

POWER ^{UP} YOUR PANTRY

CULTIVATING SELF-RELIANCE



We want this for ourselves, our loved ones, and everyone in our community. But, how do we get there?

The first step is to recognize that total self-reliance is a myth. None of us appeared out of thin air. We were born from parents, raised with all types of support, and have benefited from the input of countless people, institutions, and programs throughout our lives. Think of public schools, roads, clean water, and so on. All of this is possible because we work together and pool our resources.

The goal of self-reliance for food pantry clients is about helping people improve their own skills and utilize existing programs so they can be more self-reliant and connected to the broader community.

Below are a few options to consider for giving a helping hand:

Increase nutritional knowledge and culinary skills. Basic knowledge of how to prepare simple, tasty, and nutritious meals helps people make better choices and save money. Consider partnering with the MU Extension Family Nutrition Education Program in your area (extension.missouri.edu/fnep/).

Help people obtain government nutrition assistance and other antipoverty benefits. A host of federal programs exist to provide a safety net to families and lift them out of poverty. The most common food assistance program is SNAP (which stands for the Supplemental Food Assistance Program, formerly called the Food Stamp Program). Talk with your regional food bank to learn more and get help with helping your clients know more about these important benefits. To learn more about other programs, check with your local Community Action Agency at communityaction.org/agencies/.

Provide referrals to educational programs and services offered by other agencies. No one is saying that your food pantry needs to be self-reliant when it comes to helping clients be more self-reliant. We strongly encourage you to partner with existing agencies in your community. Learn what is available and then determine what is possible. Some options to explore include enhancing job skills and job readiness, offering health screenings and clinics (including dental), and addressing topics such as emergency preparedness, affordable housing, or energy efficiency.

Engage in local food production. Find ways to encourage and accept local produce donations, partner with your local farmers market, or help people grow gardens. These and related activities can improve access to healthy food and give people a chance to grow some of their own food. *Learn more at bit.ly/growwellmo.*



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This series is intended for food pantries and other hunger relief groups looking for ways to enhance their current operations and better meet the needs of people who use their services.

The information provided is based on survey and other research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.



SPOTLIGHT: MOTHER HUBBARD'S CUPBOARD BLOOMINGTON, IN

"Food security is increased when people have access to community." This statement from Stephanie Solomon, Director of Education and Outreach at Mother Hubbard's Cupboard (aka "the Hub") in Bloomington, IN, gets to the core of what makes the Hub a vehicle for change.



Stephanie Solomon

The growing awareness that food pantries alone will not end hunger has helped the Hub transform itself into a "community food resource center with a food pantry." It's a subtle but important distinction, illustrated in part by the variety of programs and advocacy efforts that use food as a way to help people build relationships and be civically engaged.

Beyond distributing food, the Hub manages two community gardens, holds weekly gardening and cooking classes, and houses the Hub Tool Share, a lending library that makes cooking and gardening tools available in the community.

Solomon says the needs and desires of the people who come to the Hub shape their programs. Mother Hubbard's Cupboard was started by two women who themselves were using the services of a local food pantry. They had the desire to create a food pantry that offered services in a more dignified way and truly reflected the needs of

the community. For example, early cooking demonstrations were offered by patrons themselves after receiving less common foods such as tofu and soy milk. Later, a desire to include more fresh fruits and vegetables led to the creation of a community garden.

The Hub is also a place where people get together to learn about, discuss, and take action on important local and national issues. Monthly lunches and their Advocacy Working Group, comprised of food pantry patrons, volunteers, and community members, provide the venues. Sponsoring voter registration events at the Hub, advocating for protecting SNAP benefits, and urging the school board to institute policies that eliminate the practice of "lunch shaming" when a student is unable to pay for lunch, are all efforts that have originated from these groups. Other topics of interest include affordable housing and healthcare.

For groups interested in initiating new programs, Solomon suggests starting conversations with people who are using your food pantry's services. Find out what they need and what types of programs or services would make the most difference. Then, figure out what is possible with existing resources or whether there are other organizations doing similar work. Partnerships are key to doing more to help people meet their broader needs. Learning from other organizations, including other food pantries, is also important.



For the Hub, Solomon says their goal is to "keep going in the direction of building relationships and creating spaces where people feel empowered to be a part of the community and take on any type of issue or cause." *For more information about Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, go to mhcfoodpantry.org/.*

For more information:
foodsecurity.missouri.edu