



Enhancing our collective effort to connect neighbors with food

Our Journey to Transforming Access: Community Outreach in Action

Removing Barriers to Visitation
&
Adding Distribution Hours

Where We Are Now

Benefits of Change



Improved Access to Food

Families facing crisis or chronic hardship receive support more consistently, reducing gaps in nutrition and stability.



Increased Dignity & Trust

Neighbors no longer feel judged or limited, fostering a welcoming environment rooted in respect and compassion.



Greater Community Engagement

With fewer restrictions, more people feel comfortable seeking help, leading to stronger connections and a more supportive system.



Better Understanding of Need

Frequent visits give us clearer insight into patterns of hunger and hardship, helping us better allocate resources and advocate for long-term solutions.

Better Serving Neighbors

We've been able to better serve our neighbors by expanding food pantry hours and removing barriers to access. These improvements have made our services more flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

- **Expanded hours** allow working families, seniors, and individuals with transportation or scheduling challenges to visit at times that work best for them.
- **Removing visit limitations** empowers neighbors to come as often as they need, without fear of being turned away, which is especially critical during times of crisis or food insecurity.
- These changes have resulted in **increased pantry usage, higher levels of satisfaction among visitors, and stronger community relationships.**
- We've also gained **more consistent engagement**, which helps us track needs more accurately and connect neighbors to additional resources like SNAP, housing referrals, and health programs.

Together, these efforts have created a more welcoming, dignified, and equitable experience for every person who walks through our doors.

Ease of Running Organization

Removing barriers and expanding pantry hours **streamlined our operations** and improved overall efficiency. With more flexible hours and fewer restrictions, we've seen a **more even flow of visitors**, which reduces long wait times and prevents overcrowding on certain days.

Additionally, welcoming neighbors as often as they need has **built stronger relationships and trust**, making it easier to gather accurate information, offer personalized support, and connect individuals to additional resources. This consistent engagement also allows us to **plan better, manage inventory more effectively**, and **respond quickly** to changing needs within the community.

Overall, these changes have created a more **organized, predictable, and mission-driven environment**—allowing us to serve with greater compassion and efficiency.

How We Got Here

Our Resources

Facility Access & Scheduling

We maximized use of our existing space by **adjusting internal calendars**, enabling us to open more frequently and at varied times, including evenings or weekends.

Community Feedback

We gathered input from neighbors through **informal conversations** and **Oasis intake data** to better understand their availability and needs. This data helped guide our decision to expand access.

Staff & Volunteer Capacity

We **reorganized staff schedules** and **recruited additional volunteers** to support extended and more flexible distribution hours. This helped ensure our team could **accommodate increased neighbor visits** without compromising service quality.

Acquiring Resources



**2-3
months**

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- **Volunteer and staff coordination** took the longest—about **6 to 8 weeks**—as we had to recruit, train, and create rotating schedules that aligned with the expanded distribution times.
- **Adjusting facility access and internal scheduling** was a faster process, completed within **2 to 3 weeks**, but required collaboration with all program leads to avoid conflicts.

- **Gathering community feedback** through informal interviews and Oasis intake data was **ongoing** but provided actionable insights within the first month, allowing us to quickly adapt our service model. We learned that many families were **experiencing acute food shortages** well before their scheduled monthly visit, and the **mandatory paperwork created a sense of shame** and embarrassment that deterred them from seeking help.

Neighbors expressed **frustration with rigid scheduling, highlighting unpredictable circumstances**—job loss, medical emergencies, or sudden financial burdens—that required immediate assistance rather than waiting weeks for an appointment. By listening closely to these personal insights, we recognized that **simplifying our check-in process** and **eliminating frequency restrictions** would **remove significant emotional and logistical barriers**.

Implementing Change



**4-6
weeks**

Once all the necessary tools and resources were in place, implementation took approximately **4 to 6 weeks**.

