former NPR radio host of *A Prairie Home Companion*, once described something similar regarding hospice ministry, saying, "It is like breathing, when you are inhaling and exhaling at the same time." That is our continuing collective experience at Hospitality Pantries.

In *Gracias*, theologian Henri Nouwen, reflecting on his ministry to the poor and marginalized in Peru, put it this way: "Often I have gone to such people to bring them back to God . . . but that is acting and living as if God is where I am, and as if my first task is to bring others to my place. When, however, God is with the poor and marginal, then I have to dare to go there, live there, and find Him there." By being present to the hurting poor, you connect with God, and his mercy, yourself. That is what comes of giving and receiving.

Before we open the pantry doors, we tell our volunteers that the story our guests go away with is the way we respond to their needs. And our guests' gift to them is to help them to become more of who they were called to be.

In this issue of *FISH Hospitality Pantries Press*, we want to show you how this looks in practice. Our volunteers have shared in their own words why they keep coming back and what that experience has been like for them.

**Beth Carroll Hunley**,  
*Director of Development and Community Programs*

## Volunteer Stories We've Been Told

### Barbara Jackson

**Barbara Jackson, a member of Rogers Memorial Baptist Church, along with her husband Fred, who serves as a coordinator at the Northwest Pantry, greets our guests as they arrive at the pantry.**

In 2019, Fred and I were looking for a volunteer opportunity that we could do together. Judy McLendon encouraged us to consider volunteering at FISH Hospitality Pantries on Scott Avenue in Northwest Knoxville.

What started as a volunteer opportunity became the mission that God has for me- to serve the community. I've had the opportunity to serve at different food stations at the pantry. I have been known as the "Sweet Lady", the "Bread Lady" and now as the greeter at the door I have become "Barbara." I love greeting our guests with a smile and a warm and friendly "Good morning, Sir"; "Good morning, Ma'am". How I greet the guests is so very important, for I know that their brief time with me could set the tone for their day.

I have had so many Hallelujah moments at the pantry. One guest, who for months did not respond to my "Good morning, Sir", said "Good morning, Barbara. My name is David." Hallelujah!!! I have made true friendships and am richly blessed.

A little fun fact about me: During the pandemic, I took a training class at the pantry and became a licensed forklift driver.

I was looking for a volunteer opportunity, but God gave me a mission!

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:16) NIV

*-Barbara Jackson*

### Lidia Torres

**Longtime volunteer Lidia Torres has been a strong and welcoming presence in the front room of our FISH Northwest pantry over the years. She has contributed in many ways by providing translations for our Spanish speaking guests, and by her dedicated preparation of the children's BOOST bags for all of our neighborhood pantries.**

All my family had left Cuba, but I stayed behind because I took care of my father. He was elderly and had Alzheimer's. After he passed away, I had no other family. Everyone was in the US. I wanted to be near my only son and my three grandsons.

I had visited the United States seven times to visit my son and his family. In 2012, I convinced my husband to travel with me, and we chose to stay in the US. We knew that we would never be able to return to Cuba. I was 63 years old.

Living in Knoxville has been the most beautiful experience in my life. I am with my family, I have my own home, and a lot of help is provided in the community like the FISH Food Pantry and other social services. I never saw anything like that in Cuba.

My dream is to live long enough to have a great-grandchild.

My aspiration for my grandchildren is for their path to be clear and open so they can have a career and accomplish their dreams.

*-Lidia Torres*

### Maria Feier

**Maria Feier and her husband, Grigore, are the parents of ten children. Over the years, several of the children have joined Maria as she volunteered.**

I came from Romania in 1991 with my five sisters, my brother, and my mom and dad. As a Christian family in Romania, there were severe restraints placed on our family by the communist regime. After my father bought wheat and corn to make flour during Christmas, he was arrested and put in jail for three days. The flour he had worked to make for us was seized by the police.

My mother said if our family could not live a normal life, then we should leave. That was the start of our plan, but it took seven years before the government allowed us to leave the country.

When we arrived in Chicago, it was a little hard because we didn't have a place to live. But then we met other people from Romania, and they helped us find a place to live. In December, Mom and Dad came here to Knoxville to visit other Romanian friends, and Dad said, "Oh, it is nice here in Knoxville; how about we move to Knoxville?" So, we did. We liked the mountains. It was hard for about three months until we found jobs, but when we started working, we got pretty good in our life.

