



We help neighbors get through the month

Five years ago, we responded to a call for help during the holidays at the Northside Food Pantry. Today, we are supporting year-round sustainability.

In 2013, a group of neighbors came together around a kitchen table and created the “Food Pantry Advisors,” an informal group that advocates and fundraises on behalf of the Northside Food Pantry, a program of the Northside Common Ministries and of Goodwill.

At the time the FPA began its work, the pantry served about 1,000 families a month. Other pantries in the area were closing and our response was borne out of crisis — we came together because there wasn’t enough food coming in to serve everybody. Five years later, the neighborhood has changed and is continuing to change — but the need is still there. In 2017, the pantry served 1,384 households, or about 700 families a month. The FPA’s purpose, too, has shifted, from rapid response to strategic planning related to operational sustainability, including building

a network that provides for the pantry year-round. That’s because FPA’s first goal has been met: Food shortages at the pantry are quickly addressed using the fundraising infrastructure we have set up.

Our focus now is to keep the pantry out of crisis mode. It is to make sure that our neighbors with means are aware of its existence — and understand that it will always exist, that hunger is not a problem that will ever be fully solved and that their help is an ongoing need.

And going forward, we know we must not just fill the shelves with the basics but also make sure that when someone needs the pantry, they get everything they need to get through each month with dignity.

The Coffee Crew's story is helping to feed a community

In 2013, a group of local volunteers came together over coffee to discuss better ways to provide for the 850 to 1,000 families served by the Northside Food Pantry. Darlene Rushing, AmyJo Brown, Anne George and Jana Thompson became known as the Coffee Crew. They tackled issues including long-term funding, access and distribution to food pantry recipients.

In just over three years, the Coffee Crew has built awareness of the pantry's needs and offerings by designing and implementing a website and Facebook page. They enabled donors to purchase items online through Amazon's wishlist, increasing the pantry's inventory by 1,600 items in the first year and nearly tripling to 4,500 items annually. Through their successful social media campaign, more than seven tons of food was donated in just one week last December. The Coffee Crew also helped to secure a \$10,000 grant to obtain costly housecleaning supplies for their customers. In 2015, they raised \$20,000 for renovations, allowing more customers access to the pantry at one time while providing a more dignified, supermarket-style experience.

The dedication of the Coffee Crew has enabled the pantry to become more sustainable, increasing its annual donors from five to 64, while providing better resources to its neighbors in need.

To learn more about Northside Food Pantry visit northsidefoodpantry.org

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Who is the Coffee Crew?

We call members of the organizing and planning committee of the FPA the “Coffee Crew.” Members contribute particular skill sets and focus on different areas such as strategic planning, donor development, and volunteer recruitment and coordination.



Members of the Food Pantry Coffee Crew include: (Left) Darlene Rushing, Jana Thompson, AmyJo Brown Sanders and Anne George. On the right, top to bottom, members: Moira Regan Edmiston, Kimberly Giles, Emma Gilmore Kieran and Karen Forney. Past members: Terri Hammond, Julie Shields, Terry Max Wizeorek. Linda Ehrlich, bottom right, serves as liaison between the Coffee Crew and NCM’s advisory board.

How it works

The FPA has created a series of fundraising tools, strategies and a network that it can reach out to in order to deliver food and raise cash on behalf of the food pantry. It includes branding and messaging incorporated into a website and other communication materials that serve as a foundation for all of the FPA's campaigns.



A Coffee Crew planning meeting in the fall of 2017.

About the branding and messaging

The FPA developed a brand for the pantry separate from both NCM and Goodwill. A logo, a tagline, a color palette. The separate brand identity keeps the pantry story simple and focused on a singular goal that resonates broadly with the surrounding neighborhoods: The need for food.



Posters used around the neighborhood to advertise the website and how easy it made sending food or making a donation.

