

"Love your neighbor..." To me, this is the guiding principle behind GraceWorks. Volunteering in the Food Pantry has helped me live out this commandment. Stocking the shelves and seeing what goodies have come in, including fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers, is only part of it. The real connection was when, before the coronavirus, the neighbors could come in to shop and I got to accompany them and help them select their food and fill their carts. Some were shy. Some looked just like me. Some didn't. Some struggled with a language barrier until we both realized that a smile is universal, and it seems that everyone likes mac n cheese!

While Williamson County ranks in the top 10 wealthiest counties in America, the need here is real. I'll admit I was surprised until I saw it firsthand in the Food Pantry. In the 19/20 fiscal year, 15,453 neighbors received food, a 53% increase from the prior year. Neighbors are allowed to get food once a month. Pre-Covid, we shopped with them using a clipboard that listed items and how many of each they could select based on their family size. Since last March, neighbors now have a 30-minute slot to pick up pre-filled carts in the modified drive-in pantry. They have to stretch the contents of their cart to last the entire month. I think of that when I'm at the grocery store multiple times a week for my own family.

On a good day and depending on what donations have come in, the Food Pantry will have fresh produce, milk, eggs, bread, cheese, and frozen meat along with canned goods and boxed items. Pre-pandemic, one neighbor skipped the entire refrigerated section and I thought she had simply overlooked it until she shared that she lived out of her car and it would just go bad. I felt so convicted of the times I had flippantly joked that with three kids I felt like I lived in my car. She actually did.

The GraceWorks Food Pantry makes an immediate impact on our neighbors and it has made an immediate impact on me when I've lent a hand. Please help restock the shelves this Lent. As we fast, let's enable our neighbors to eat. As the days get longer, let's make the pantry fuller.