- **Expanding distribution hours** required adjusting volunteer shifts, updating signage, notifying neighbors, and syncing schedules across programs. This was done gradually over a few weeks to allow time for testing and feedback.
- **Removing barriers to visitation**—such as lifting strict frequency limits or simplifying check-in—was rolled out in phases to ensure staff and volunteers could adapt to the new flow and maintain a welcoming environment.
- **Oasis platform updates and training** were completed within the first two weeks of implementation, helping us quickly gather more accurate neighbor data and track visits.
- **Community communication** took place through flyers, social media, text reminders, and partner referrals to ensure neighbors were aware of the new, more flexible system.

Though the **changes were fully in place within 6 weeks**, we continued to monitor, evaluate, and fine-tune our process based on neighbor feedback and operational impact.

Final Results

Removed barriers to visitation

We adopted a **needs-based, open-access approach**. Neighbors can now visit as often as necessary without fear of being turned away.

Our **previous intake process required** neighbors to complete **extensive paperwork** every time they visited our food pantry, with visits strictly **limited to once per month**.

Recognizing the urgency and dignity of our neighbors, we've transformed our approach by removing all appointment requirements and cumbersome documentation. Now, neighbors simply sign in—no questions asked—and immediately receive a nourishing box of food. This streamlined process has dramatically increased accessibility within the community, empowering individuals and families with **immediate, unlimited access to food** exactly when they need it most. This shift honors the dignity of those we serve and acknowledges that food insecurity doesn't operate on a schedule.

Expanded distribution hours

We restructured our operating schedule to **include more service days and flexible hours, including evenings and weekends**. This change was made in direct response to working families, caregivers, and individuals with limited transportation who previously couldn't make it during traditional weekday hours.

What We Learned

Following these changes, we **measured satisfaction** among neighbors primarily through **direct conversations, feedback surveys, and informal check-ins** during pantry visits.

Additionally, we noticed significant **increases in repeat visits, word-of-mouth referrals, and positive community engagement**, clearly demonstrating a deeper **trust** and **satisfaction** with our improved process.

What surprised us most was just **how quickly the community responded—and how deeply the change was needed.**

Within weeks of removing visit limitations and expanding our hours, we saw a noticeable increase in neighbors coming through our doors. Many were **first-time visitors** who had previously been unable to access our services because of work schedules, lack of transportation, or fear of being turned away for coming too often.

Another unexpected surprise was the emotional response. Neighbors expressed not just gratitude, but **relief**—relief that they didn't have to ration food or choose between groceries and gas. Some told us they finally felt **seen** and **respected**.

Internally, we were also surprised at how seamlessly our volunteers and staff adapted. There was a **shared sense of purpose**—everyone recognized that this new model better reflected our values of dignity, equity, and compassion.

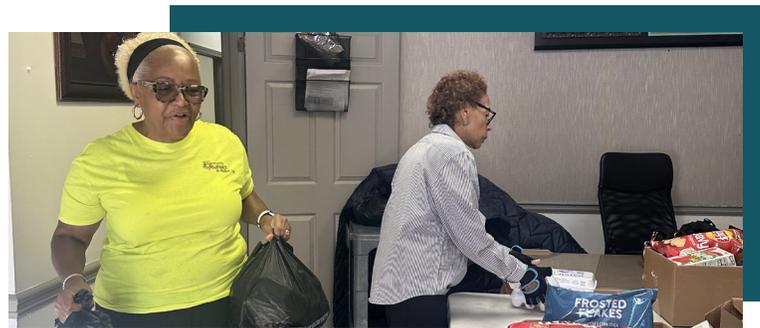
Most of all, we were surprised by how something that felt like a big operational change turned out to be a **simple, human-centered shift**—meeting people where they are and saying, “You're welcome here, as often as you need.”

“As a senior, this assistance helps bridge the gap for me when resources are low. I always feel that I am treated with respect here.”

- Neighbor at Community Outreach in Action



Janice Dixon, *Executive Director*



Staff & Neighbors