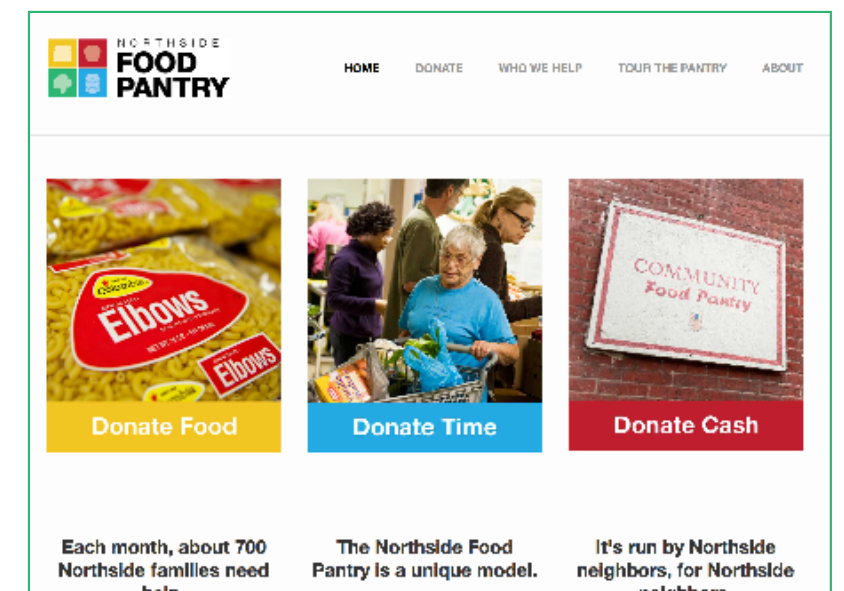
Tools we created

northsidefoodpantry.org

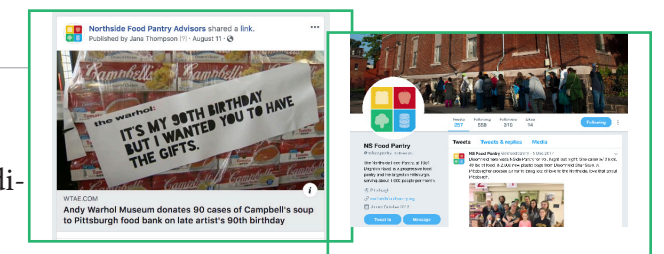
- **Tells the pantry's story in documentary style**, with stories from clients and a visual tour of the pantry itself to help viewers understand how it works and who it helps.
- **Asks for help simply**. Food. Time. Cash. Options are clearly presented and allow for an immediate action to be taken.
- **Builds trust**. Names, photos and bio detail are given about the people in charge. Funding information is disclosed, along with information about the number of clients served.

Other branding materials

- **Support active campaigns.** Posters, an event banner, and social media accounts were created to drive people to the website during active campaigns.



A subcommittee created in 2013 designed and built the website — and brand — for the Northside Food Pantry. They included designer Lindsay Grauvogel, photographer Jasmine Goldband, donor development advisor Emily Martin, strategist and project manager AmyJo Brown and neighborhood resident advisors Stephen Gross and Tara Zeigler.



Judicious use
of social media
engages our audi-
ences.

Strategy and reach: How our neighbors respond

The name “Food Pantry Advisors” refers to all the volunteers and donors who answer when the Coffee Crew asks for help. Since 2013, the number of people who have given time, cash and food to the pantry has increased significantly. Below is an over-view of the primary activities the FPA engages in to help support the Northside Food Pantry.



1. Volunteers

Every second and fourth Monday of the month, volunteers coordinated by the Coffee Crew show up to help with cleaning the pantry, unpacking and sorting inventory, and stocking the shelves for the week ahead. This event is by far our most well attended and draws anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen volunteers each night. In addition to the community it builds of its own, Monday nights at the pantry are also an educational experience. Many volunteers have also become regular donors of cash and food.

The FPA also manages specific volunteer requests that come in through its online form, increasing the number of volunteers available to help when the pantry is open, and coordinating requests by large groups.



2. Elks and yellow gloves

For three years, 2016 through 2018, the Elks National Foundation has annually contributed \$10,000 to support the Yellow Glove Project, coordinated by Coffee Crew member Anne George, who is an Allegheny Elks Lodge #339 member. The project fills bags with items food stamps can't buy — cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items. Items are purchased through a local supplier, Waltmire Pharmacy, and Elks members prep the bags