Later I met my husband here, and I got married in '93. We had a nice life until a terrible accident happened in 2003, and my husband, a long-distance truck driver, got into a big wreck. At first, nobody believed he was going to survive because he was hurt so badly. When he got out of the hospital, we didn't have money to pay for the house and for a period of time, we had nothing, and we depended on my sisters and my brother. Some people told me about the FISH Pantry, and it was a blessing.

A year later, I asked Lissy [a former coordinator] if I could become a helper at the pantry, and it was nice being with people. Once I started working, I still kept volunteering because it was a pleasure to me to people like people helped me.

*-Maria Feier*

## Doing A Few Things Very Well

The CEO of Apple Computer was once asked how the company continues to be so successful. He responded that Apple tries to do just a few things, and to do them very well.

I believe that FISH Hospitality Pantries also tries to do a few things very well.

One thing I think our organization does well is to create a community where people marginalized by our society are able to experience nonjudgmental welcome, compassion, and safety. Our pantries provide nutritious food, but they also are also places where people of many different backgrounds transcend their differences. Acting on our shared values, we model a challenge to the polarization we all experience in the world.



*Next Step Ministry Youth sort food products at FISH Warehouse Annex.*

Another thing I think we do well is to create supportive programs that respond to the aspirations of our guests and volunteers to grow in wisdom and courage to better deal with life's issues. Our tradition of intentionally listening to the struggles and goals of our volunteers and our guests has guided us in the creation of such programs as You Teach Me/I Teach You (our language and culture exchange class), Mosaic (a seminar on undoing racism), and the Women's Community School (a class in which diverse pantry leaders and supporters learn the power of working together across dividing lines for the common good).

Something else we do well is attracting dedicated volunteers and donors whenever we commit to new projects requiring additional volunteers and funds. From our beginnings we saw that whenever we asked the public for support it came quickly. Our success at obtaining funding for many projects over the years, including our pantry/food warehouse building at 122 W. Scott Avenue, the parking lot across the street, the 1200 sq ft freezer, the pavilion, the upstairs mezzanine renovations, and the new 236 W. Scott Ave. food warehouse annex project



*The new 236 W. Scott Ave. food warehouse annex project has confirmed our belief that our supporters will respond generously when we need them.*

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We remain grateful for our diverse pool of volunteers and for our guests, all who come offering their own insights and history and who share our concern for the wellbeing of all. Standing together in solidarity, we become increasingly like family. Without our realizing it, the margins disappear and become power to move the world. **People are transformed when they experience examples and models of life as it should be.**

Many people who do justice work tend to say that food relief pantries are only treating symptoms, are only a band-aid, and do not address root causes of poverty and hunger. **I understood from the very beginning in 1986 that to be non-judgmental in sharing food was a revolutionary act that challenges the unjust status quo.** Exploring the implications of this welcoming, compassionate hospitality more deeply is what has kept the work interesting to me all these years and is probably the most important thing we do.

**Jim Wright,**

*Director of FISH Hospitality Pantries*



## Dream, Dream, Dream

*"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."* - W.H. Murray, inspired by Goethe

We are known for being dreamers at FISH Hospitality Pantries. **We first dreamed of non-judgmental food pantries to be located in neighborhoods accessible to those in need.** In 1986, this became a reality, and our dreaming expanded to **include two more neighborhood pantries.** **Further dreams came to fruition when we built our Northwest Pantry/Food Warehouse and, over the years, additions like the pavilion to protect our guests from extreme weather, the renovation of our balcony for additional programs and storage space, and our community programs that respond to the needs of our guests and volunteers and highlight **the positive benefits of diversity in our community,** just to name a few.**



*Women's Community School participants create programs that provide opportunities for people from many different backgrounds to transcend their differences and build community.*

In *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare teaches us that we can make our dreams become a reality if we act on them, reminding us that we are "such stuff as dreams are made on," but warning us that time, ever elusive, will inevitably slip away.

In last summer's publication of FISH Hospitality Pantries Press, we described the latest dream of FISH Hospitality Pantries Director, Jim Wright: to build a 5,000 square foot warehouse annex on land we purchased a block from our Northwest FISH Hospitality Pantry.

