

# Food pantry: 'It's too important to slow down'

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seeing closer to 40 families every Wednesday, all taking home about three to five days worth of food.

While those visiting the food pantry represent a diverse population, Littell and Wood, the co-chairwomen, said almost everyone they serve lives from Cannon Beach to Jewell. In an informal survey last year, volunteers interviewed 89 households and found about 50 percent of all customers worked in a hotel, restaurant or retail job in Cannon Beach.

"The need is here, the need is strong and it's increasing," Littell said. "A lot of people don't realize we're even here. They ask, 'Why do we need a food bank in a place like Cannon Beach?' Well, we have the need."

## Contributing factors

The rising demand for emergency food is nothing new, Clatsop County Regional Food Bank Director Marlin Martin said. More than 25 percent of county residents qualify for emergency food assistance, and the number of households served peaked at 1,400 countywide in 2017.

"We've been riding a high wave. We've continued to increase. We think we are finally reaching everyone that kind of needs help on a regular basis. We are hoping someday it starts going down," Martin said. "In the food banking business, saying business is up is not always a good thing."

While use has been steadily going up for years all over the county, the sharp increase at a pantry as small as Cannon Beach's is unusual, Martin said.

Littell and Wood said they don't have a particular explanation for the influx, but in general surmise the tourism-based economy contributes to a growing need.

Much of the work in Cannon Beach is seasonal, and when tourism dips, so do work hours and paychecks, Littell said.

"I also think part of the reason for the uptick is people are still finding out we're here," Littell said. "We're trying to



David Kinhan, Charles Bennett and Rock Wickham line the tables with produce at the food pantry in Cannon Beach.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian



Rock Wickham sets out produce.

raise our visibility."

Martin also said the increase could be a reflection of the same families picking up supplies more frequently.

"We used to be third tier.

When family income disappears, you rely more on SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and that is only designed for a certain amount of food.

So you become more reliant on emergency food services," Martin said. "So people aren't able to work, or are on fixed incomes, but the cost of living is still going up. You start falling deeper into poverty, so you seek more non-cost services like the food bank."

## Keeping up with demand

With an increase in demand comes a need for more resources, which, for an entirely volunteer organization of about 20, can be tricky. More demand for food meant the need for more trucks for hauling, more organizing, and of course, more supplies to give out.

"Some days it really feels like we're hustling, but I

wouldn't say we've ever felt overwhelmed," Wood said. "It's too important to slow down."

Luckily, Wood said, there has been an upswing in financial and food donations, keeping the amount of food they must purchase steady. Almost 70 percent of the 70,000 pounds of the food served last year was donated.

Donations from second homeowners who have left-over food from their vacations have been on the rise, as well as from local restaurants and grocery stores. Sometimes people will drive by and hand Littell a check when they see her. Some individuals in town take it upon themselves to consistently supply one particular item each week. She attributes the increase to

getting the word out about a growing need.

"We have one person who provides us laundry soap every week. One lady decided she couldn't stand the idea of people not having toothbrushes," Littell said. "So she's donated toothbrushes for two years now."

While the pantry is keeping up for now, the board has organized its first fundraiser after 10 years: a soup cook-off and silent auction from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on April 14 at the American Legion. Whatever is raised will go toward growing food reserves.

"Gosh. I remember when 26 households seemed like a big number. We really thought we were hustling then," Littell said. "I guess we were just getting started."

# Homeless: 'I'm not a criminal. I'm not trespassing. I'm working'

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is fully staffed again — or until the council approves the hiring of additional officers — the shift in enforcement priorities will be carried out in a limited way, Spalding said.

"This may also require us to look at our current priorities and shift resources away from other patrol activities to spend more time on this problem," he added.

While the City Council's motion was alarming to some advocacy groups who work with the homeless, for Chris Bradley, who is homeless in Astoria, the motion put him on edge.

"Especially if I'm on my way to work, because I'm walking down the street with

a backpack and a dog, on my way to work and you're going to stop and hassle me?" he said. "At this point, it's the tightening of the screws."

