

EXTENSION
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER
& ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Rebecca Crumrine

Supplemental
Nutritional Assistance
Program—Education
Program Coordinatorracrumri@illinois.edu

Professional development and fresh produce donations are just some of the ways Food Pantry Network-HOI has been able to address needs throughout Central Illinois. The network was established in 2019 and has allowed food pantries, food banks, and organizations to better work together and support each other as emergency food needs increase.

Food Pantry Network – HOI Helps All Emergency Food Services Better Serve Community

With a mission to support, connect, and provide resources to those working within the emergency food system, University of Illinois Extension Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit SNAP-Education and the Tazewell County Health Department partnered to launch Food Pantry Network-HOI in March 2019. Since then, the network of food banks, food pantries, and local organizations has come together to focus efforts and to support one another as they work to alleviate hunger and build a healthier community. Through the Food Pantry Network, systematic changes have happened that help pantries share resources and communicate with one another as well as both local food banks: Midwest Food Bank and Peoria Area Food Bank.

The network works to cultivate a partnership by sharing information and further educating those working to combat food access in the community. Events have included a refrigerator raffle, fresh produce giveaway, guest speakers, and professional development. In addition, the group has established online networking platforms and bi-monthly meetings to address educational topics, discuss current issues pantries are facing, and provide time for general networking.

“This partnership has led the emergency food system to better serve families in need within our community,” explained Rebecca Crumrine, Extension SNAP-Ed program coordinator.

“When social distancing and shelter-in-place recommendations came into play, food pantries had to quickly shift their processes at the same time the need increased,” noted Rebecca. “Thankfully the Food Pantry Network was well established and able to quickly reach people online and provide a route to connect those in need with food and necessary resources.”

Requests for food delivery to both quarantined families and vulnerable populations is a continuous need in our community. Thanks to the partnerships developed, several mobile food pantries have operated throughout the four-county unit in the last couple of months. Referral requests for area residents in need are also completed in days, sometimes hours, thanks to the well established and responsive network.

Recently, Food Pantry Network-HOI has connected with Tazewell County All Our Kids Network (AOK) to become a new partner with a web-based, bi-directional referral communication tool called Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS). It provides a way to complete the referral process to families from a multitude of community services. By utilizing this new resource, Food Pantry Network-HOI hopes to reach more families in need.

“Before IRIS, referrals mainly came from those who were familiar with us,” stated



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

Rebecca. “Now, any agency in IRIS, whether they are familiar with who we are, can see there is a referral agency available to connect others to food.”

Local food pantries or organizations interested in being a part of this network can join the conversations in the Facebook group and reach out to Rebecca Crumrine to receive email communications, racrumri@illinois.edu.