Since our warehouse was already overflowing with many good things to eat for our large family of pantry guests, we needed additional space. We were becoming reluctant to explore potential food contributions because of space limitations.

Already, we had been renting offsite space to house the 50 to 70 pallets of canned food which would not fit into our warehouse. However, the rental space did not allow us to house perishable foods which are necessary for optimal nutrition of our guests.

So, we began to dream up a solution and committed to raising the funds needed to build another warehouse. And with the great support of our generous supporters, once again our dream came true.

The building was completed in April, and already is storing eighty pallets of all kinds of food, including canned meat, fish, vegetables and fruit, as well as packaged pasta, rice, beans, and cereals. **Groups of volunteers are hard at work at the new building, sorting the nutritious food items with which our guests will fill their bags.**

And as W.H. Murray said, "The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred." Not only did we receive the land for our new building, but we were offered the opportunity to purchase a church building and its lot right next door. We plan to renovate the building and to repurpose it for meetings and community program events. It will also be the home of **our newest community program, Tapestry.**

**Tapestry connects the suffering of the poor with the suffering of the Earth, recognizing that the poor are most affected by the ravages of pollution and climate change.**

As part of Tapestry, we had originally planned to plant our community garden using sustainable practices on this land, but when the recent soil test report came back, we learned that the soil analysis did not support the development of healthy vegetation. Therefore, we are searching for some additional space for our garden. We plan to begin community conversations and activities illustrating the connection between the health of the land and the health of humans and other species. We will explore ideas of how we can reduce the devastation of the land which especially affects low-income neighborhoods. Additionally, we will hold seminars about sustainability and care of our environment, and we will use art, music, and drama to envision a sustainable future for our Earth.

In the meantime, our dreams continue through our other community programs, which all share our goal of contributing to the common good.

**Our You Teach Me/I Teach You** summer class will begin soon. This language and culture exchange program will continue to help us connect in a deeper way with the immigrant community, to help them live their dreams as participating members in their new country. We plan to conduct a YTM/ITY class with English-speaking KPD officers and Spanish-speaking members of the community in hopes of strengthening relationships between the

Latino community and officers. This idea arose from a request from KPD officers during a listening session by Alliance for Community Transformation East Tennessee (ACTET), the broad-based, multi-issue, interfaith community organization founded in 2016 by FISH Hospitality Pantries to work for the common good.

Our initial community program, **The Women's Community School**, composed of a spirited mix of women from diverse religious traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and economic circumstances, remains the backbone of our programs. Founded in 2008 with an initial goal of leadership development, over the years the School has become a strategy team for initiating new community programs based on the needs of guests.

**Finally, our children's BOOST program is helping fulfill our dream for all children to have the nutrition and food they need to thrive and reach their full potential.** Through this program, we strive to provide children whose families visit our pantries with the most nutritious food to help them develop their brains and bodies. We are always thinking about how to improve the nutrition in the bags with additional kid-friendly whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. This year we are increasing the vegetable items in the kids' bags, and lately, we have been introducing some new items with taste tests at our neighborhood pantries.



*Emma Ellis-Cosigua, Northwest Pantry Coordinator greets young guest as Lidia Torres gives the youngsters their BOOST bags.*

Recently, on a Tuesday at the Northwest FISH Pantry, I was talking with folks about their commitment to volunteering at FISH, when I approached Hildegard Kalcevic, a volunteer for 12 years, who was working outside on the line offering varieties of bread, buns, and bagels to our guests. Hildegard lives for six months each year in the U.S., and six months in her home country of Germany. On this day, she had been working with David, a young student from St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Texas and the Next Step Ministry. She was telling him about St. Hildegard of Bingen, the famous saint for whom she was named, a German abbess and poet, who called God the “unique master craftsman,”

and who spoke of the important role of the human, perfectly created by God, as a “workman,” responsible for working in and shaping the world.

In reminiscing about her time volunteering at our pantries, Hildegard mentioned that her daughter, visiting next week, would surely want to accompany her mother to the pantry. “She will say, how we say in German: ‘It earths me,’ meaning it connects me to the soil, the ground.”

