

Mobile pantry trucks food to rural Idaho towns in need

Elizabeth Rudd/Lewiston Tribune

BOVILL - The last bar in Bovill closed about six months ago, and with it went the last place in town to buy essential day-to-day items.

That's just one example of why Jamie Fiorino said it's crucial for the Idaho Foodbank's mobile pantry to come to her rural Latah County town.

"I don't really think you can overestimate the importance of the mobile pantry coming to this community," said Fiorino, who has lived in Bovill for three years.

Fiorino is the pastor at the Bovill Community Presbyterian Church and was one of about 10 volunteers Monday who helped facilitate the food bank's distribution. She was also one of the town's residents who benefited by receiving a box loaded up with food, including fresh potatoes, onions, ricotta cheese and elbow macaroni.

"We all come down here for the socializing aspect, and we get to walk away with something that helps," she said.

Cari Miller, the food bank's Lewiston branch manager, said the mobile pantry visits nine locations in north central Idaho that have limited food pantry access, including the monthly trip to Bovill.

The food bank distributed about 2,700 pounds of food to 72 recipients Monday, ranging from single individuals to larger families, Miller said. The Bovill mobile pantry also serves residents in Santa, Clarkia and Fernwood.

The pantry itself consists of a pickup truck and trailer that is loaded with food. Miller said the amount of people being served is determined based on what the food bank has available and how many families have signed in at the pantry in the past three months.

The food is then labeled and placed in the truck. Once it arrives, a group of volunteers helps sort the food and distribute it to residents.

Each town has a mobile pantry coordinator, who helps the food bank organize volunteers and manage the site. Miller said the number of volunteers tends to range from five to 10.

"Bovill's usually really good with their team (of volunteers)," she said.

Ken Bowey, Bovill's mobile pantry coordinator, said a staff member of the food bank approached him about 10 years ago with the idea of the mobile pantry. He has been helping with it since.

"It's really good what we do here," he said. "People come down, the community gathers."

Bowey, whose wife Sally also helps with distribution each month, said the mobile pantry is a Godsend for many people in town.

"It helps them," he said. "It puts food on their table when they otherwise wouldn't have it, what with the price of gas. It's horrible."

Fiorino echoed that concern, saying it's either a 30-minute drive to Deary or a 50-minute drive to Moscow if anyone in town needs anything from the store. Some residents aren't able to make that trip, so she said the program ensures they get the food they need.

"It's not just gas, it's an hour each way," she said.

Not having easy and quick access to the grocery store is something Fiorino said she had to adjust to once she moved to Bovill from Clarkston. She's originally from Spokane. Now, she makes sure to write a list before heading to town.

"You have to be prepared, living in a small town," she said.

In addition to nutritious food, the program makes it so people on a strict budget can get treats, Fiorino said. Last month, Bovill residents were given a large box of Oreo cookies.

There is no income requirement for participating in the mobile pantry. Miller said the food bank is intended to be a resource for those in need of food assistance, regardless of their situation.

"It's hard enough to ask for food, then have to justify it," she said. "We really believe that anybody who asks for food should have access to it."

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