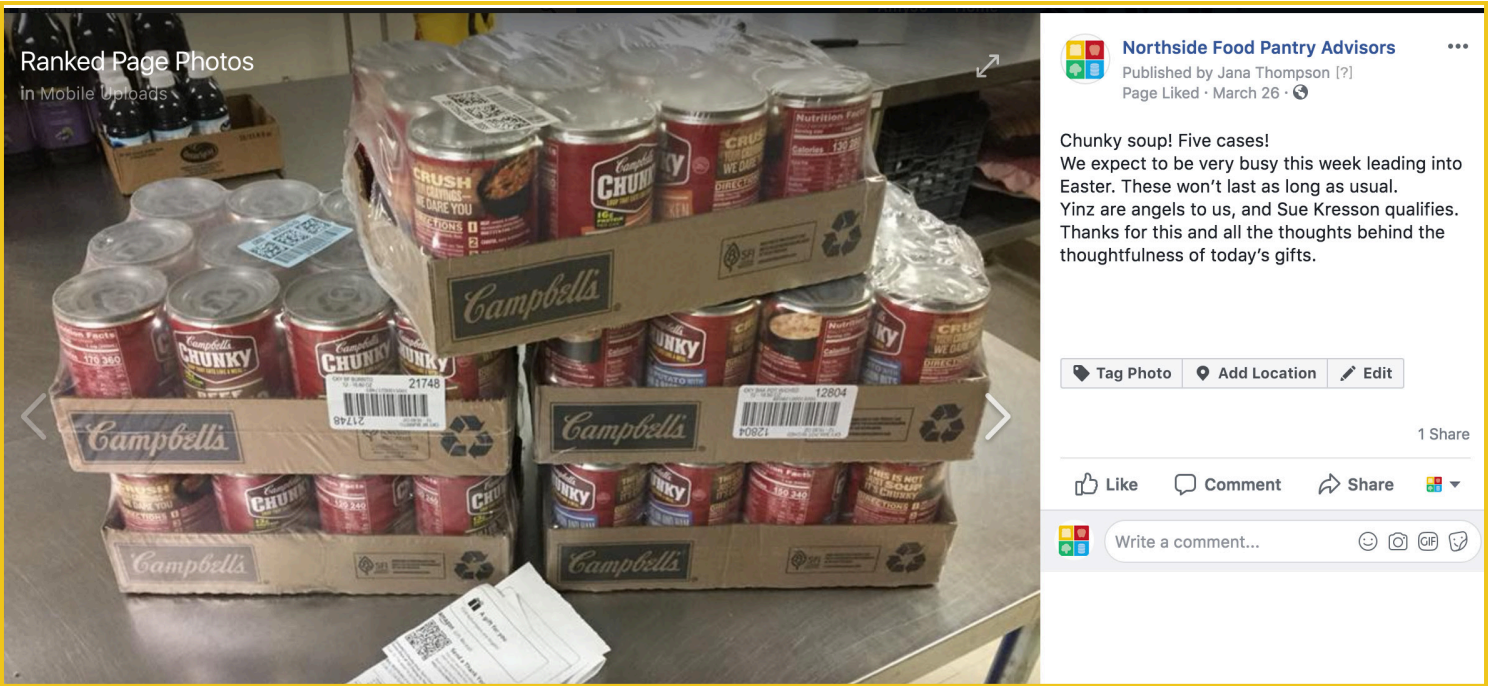
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to be handed out to food pantry clients. Not having to compromise on cleaning products means that people can have dignity of place, George told the Northside Chronicle in 2017. “People don’t have to choose between a clean home and food.”

3. Amazon donors

One of the first efforts of the FPA, alongside the Monday night volunteer work in 2013, was the Amazon List Food Drive. Volunteer Darlene Rushing continuously updates the list based on conversations with the pantry coordinator, actively managing it and tracking items purchased. While our biggest collections from the list come during the holiday season, the FPA has been so successful with this community outreach that it has become a year-round tool, bringing items into the pantry regularly. We also encourage neighbors to sign up for Amazon Smile, which provides another cash donation stream to the



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4. Farmer and neighbor connections

In summers, the FPA displays a booth regularly at the Northside Farmers' Market, educating neighbors about the year-round need for food and collecting farm-fresh produce for the pantry's clients. Through this effort, the pantry has also developed strong relationships with the farmers — every dollar collected during this time period is spent at the market, supporting their work, too.