Grounding means putting us in touch with what is most important in life—in a sense, reminding us of who we really are. **When we stay connected with our values as we dream up plans for our work at the pantry, we go forward in our work for the common good.**

My conversation with Hildegard reminds me of a musical refrain I heard once at a gathering of peace workers. It went, “Keep your head in the clouds, and your feet on the ground, and dance your dreams awake.” The refrain continued over and over again as the participants walked, kind of dancing, together. The refrain is reminiscent of some powerful words of Theodore Roosevelt back in the early 1900s, when he said, “Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.” Which, of course, is wise advice to all of us for making and keeping our dreams alive.

For we are not alone in our dreaming at FISH Hospitality Pantries; it is important for everyone to follow their dreams, to remember that often, success begins with the following of a dream—and that the world knows that, embraces it, and sings of it.

I am remembering just two of the many songs that call to mind the importance of dreaming: “All I Have to Do is Dream” (popularized by the Everly Brothers) which my friends and I would harmonize with during our teen years and which introduced to us the concept that dreaming could make things happen; and our high school class song, “Climb Ev’ry Mountain,” from *The Sound of Music*, which encouraged us to “ford every stream, follow every rainbow until you find your dream . . . every day of your life, for as long as you live.”

But perhaps the most powerful words about dreaming come from Civil Rights Leader, Martin Luther King, who inspired us all with his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, in Washington D.C., as he spoke to a crowd of 200,000, a cross section of black, white, rich, and poor Americans. As Dr. King said that day, “. . . even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.” His call for justice and liberty for all resonates so strongly with the values we hold at FISH Hospitality Pantries and the hope we believe in and underscores our own dreams.

**So, we continue our work, and the dream goes on.**

**Beth Carroll Hunley,**

*Director of Development and Community Programs*

## Learning from Our Volunteers - Why They Come and Why They Stay

*"I have a family here . . . And I don't mean just the volunteers, I mean the guests as well . . . After fourteen years I'm used to the people, I'm used to the faces, I'm used to the stories, I'm praying for the people that need the prayers . . . I pray for them like I would for my own family . . . It's a family. This is a family."*

*--Shyrl Plum, volunteer for 14 years*

Over the years, many people have come through the doors of the FISH Hospitality Pantries to volunteer their time and talents. There are many ways for volunteers to serve: greeting guests, preparing food displays, and working on the line offering choices of food; repackaging bulk food items, stocking shelves, and operating our manual and electric pallet jacks in the warehouse; and driving our U-Haul-style trucks to pick up local food donations and to deliver food from our warehouses to our other pantry locations. It takes many people and a variety of tasks to ensure the smooth operation of our pantries.



*David Walker and Fred Williams prepare volunteers for the day at the Pre-opening Morning Meeting.*

### Why They Come

**Many of our volunteers come to us from nonprofit organizations and businesses, college fraternities and sororities, local school and church groups, and even youth mission groups from all over the eastern half of the U.S.** Many people in search of a way to make a difference come on their own to volunteer at our pantries too--those who are seeking a new volunteer experience, newly retired folks who are looking for something meaningful to occupy their time, middle and high school kids needing school service hours, and donors who come to see with their own eyes the good work their money is helping to achieve.

**Since our first neighborhood pantry opened in 1986, we have benefited from the good work of more than 10,000 different volunteers.** Some of these people volunteered once, some for a brief time, but many came and have stayed for years. In fact, one dedicated volunteer, David Lovett, joined us at the very beginning, and never left!

**On any given week, it takes a huge communal effort to help ensure that the more than 1,100 families (on average, 3,600 people, 25% of them children) who visit our pantries receive the food assistance they need.** Each week, we welcome 25 volunteers at our East Knoxville pantry, 40 at our South Knoxville pantry, and 60 at our Northwest Pantry and warehouses on Scott Avenue.

**We think it is noteworthy that one-third of our volunteers once were guests who came for food.**

Often these people tell us that it was the way they were treated--with respect, welcome, and kindness--that led them to want to come back to volunteer. Director Jim Wright tells new volunteers, "We want the way our guests are treated to be as nurturing as the food they receive." Indeed, this initial treatment of our guests, which is deeply rooted in our hospitality values, and which preserves the dignity of every person who comes through our pantry lines, leads to many returning later in a volunteer capacity

So, we know why many of our guests return to volunteer--but why do they stay? And what of the other two-thirds of our volunteer pool--out of all the many opportunities to volunteer in our community, what is it about FISH Hospitality Pantries that keeps them coming back? What is it that volunteering in our pantries has taught them about others or themselves? What life lessons have they gleaned from their time as volunteers at our pantries?

