

The Public Pantry at the Woodstock Public Library

By Martha Hansen, Assistant Director / Head of Adult Services, Woodstock Public Library, IL

In early February (pre-COVID) the Woodstock Public Library staff wanted to have a small food pantry available in the library. For several years we have had a 'Cold Weather Clothing' Bin for people in need, where they could pick out what they needed to get through the winter months. The bin included hats, mittens, socks and, starting this past winter, a rack of coats. All the items were donated by the community. Adding a food pantry seemed a natural progression to help those in need in our community. We had a piece of audiovisual furniture that wasn't being used so we transformed it into a small food pantry inside the library. It was an immediate success and very well received.



Then the pandemic hit, and we were faced with closing our doors. Finding a way to continue providing the pantry became a priority for the staff. The outdoor pantry took on several evolutions until we found a solution that worked. We started with plastic tubs (first just one, then two, then three). The tubs were not ideal, as people had to kneel on the ground and handle everything inside to find what they needed. The next version of the pantry was a small metal cabinet on a table, which was a great improvement over the tubs but didn't hold a lot of food or toiletries and wasn't waterproof. Finally, we purchased a small outdoor shed that is working out perfectly. The shed has shelving and drawers inside that allow us to organize the donations and make it easy for those in need to find what they need.



The library re-opened this week and so we have the indoor and outdoor pantries fully stocked for all who need to make use of them. There is a clipboard available so that folks can write down if they need something specific and I'm proud that our community has been so responsive. Early in July, we put out the call that we were out of toilet paper for the pantry and we received cartons of donations. One couple has scheduled regular Instacart deliveries that come straight to the pantry, which is wonderful. It is such an easy, positive, way that we can help our community get through this crisis and we are so pleased to be able to do it.

