

Open Pantry Community Services marks 40 years of helping Springfield



This 1990 photo shows Barbara M. Volker, project director of Open Pantry's emergency food program, as she accepts donated food from Dorothy M. Brown, the director of the Mason Square Senior Center, as part of a food collection drive. Open Pantry Community Services is marking 40 years of service to the city of Springfield. *(FILE PHOTO / THE REPUBLICAN)*

By [Kathryn Roy](#) | **Special to The Republican**

June 17, 2015

SPRINGFIELD - Open Pantry Community Services opened its doors at Hope Congregational Church 40 years ago this fall.

"At that time, we were just an emergency food pantry," says Open Pantry director Allison Maynard. "We served two to three people a week."

In that first year, **Open Pantry** filled 254 requests for food.

"This past fiscal year, we served 36,303 people in our food pantry, so the need has dramatically increased," Maynard said recently.

Two years after Open Pantry opened, the organization became incorporated. In 1980, the Loaves and Fishes community kitchen was added, offering two hot meals seven days a week to people in need.

The agency's Open Door Social Services opened in the 1980s, which provides homeless individuals with a drop-in center at which they can receive case management services.



Allison Maynard, left, is director of Open Pantry Community Services in Springfield and Kim Kennedy is the operations director . The agency is marking its 40th anniversary. *MARK M. MURRAY / THE REPUBLICAN*

Over the years, Open Pantry continued to expand services by adding the Teen Parent Program, a shelter for young women and children, and opening two recovery houses for women in recovery from addictions.

Most recently, in 2010, Open Pantry took over operation of the People's Center, which provides clothing, linens, household goods and decorative items to people in need for a minimal charge.

Maynard said Open Pantry has worked to meet the needs of the community, which have increased over the years.

"Through the recession, we saw the numbers increase 28 percent (for people accessing the emergency food pantry) from 2008 to today," Maynard said.

Because of the extreme need, people are limited to six visits a year to the food pantry. Senior citizens can visit 12 times a year.

The Loaves and Fishes Kitchen served nearly 90,000 meals last year to people in need. The Open Door program provided nearly 1,400 case management services. Thirty teen mothers

and 34 children were served at the Teen Parent Program, and the supportive housing program assisted 11 women.

Maynard said the number of people who need services continues to rise.

"At our emergency food pantry and soup kitchen, people are using those services to supplement the (state and federal) benefits they receive," she said. "We see the highest numbers at the end of the month, because people's food stamps run out so they're using our services to get them through the end of the month."

When Open Pantry opened in 1975, Maynard said the agency was used only on an emergency basis, but today, many people need these services on an ongoing basis to make ends meet.

"A lot of the people we serve are the working poor, people who are just struggling to get by because they're not making enough money," Maynard said.

In recent years, Open Pantry has expanded its services at the food pantry to include financial literacy classes and cooking and nutrition classes. In addition, everyone who goes to the pantry goes through the intake process, allowing staff to refer people for other services, such as fuel or food stamp assistance.

"We have a SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefit worker on site," Maynard said. "If we can identify that your benefits can be increased or you're eligible for benefits, we can process it right there."

Maynard encourages everyone to donate to local food pantries if they can, to help address Springfield's 36 percent poverty rate.

"The community supporting Open Pantry Community Services is critical to us being able to meet the needs of those living here," she said. "We have always relied on the community to help us distribute food."

The Open Pantry also has a volunteer base of over 1,000 people, who serve meals at Loaves and Fishes, sort food for the food pantry and do other tasks.

"We receive very little state or federal funding, so people supporting the agency financially is also critical to us," Maynard said.

Both food and monetary donations are welcome. Donations can be made online at openpantry.org via PayPal, or checks can be sent to P.O. Box 5127, Springfield, MA 01101-5127.