

Volunteer Perspective

We asked NEFP volunteer Dave Hogan to write about the people he talks to as he does intake interviews on Monday afternoons.

The following is Dave's perspective.

Four afternoons each week, we at Northeast Emergency Food Program see Oregon's economic struggles in the faces of people arriving for food. I am one of the many volunteers at the program, in the basement of Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, where we meet our fellow Oregonians and hear them tell of their own struggles. They are of all ages, of all races. Some live alone; some have a family of eight or more to feed.

But what struck me this year are the increasing signs of Oregon's unemployment rate, which has climbed above 11 percent. More and more, it seems, people mention to us that they or their spouse or parent have recently lost their job. And, many add, they have had to move in with a sibling, parent, child or friend.

Some tell us they are now living in their vehicle, or have joined the others already living on the streets or at Dignity Village near Portland International Airport. They mention this to us in discussing the types of food they need—as they can't use food that needs refrigeration or freezing.

Some are hopeful, despite their job loss. Some are quiet and appear to be in shock. A few are in tears. Several have mentioned they never thought they would need help with food. One person explained that they didn't give their full name when they first signed in at the food program, because they didn't want others to know they were there.



The services at NEFP are made possible because of dedicated volunteers like Roxie (pictured above).

But not all are unemployed. Some are working, though they note they have had their hours cut back and are struggling to get by. Many worry out loud about how they are going to provide for their kids or other family members, particularly during the winter.

Most of the people coming to the food program speak English, but many of them have taught me how to speak a few words in their native languages—Russian, Chinese, Spanish and Croatian, among others.

Whatever the language, many of the people pause and thank us for the food program. It is a good one, they tell us. Some express this to me with their hands and their eyes, grasping my hand or arm for emphasis. But I get the message.

From the Heart is published by the Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP) at Luther Memorial, a community ministry of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO).

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Have you stopped by for a visit?

The staff at NEFP at Luther Memorial and Genesis Satellite hope you come by, introduce yourself and have a cup of coffee. *We'd enjoy showing you around!* NEFP at Luther Memorial is open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and the satellite at Genesis Community Fellowship (located on the corner of NE 27th and Killingsworth in Portland) is open from 5 to 7 p.m. each Thursday.

A First Look

Becca Moore did a two-month internship at NEFP as part of her Masters of Social Work program at Portland State University. We asked her to write about what she observed as a new person at NEFP. We hope to develop a full time internship to offer even more services.

Dignity, gratitude and opportunities for social justice

I recently joined the NEFP team as a first-year social work intern, studying at Portland State University. For last seven weeks, I have been participating two days a week in the organization's efforts to meet the food needs of clients and have made many powerful observations. In some ways, these are final observations as I leave the internship at NEFP. I am incredibly grateful for my experiences and glad to have a chance to share my thoughts with you.

Serving with dignity

One of the first things that struck me about NEFP was the grocery aisle set-up. While clients still have a limited selection of products to choose from, they are able to have some choice in the food they take home, as opposed to being handed a box full of items they may be completely unfamiliar with and even unsure of how to prepare and eat. Clients walk through with a shopping cart—almost exactly the way they would at a grocery store. This is one powerful way that NEFP helps to acknowledge and support the dignity of each person in need of services.

Around the waiting area, I regularly hear clients greeted by name. More than one client has spoken to me about their relationship with John Elizalde, whom you know as the NEFP program manager. It's clear he knows what's going on in their lives, as they catch up over a hot beverage in a passing quiet moment outside or amongst the many people beginning to line up for the produce table. The way these clients have spoken to me about this relationship communicates the worth and dignity they feel when they know they are seen as more than just a hungry mouth to feed.

Ceaseless gratitude

Many of the clients I sit with at the intake desk express significant gratitude for the services they receive at NEFP, but one particular client stands out in my mind. I'll call her Gloria. Gloria came rushing in the door one day, just a few minutes after we had stopped serving clients. "Oh no!" she exclaimed, "Am I too late?" I looked down the ramp to the tired volunteers who had



Guests at NEFP have access to fresh produce.

just been discussing their plans to go home, and then I looked up at Gloria's face and was reminded in an instant why we are all a part of this work.

As I took her into the intake office, Gloria handed me her ID and began showering me with gratitude. As I looked up her information in the computer, she began to passionately pray. I listened to her thanking her God for protecting and providing. She asked for continued strength and courage to help her face the next challenge ahead, and also asked that we, the people at the food pantry, be blessed with love and abundance. Gloria then looked up at me, thanked me more and started telling me the story of her day. She described how someone had been sick, and then her ride was late. They had trouble finding the food pantry, going first to the old location on Killingsworth. Gloria talked about her fear that she wouldn't make it in time and would have to go home without any food. We talked about her son, who was getting ready to be deployed to Afghanistan. He and his wife had saved enough money to buy Gloria a bus ticket to Louisiana, so she could see him before he left.

As the conversation went on, Gloria continued to thank me again and again. She tried to explain why she needed to come for food, talking about how she had been doing okay, but things had gotten much worse. She assured me that she only came to the food pantry when she really needed to. The shame she felt was apparent,

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A First Look

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and it deeply saddened me. It seems that the shame and embarrassment of asking for help is unfortunately a common partner to the gratitude that clients express.

