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Some of the goods ready to be distributed to local families. The food cupboard accepts non-perishable items and monetary donations for donations to the food cupboard's funds and supplies. L&T photos/Elly Grimm

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

In 2012, 59.4 percent of food-insecure households participated in at least one of the three major federal food assistance programs, according to statistics from feedingamerica.org.

HomeCare, Inc., a United Way agency in Liberal, is the city's oldest food cupboard and has been serving people since 1979. The food cupboard helps numerous people every year with requests.

Susan Roberts, director of HomeCare, Inc., said food cupboard inventories, located at the First Presbyterian Church at 1551 N. Western, are usually rather bare and depend heavily on donations, and they have to make trips to Walmart to help increase supplies.

"I would say it's because of the economy," Roberts said. "In the past, a lot of churches were able to help us financially as well as with food. A lot of individuals did that as a personal donation, but that, over the years, has gradually decreased and so we pretty much depend on United Way and whatever else we can come up with for donations."



Roberts added the economy has also affected donations. The Boy Scouts used to conduct a food drive for the food cupboard and while the cupboard still gets donations from organizations, they're less than before.

"A lot of the churches still, especially at the end of the year, will give us a nice check but not as many as before," she said. "And I understand that because of the way the times are right now for everybody – money is in shorter supply than it used to be."

The process to apply for help from the food cupboard is an easy one – there is an intake sheet with some questions Roberts asks them. The intake forms require a form of I.D. and Roberts fills out the form. After a family is accepted, there's an employee who then gets that information who gets the food and delivers it to the family.

Families who receive assistance from HomeCare, Inc. get a one-time, five-day supply of food that includes milk, eggs, hamburger, along with staples such as rice and beans. However, second requests are considered in emergency situations.

Roberts also said the cupboard's busiest time of year seems to be around the end of June or first part of July, as people are typically moving and have those expenses.

"On top of that, we have school coming up and there's all the expenses involved in getting children into school and that is really a busy time," she added.

The food cupboard delivers the food to the families and delivers them to any location. Roberts spoke of one particular case where a delivery had to be made to a homeless man living in a freezer box in the summer – who had been abandoned by relatives – and had been living off his social security.

"I just felt so sorry for that poor old man," Roberts recalled.

The food cupboard accepts non-perishable items such as pastas, cereals and canned goods. They also accept monetary donations to help with buying supplies.

There are a few things the food cupboard does not supply and use funding for, including disposable diapers and other personal care items. However, Roberts said, if people donate those items, they will be accepted and given away to those families who request them.

"Our goal is to help people who are in desperate need of food, that's our main goal, to help people get back on their feet," Roberts said. "And they don't necessarily have to be impoverished, they can be a family that has had sufficient money and something bad has happened in the family like someone losing their job or a medical crisis, so it isn't just for one group of people, it's for anybody who needs help."

For those interested in volunteering with or donating to HomeCare, Inc., contact Susan Roberts at 624-0714 or via mail at P.O. Box 1616, Liberal, KS 67905.

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