We asked just a small selection of our wonderful volunteers two important questions to arrive at some of these answers. They had a lot to say, and plenty of wisdom and experience to share.

### What They Learned

*"Absolutely to make a connection with the people. I've tried to learn names and relate to them that way. You ask about them, make it all about the people who come in. And I think that's probably the most important thing. When I first started, I thought in my head that I would come and bless all these people who came in, and the very first day I realized that's not how it works. I'm the one who's blessed. I'm the one who's blessed! I feel like I'm doing right now what I was put on this earth to do."*

*--Pat Farley, volunteer for 12 years*



Church group volunteers

*"The scripture that says 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'...that scripture came to life for me when I came to the pantry. I'm still learning, I'm still growing, I'm still becoming the person that I feel like God wants me to be. And the compassion...when the people come through, that gives me a gift every time I come. It gives me that inner peace I think that God wants us all to have."*

-Kathy Weston, volunteer for 17 years

*"People are just like us. They ARE us . . . they're God in them and in us."*

-Gail Kenney, volunteer for 17 years

*"That I too could be like our guests . . . I'm blessed to have the different foods that I want . . . my situation could change, and I could become a guest instead of a volunteer."*

-Natasha Caldwell, volunteer for five years.

*"Diversity . . . I like it too, that it's a no-judgment zone. You don't know what someone's going through."*

-Nadelle Gier, volunteer for six years

*"It's really shown me the importance of communication, not only between the servers and the people coming through the line, but also in the back, making sure everything's organized, everything's running smoothly. It's just placed that on a higher priority than I had thought that was before."*

-Bert Everitt, volunteer for two months

*"I'm a former teacher and I've been involved in a lot of food drives and competitions between classes . . . and now that I am on the other side of it [as a volunteer], and seeing those canned goods come in, I know how important those food drives really are. They really make a difference."*

-Anne Harvey, volunteer for four years

*"I think it is being amazed at the people who line up in the heat, in the rain, in the cold that really impresses upon me how much they really need this."*

-Marlys Staudt, volunteer for four years

*"Value the food you have."*

-Lincoln Toomey, new volunteer.

*"To curb my judgment, no doubt about it. To be accepting and loving to everyone regardless of anything. To understand that everybody's special, nobody's special, you can't judge people because you never see the whole picture . . . Learning to not be judgmental. I was a lot more judgmental before I started here."*

-Shyrl Plum, volunteer for 14 years

### Why They Stay

*"Oh, the people. I love being around the people. You got all walks of life that come through here. It makes my day. I love it. I love the people that I'm volunteering with...it just keeps me going."*

-Frankie Summeour, volunteer for five years

*"Suspending judgment. I love to be here because of that. The way in which we treat the guests and the intentionality of diversity. I love it, and I value it."*

-Emma Ellis-Cosigua, volunteer for 11 years

*"What started as a volunteer opportunity became the mission that God has for me—to serve the community...How I greet the guests is so very important, for I know that their brief time with me could set the tone for their day."*

-Barbara Jackson, volunteer for nine years

*"It gives me strength to see how people appreciate the food. It gives me strength. When I'm down and out, they build me back up."*

-Josephine Bonner, volunteer for 30 years

*"It's the volunteers who are here consistently. They have befriended me, and they have become my closest friends. When I was out sick, they were messaging me: 'Are you okay? Do you need anything?' So, it's the people I work with that keep me coming back."*

-Julie Pearson, volunteer for one year



Three generations of the Sanders Family grant the Birthday wish of Micah, the youngest family member by volunteering together at the FISH Northwest Hospitality Pantry.

## A Visit to the South Pantry

A sunny Friday in June is a perfect day to visit the FISH Hospitality South Pantry to talk with volunteers about what draws them to this ministry and what keeps them engaged.

