

# Getting the FOOD to those who need it the most

by Jennifer Bauman  
Food Bank of Lincoln

On Tuesday afternoons you will see the big brown Food Bank truck parked in the alley behind the F Street Rec Center.

This is a sign that it's distribution day for the Neighborhood FOOD Program, a joint project of the Center for People in Need (CPIN) and the Food Bank of Lincoln. Begun in May of 2006, the FOOD Program (Food Operations Outreach & Delivery) serves approximately 800 families each week, and the count is climbing.

Similar scenes are played out at all the weekly FOOD sites: Matt Talbot Kitchen, Malone Community Center, Oak Lake Church, and CPIN's new offices. There are also early evening distributions at Elliott, Clinton, and Saratoga elementary schools. Go to [www.lincolnfoodbank.org](http://www.lincolnfoodbank.org) for details.

The FOOD sites are in neighbor-



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hoods; they're new immigrants, refugees, students, and service-sector workers. Most of them are trying to survive on very small incomes.

And that's where the FOOD program comes in. The big truck comes from the Food Bank loaded with a couple hundred cases of food and household necessities. When it arrives, CPIN volunteers unload supplies and set up stations for each item in the F Street gym. On the best of

hoods of trailer houses, modest homes, drop-in apartments, and small commercial properties.

Many of the people in these neighborhoods are elderly or disabled;

weeks the long tables will hold meat, vegetables, pasta, bread, produce, beverages, snacks, and a few bonus items like shampoo or deodorant. Some weeks the selection is less varied but whatever is offered, the supply is gone within the hour-long distribution period at each site.

People begin arriving for FOOD distribution at F Street well ahead of the 1 pm start time. They check in at tables staffed by volunteers where they can also pick up information on other assistance available. Then the line begins to form in the gym, with people bringing bags and carts to take home what they will collect.

Many of these folks are on foot or using public transportation; others rely on the good graces of a friend or relative who can bring them.

A good many people coming to these distributions are elderly or have mobility problems; parents and grandparents often have at least one

toddler or baby in tow. Food is heavy and Nebraska's weather is fickle. Check-in lines can spill out into the blazing sun or icy wind. It's not an easy procedure.

While the supply of food is often limited, the FOOD program aims to send home 20-25 lbs of food with each family, which does not go as far as you might think unless the recipients have the time and skill to improvise. But most families take all that is offered, knowing they will figure out a way to make use of everything. And what they take to supplement their grocery shopping may free up funds to pay for utilities, medicine, gas, or rent.

The products distributed at the Neighborhood FOOD sites come from company and individual donations, the America's Second Harvest system, CPIN's Truckloads of Help program, grocery store salvage, and the US Department of Agriculture.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Using volunteer labor and donated facilities, materials, and transportation, CPIN estimates that they can provide items to FOOD participants at roughly a nickel per pound. This is an efficiency that should delight any donor.

While demand threatens to outpace supply, CPIN and the Food Bank of Lincoln are working hard to ensure that more and more people can participate in the Neighborhood FOOD program when they need some extra help to get by.

Jennifer Bauman is in charge of agency relations for the Food Bank of Lincoln. "Food For Thought" appears periodically in Neighborhood Extra. The next column will appear Dec. 29.