

## **A Week at the West Texas Food Bank**

When I reflect back over the last six weeks, I am thankful for the West Texas Food Bank team, who have worked themselves to the bone building pantry boxes and manning our pantries. I am thankful for my leadership team and Board of Directors for their guidance and council during these uncertain times. And I am just completely humbled by our community, which has rallied around the Food Bank's mission and opened their pocketbooks.

This week we served over 1,000 households from our on-campus pantries, compared to March of last year when we served just over 1,100 households for the entire month. From March 16<sup>th</sup> through April 23<sup>rd</sup> we served 3,150 households, of which 2,815 are coming to the Food Bank for the first time, which is an 89% increase in new households. These increases are also being seen by our over 80 partner agencies located throughout the 19 counties the Food Bank serves, making sure those who need a little extra help can get it.

What does it look like to go from serving a few hundred families a month to serving over 200 families a day? Well, it's hectic, and it's chaotic, but it is an absolute act of love on the part of the Food Bank team, who so steadfastly believe in our mission, they are willing to put themselves in harm's way to make sure the community is fed.

Looking back at the 35 year history of the West Texas Food Bank, I can say with some certainty that without the growth of our programs over the past five years, we would not be in a position to handle the load we are seeing today. Your support of the Food Bank through the Capital Campaign to build our facilities was second to none. You have also been an amazing support network for the growth we've had since moving into the two new, state of the art food bank facilities.

These facilities have allowed us to double our output. We've gone from distributing three million pounds a year from our old home on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Odessa, to distributing six and a half million pounds last year. And doubling our distribution wasn't by accident, it was by design. The need in the 19 counties we serve demanded we step up, and thanks to your support we did.

Which brings me back to today, and how the Food Bank team has been able to handle the stress of the exponential growth in our distribution. We are making use of our warehouse, which was designed to distribute 10 million pounds of food a year. That's right, we built bigger preparing for growth. Our two facilities lend themselves to the "drive-thru" distribution model because they were designed for large trucks to not ever have to reverse and turn around in the parking lot, so basically our campuses were built as a drive-thru already.

Access to the Client Choice Pantries on both campuses is designed to be accessed directly from the parking lots, so that clients never had to enter the warehouses in either facility, and the conversion to these spaces into a make shift staging area for the drive-thru distribution was a very simple task. We now use the area which used to serve as a pantry to make ready the pantry boxes, produce bags, fresh fruits, and protein and dairy products. In total, each client we serve is leaving with over 50 pounds of food.

All this to say thank you to the Food Bank team, who are much more like my family, and who have gone above and beyond. And thank you to the community who stepped up to make sure the West Texas Food Bank was prepared to handle whatever crisis came our way, and who have taken care of the Food Bank team with delicious lunches and goodies. Again, I am humbled by the support we have received over the past several weeks.

Forever Yours in Service,  
Libby Campbell, Executive Director, West Texas Food Bank