**The South Pantry sits in a lush setting in Vestal on the premises of the Sustainable Future Center,** a nonprofit organization engaged in environmental sustainability and permaculture. Housed in the Vestal United Methodist Church for more than 20 years, the pantry moved when the church building was undergoing renovations. David Bolt, Director of the Sustainable Future Center, opened their doors to the pantry, and in the midst of gardens and fruit trees, it has thrived.

**A trio of women are outside the South Pantry building, offering to-go lunches for guests.** A chicken, rice, and vegetable casserole with a roll, watermelon slices, an assortment of pastries, and water are on the menu. Manning the station are South Pantry volunteers Julia Weissinger, Cicely Neel, and Vicki Patton, who began offering the take-out lunches to pantry guests two Aprils ago. The women have dubbed themselves the SoKno GOATS which stands, not for “Greatest of All Time,” Julia explains jokingly, but for “Giving Ourselves Away Through Service,” an opportunity that the pantry affords them that for which they are grateful.

**Inside the pantry, there is bustling activity. Stations feature a variety of foods for guests to select from to fill their bags,** and there is the usual mix of folks of many religions and backgrounds overseeing the stations. This volunteer pool includes many retired teachers, perhaps due to the recruiting ability of the former Friday pantry coordinator, Bob Huff, a long-time principal at Mount Olive School.

**When guests enter, they are likely to be greeted by retired teacher Pat Farley, a South Pantry volunteer for twelve years.** Pat taught school for 40 years and then worked as a substitute teacher for nine more. Pat informed former longtime South Pantry Coordinator Bob Huff of her retirement after church one Sunday at Lake Forest Presbyterian, where both are members, saying “I did it!” Laughing, Pat recalls Bob’s response: “Well, be at the Pantry on Friday!” As encouraged, Pat Farley showed up to volunteer, and has been here ever since.

Another volunteer, Karen Talley, a recent retiree, taught for 24 years, mostly at Dogwood Elementary School. Like Pat and Bob, Karen attends Lake Forest. After church services, her late husband often said, “Next week, I think I am going to go to the pantry and help Bob Huff.” His health never permitted him to go, so Karen volunteers in his memory. So far, she has only volunteered twice, but she says, “I love it,” and speaks of the kindness of all the volunteers and the people coming in.



*Pat Farley greets young guests at South Pantry, as it bustles with activity each Wednesday and Friday.*

Anne Harvey, another retired teacher and a staff member of the Sustainable Future Center, volunteers weekly. Today, Anne is sorting canned goods. As a teacher, she oversaw many canned food drives and school competitions. Now she gets to share the fruits of those donations with people in need of food assistance.

**The South Pantry, established in 1991, was the third neighborhood pantry Jim Wright founded,** and it has continued as a stalwart presence in the community, a welcoming place for folks on the south side of Knoxville in need of food assistance for their families. Like all the other neighborhood pantries, this one has enjoyed the contributions of long-term volunteers who have been part of the working success of the pantry.

**But there are some newer volunteers like Lincoln, who will be a senior in high school this fall.** Lincoln’s grandfather, who does “church work,” encouraged him to spend some time at the South Pantry. It is only Lincoln’s third time here, but he intends to continue and has even convinced his younger sister to try out volunteering. When asked about something important he has learned from volunteering so far, Lincoln mentioned that he has learned from the guests, who he says “have an amazing attitude toward life.” This has taught him that “materialistic things” are not the only things that matter.

**On one side of the large room, a man named Richard enjoys a hot lunch courtesy of South Pantry Coordinator Ted Mohundro, who often cooks a meal for the homeless guests who stop by the pantry.** Today’s menu includes Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, gravy and biscuits. Richard attests to the tastiness of the fare, and to the compassionate treatment he has received here. “It’s



a blessing,” he says. “They fed me; they have clothed me. I know the good Lord is flying around in here, looking over His children, and He loves us all. They just do a great job [at all the pantries] . . . each and every one.” He particularly is happy that children are being cared for and have the food they need.