Opportunities for social justice

Tackling the stigma that feeds this shame is an incredibly daunting task, but one I feel is critical in our efforts to work towards social justice. We can take personal action to challenge this and many other stigmas, lessening their strength and power, slowly chipping away at the oppression that most often feels insurmountable. In my short time at NEFP, I have seen many of these opportunities, and most often they seem to come out of the rich diversity amongst clients and volunteers. This diversity provides a unique and fertile environment—one that has the potential to foster great awareness and understanding that will undoubtedly spread outside the walls of Luther Memorial.

One of the most powerful places to begin this journey is within ourselves. In reflection and observations of myself, I have realized how stigma is imbedded so deeply, I am most often not aware it is there. I have recognized things about the assumptions I make about people and how these assumptions impact the way I interact and engage with the world. Unfortunately, after a closer look, some of my behaviors turn out to be far less

admirable than I would intend. Ensuring that my actions more closely mirror my intentions requires this heightened awareness for how my beliefs and assumptions impact the way I relate. It requires that I face the negative stereotypes that feed oppression and try to understand how I contribute, even unwittingly, to their power. I believe that developing this awareness can serve as the foundation for a personal commitment to social justice. The atmosphere at NEFP offers this opportunity, for only in the midst of such diversity can we truly understand how we think and feel about those who we see as different.

My hope in writing this is to inspire people to seek out opportunities at NEFP or elsewhere, to develop this awareness, focus your intention and strengthen your commitment to social justice.



A choice of dairy products are available for guests at NEFP.

Alternative Giving / Donation Form

During the season of giving, please consider NEFP's *Alternative Giving Program* in honor of a friend or family member. A gift of only \$25 will provide an NEFP family in need with three to five days of well-balanced, nutritious food. Your honoree will receive a personal card from NEFP telling them of your gift as an expression of love and good wishes, and you will be named as the gracious giver.

Donor's Name _____

Donor's Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Honoree's Name (if applicable) _____

Honor Celebration _____

Honoree's Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Please make tax-deductible checks to *EMO/NEFP* or pay by (check one):

Visa MasterCard American Express

Credit Card No. _____ Exp. date _____

Your gift makes a difference . . .

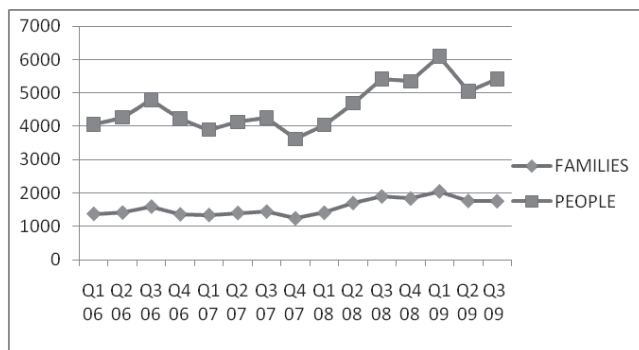
- \$25 provides food for a family of five people for three to five days
- \$50 provides food for three families of three people for five days
- \$100 supplies 1,000 pounds of donated food from the Oregon Food Bank
- \$500 provides a can of vegetables for every person served in a month
- \$1,000 provides five days of food for 77 families
- Other amount _____

Mail form and payment to EMO/NEFP, 0245 SW Bancroft St., Suite B, Portland, OR 97239.

Thanks for the help

This newsletter has information about what it's like to serve at NEFP. You serve by donating food or funds, volunteering, participating in food drives or advocating for the people we serve. The depths of this recession prove just how dedicated you are. As the chart below shows, the demand for services is staggering. The latest USDA report on hunger in America has the Beaver state at the wrong end of the list, again. Your support has been well worth it this year. The 20,000 plus people we help are grateful and say so every day.

We continue to need your help. This year, we expanded our services a number of ways. We partnered with Genesis Community Fellowship and Westminster Presbyterian Church to start a once a week supplemental food program in the Vernon neighborhood, not far from our former site. This Thanksgiving, the Genesis program folk teamed with Vernon Elementary School to provide over 20 special



Number of families and individuals served at NEFP per quarter from 2006 to 2009.

boxes to families in need at the school. In December, they will start a backpack program so children in need (generally, homeless) can be assured food over the weekends and holidays.

In 2010, NEFP will launch an effort to enroll uninsured children in the Oregon Healthy Kids program. We need volunteers to help us assist families with the application process. This means we will need a copier and other office equipment we don't have now.

Northeast Emergency Food Program remains active as advocates for people in need. We know that hunger is not about food availability—it is about justice, equity and opportunity. Our membership in the Oregon Faith Roundtable against Hunger is important for this work. Please join us (www.ofrah.org).

You have the donation envelope in hand. Thanks for your help. We are here because we have tremendous support from throughout the community. Of course, we need tremendous support!

Happy Holidays,

John Elizalde
John Elizalde, NEFP Program Manager



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