Because he doesn't engage in behavior that could get him in trouble, Bradley said he has never worried about citations or tickets before. His dog is on leash and up-to-date on all her shots, he said. Though he is sleeping outside, he has a job working on the remodel of the Van Dusen Building where Astoria Maker Industries plans to open.

"I'm not a criminal. I'm not a tweaker. I'm not trespassing. I'm working," he said.

City Councilors Zetty Nemlowill, Bruce Jones and

Mayor Arline LaMear voted in favor of the motion, which came up during a public comment period Monday. Debbie Boothe Schmidt, owner of Phog Bounders Antique Mall, had asked if a parking space close to her business could be exempted from the two-hour parking time limit and available for her employees to use later in the afternoon and evening.

Currently, they park on a street where homeless people gather throughout the day and whose presence intimidates both her employees and her customers, Boothe Schmidt said.

City Councilors Tom Brownson and Cindy Price voted against the motion. They said they were sup-

portive of the police department, but Brownson said he wanted more time to consider the language and implications of the motion. Price said that, among other concerns, she was worried about targeting individuals or specific populations.

LaMear, Nemlowill and Jones felt the motion could quickly begin to help address Boothe Schmidt's concerns. Price disagrees.

"I'm angry that a group of perhaps 30 or 40 people is harming our businesses and intimidating our residents. But being drunk or high on the streets, saying nasty things as people go by, panhandling, smelling nasty and looking scary aren't illegal," Price said in an email Thurs-

day. "I'm certain our police officers are enforcing the laws as best they can."

"We have to work with our community partners to discourage enabling activities and act on sustainable solutions. The real stand for public safety comes in the budget committee. Perhaps I'll be joined by a majority in

this fourth year that I'll advocate for tough choices to fund an additional police officer."

"Meanwhile we could prioritize public safety and provide a safer environment for all business employees right now by suspending or revising parking enforcement for a couple weeks until the days grow longer."

# Schools: 'We have a really strong kindergarten class'

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Clatsop County kindergartners generally compared the same as or better than the statewide average in self-regulation and interpersonal skills.

Melissa Linder, the curriculum director for Astoria, said her school district's favorable results are largely a matter of luck based on how prepared children are when they enter school.

"We have a really strong kindergarten class this year," she said of the nearly 170 students in this year's cohort.

Children who attend preschool tend to be more prepared for kindergarten than peers who do not.

About 30 percent of children statewide have some formalized preschool experience before kindergarten, said Holly Dalton, an educational program specialist with the

## 'Our Kinder Ready Kids cohort are at the top of the list of every standard.'

Melissa Linder  
curriculum director for Astoria

state. Linder estimated a similar percentage for Astoria kindergartners, either through the district-run Kinder Ready Kids program or federally funded Head Start. Between 80 percent and 100 percent of Astoria kindergartners who attended the district's preschool program have been on track academically as of fall and winter, generally higher than the general population, Linder said.

"Our Kinder Ready Kids cohort are at the top of the list of every standard," she said.

Clatsop Kinder Ready, formed four years ago by local educators, has been focused

on better preparing kids from birth for preschool, kindergarten and to be academically on track by third grade. Dan Gaffney, former director of the group, left in April to begin a one-year feasibility study funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant of preschool needs in Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties. The study is part of determining whether the counties could get private investors to fund universal preschool.

About half of the parents of Clatsop County kindergartners report their child having had some preschool expe-

rience, Gaffney said. But that can mean anything from an approved, full-day program to staying with a grandparent, depending on how the parent interprets preschool.

Gaffney is looking at the costs of comprehensive preschool and what existing preschools provide.

"In Chicago, they're talking 3- and 4-year-olds attending full-day preschool," he said. "They're trying to provide preschool and after-school care so parents can be in the workforce. We're trying to determine whether that's what our community wants."

Some parents might want all-day preschool, while some want to educate their own kids, Gaffney said. The state created a developmental guide for what kids should know at each age level and coming into kindergarten, available at [tinyurl.com/PreKtoGrade3](http://tinyurl.com/PreKtoGrade3)

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