**At the other end of the line, Lauren Mohundro is sorting produce.** Lauren has been volunteering almost as long as her husband Ted, who has been the South Pantry coordinator for eight years. Part of Lauren’s time is spent in the garden on the side of the building. This year, she says, she is keeping it simple: “I planted green and gold peppers and a lot of onions and Roma tomato plants so that we would have an abundance here [at the pantry.]” She also stresses her commitment to volunteering and says that she especially appreciates how the pantry helps the younger, college-aged volunteers, who have not been aware of the scope of the issue of hunger, to “put things in perspective. It really enlightens multiple generations of people.” Reflecting on what she calls “the spirit of giving,” **Lauren adds that giving is “a double blessing, because you’re blessing somebody else, but you’re being blessed as well.”**

Anne Harvey also cultivates a garden plot along with some of the other volunteers and guests, though the heat this summer has not been a friend to gardeners. Fortunately, the Sustainable Future Center has been able to maintain hydration for the center gardens with their potable rain harvesting system.

**Lauren adds that giving is “a double blessing, because you’re blessing somebody else, but you’re being blessed as well.”**

**At the pantry’s closing, members of the takeout crew reflect on their ministry of serving weekly meals to pantry guests.** Vicki says that the dishes that Julia cooks each week illustrate what can be done with the foods that are available to guests, since the ingredients come from the store of pantry stock. Cicely says working at the pantry “has been very rewarding,” and helps her to become more outgoing, adding, “Helping people helps me.” Vicki adds, “I enjoy seeing all the people,” but says she especially loves interacting with the children who come to the pantry.

It has been another productive and rewarding day at the pantry for the SoKno GOATS team. On this particular Friday, these dedicated ladies surpassed their original goal of 100 lunches. “Today,” says Julia, “we gave out 172.”



Julia Weissinger and her SoKno OATS Team, Vicki Patton, and Cicely Neel, offer To Go Lunches for South FISH Pantry Guests.

## Volunteers Make It Work



East FISH Pantry Volunteers Welcome Guests



Catholic Heart Work Camp



Les Hargrove and Tan Nguyen: Two East Pantry Volunteers who are also doctors, confer about products for the line.

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Some of our most committed volunteers are students. We are inspired by their concern for the well being of all.

*"The people. They're glad we're here, and they thank you, they say 'Thank you so much, this helps us.' And I say, 'Well, you know, it helps me too.' It does! It helps the volunteers."*

-Carolyn Gamble, volunteer for 17 years

*"I just felt a calling. It's something I feel I need to do for my community...the people are awesome; it's like a big family, you share your hurts and your joys and they listen with prayer...We try to treat people with dignity."*

-David Eggers, volunteer for two years

*"This is only my second time of volunteering, but I love it because I feel useful . . . it's a blessing for me. What keeps me here is the people. The people here are so kind, the workers and those who come in...Getting to meet people that I wouldn't normally meet."*

-Karen Talley, new volunteer

*"I look forward to every Thursday to come here...big smiles, you can meet friends here."*

-Betty Thompson, volunteer for 12 years

*"Seeing the kids come in and being able to get them things and watch them interact with everyone."*

-Vicki Patton, volunteer for two years

*"I work with FISH, and I also work with homeless people, and basically, it's the good feeling I get from doing that. I get a lot of satisfaction from it, I meet a lot of nice people, and I learn a lot."*

-T.J. Blasing, volunteer for 35 years

*"I love the community. I love talking to people. I enjoy the smiling faces."*

-TeeTee Farris, volunteer for 15 years

*"It is so fulfilling. We meet people from all different walks of life, from the very destitute, to families that are struggling, grandparents raising grandkids . . . and everybody that comes through is so grateful and appreciative and they thank us for being here and it just is a wonderful feeling."*

-Lauren Mohundro, volunteer for six years

*"I like coming here, seeing faces that I've seen before stay able to feed themselves. As long as they're staying healthy and eating, that makes me feel happy. Occasionally they'll be like, 'I don't know how to cook this thing that you have on the table,' and I'll be like, 'I've cooked it like this, or I've heard other people cook it like that,' and they'll come back and tell me what recipe they used, and I'll be like, 'YES! That works!'"*

-Cicely Neel, volunteer for one year

*"The people. I'm a people person. The volunteers... and I've got friends now in the line."*

-Karen Handy, volunteer for three months

*"We are commanded to read the hungry...I find a lot of joy here. When you are blessed with skills and talents, you are supposed to use them."*

-Julia Weissinger, volunteer for two years

*"You form friendships with different people, and you look forward to seeing them."*

-Judy Mclendon, volunteer for 10 years

*"The fellowship, all different colors and nationalities and races are here and I feel I can come here and do my volunteering . . . and everybody loves everybody. And it comes from the heart! Everyone at one time or another is going to need help. We are all children of God."*

-Fred Jackson, volunteer for nine years

FISH Hospitality Pantries values every volunteer. They each bring their own unique experience, wisdom, and spirit to our table. We thank them for sharing their time and talents with us and with our guests, and for their continuing hard work to make sure that no one in Knoxville goes hungry.

**Anne Trisler,**

*Hospitality Pantries Press, Co-editor*



The FISH truck arrives early each morning, and volunteers like Josephine Bonner, 25-year volunteer, are always happy for the wholesome food for their guests.

## Our Donors Make It All Possible

At FISH Hospitality Pantries, we know that the ongoing work of responding to poverty and hunger in Knoxville is a community effort. It would be impossible to provide food relief to those most in need without the help and dedication of the many individuals, businesses, religious communities, school groups, and foundations that donate their financial support and time throughout the year. We acknowledge and thank all who have raised funds and collected food for our pantries through work or school. And we are so grateful to the following foundations for their generous awards:

**Arby's Foundation**  
**Boyd Foundation**  
**Gene & Florence Monday Foundation**  
**Family Foundation**  
**The Jane L. Pettway Foundation**  
**Variety Foundation of Eastern Tennessee**  
**Y-12 FCU Gives Foundation**

This year our Christmas Gift Card project once again provided tremendous support, and we appreciate everyone who made this project such a success! We are also grateful to All Saints Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, and Gloria Dei Lutheran Church for the wonderful variety of gifts they provided for the children who visit our pantries.

When we write grant proposals, we try hard to describe what it feels like to be at the pantry and to observe the beautiful giving and receiving between our volunteers and guests. But we find that the advice "show them, don't tell them," works best, and we are always delighted when donors visit our pantries to see for themselves the good work we are doing with their support.

Indeed, much of the impetus for the generous contributions we receive is that many of our donors have visited and even volunteered at our pantries. These donors say that witnessing and participating in pantry operations and relationships has kept them engaged in our work and reinforces their desire to support us.

### **Donor Sees Children's BOOST Program First Hand**

Carol Fusco, Executive Director of the Variety Foundation (longtime funders of our Children's BOOST Bag project), recently volunteered at our East FISH Neighborhood pantry to distribute BOOST bags. Carol brought along sixteen-year-old Scarlett Song, daughter of an executive from Regal, the parent company of Variety.

Ms. Fusco and her young friend volunteered on a Wednesday, which fell on Juneteenth, the federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. In addition to a parade on Martin Luther King Boulevard, there were multiple



*Scarlett Song and Variety Executive Director Carol Fusco*

celebratory activities at Dr. Walter Hardy Park nearby. The East Pantry volunteers chose to participate in the celebration of emancipation in this predominately Black neighborhood by keeping the pantry open on that special day to ensure food for anyone in the community who needed it.

Ms. Fusco and Scarlett attended the opening meeting during which Wednesday Coordinator Kathy Weston reflected on the values of inclusion and non-judgmental welcome for which our Hospitality Pantries are known. After they helped to distribute the children's BOOST bags and saw firsthand the rewards of the contributions Variety has made over the years since the beginning of the BOOST program, we asked them to comment on their experience.

Scarlett said, "I think it [volunteering at the pantry] is really amazing and exciting! Especially giving the kids their BOOST bags is really fun. It can make someone's day." She added, "One bag could change someone's life."

Ms. Fusco added, "It has been wonderful, getting to immerse myself in the community, meeting some of the community members and handing out the BOOST bags, and seeing the impact that FISH has on wonderful communities here in Knoxville. It means a lot to me. It is great to be here and to give back."

Early in the afternoon, a young guest arrived with her mother and her siblings and began excitedly announcing that her tenth birthday was coming up the following Saturday. Ms. Fusco responded with a birthday greeting and told the child that it was also her own mother's birthday. After the little girl received her BOOST bag, she made sure to ask Ms. Fusco to wish her mother Happy Birthday. It was one of many sweet moments that happen so often at FISH pantries when a volunteer connects with a guest.

*Publication Articles were edited by Leslie Hunley and Anne Trisler.*