5. Project-based fundraising campaigns

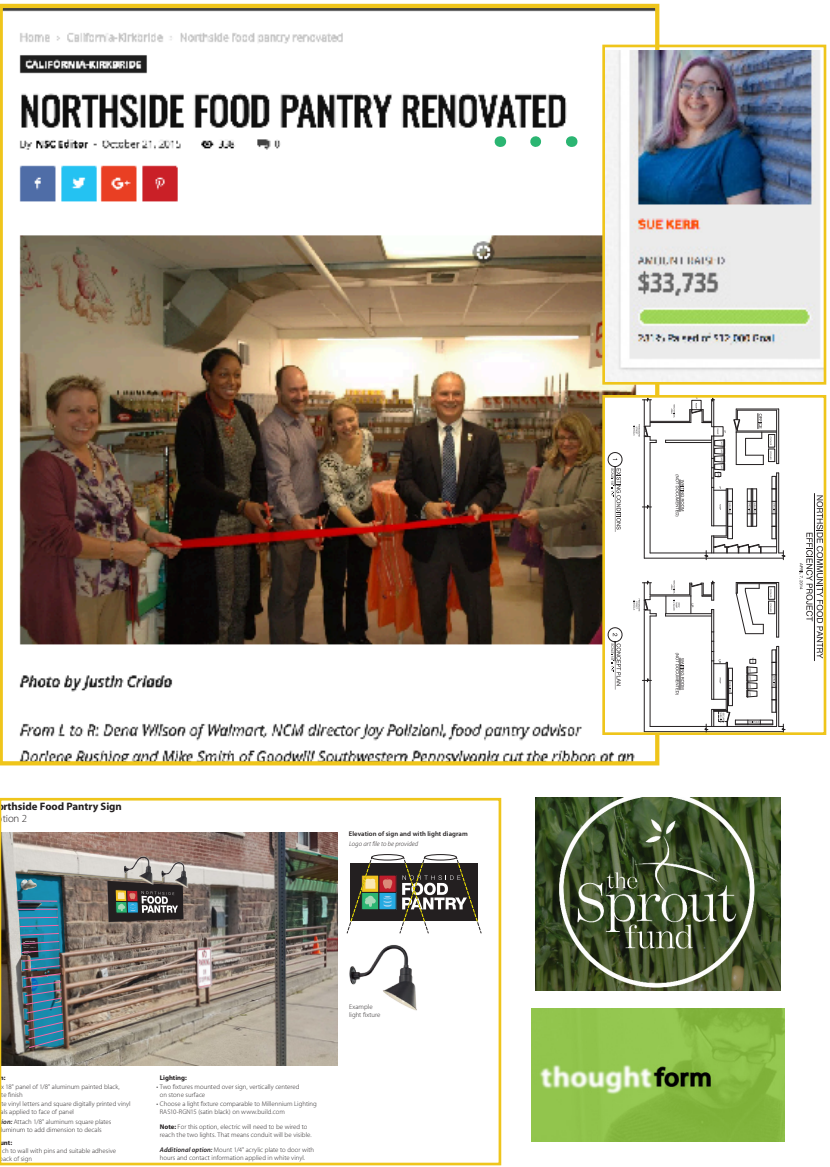
When the pantry needs are specific, the FPA has raised thousands of dollars for the cause, both directly through crowd-funding and grant writing, and indirectly through asks of local businesses. We've also been successful at drawing in professionals and asking for donated services.

Reramp campaign

Led by volunteer Sue Kerr, the FPA raised more than \$12,000 to make the pantry area more accessible and to decrease overall wait times. Architectural designs were donated by neighbor Bob Baumbach.

Front door campaign

Led by Anne George and Darlene Rushing, the FPA raised more than \$2,000, which included a grant from the local Sprout Fund and donated services by Signs by Tomorrow, and the South Side design firm ThoughtForm, to provide better lighting and create a more welcoming entrance to the pantry.



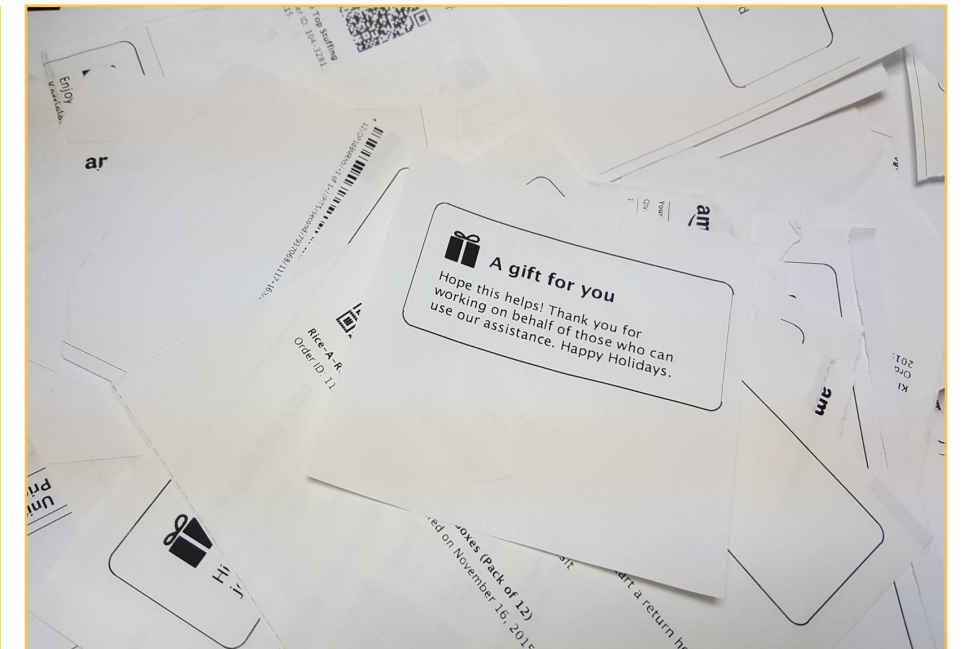
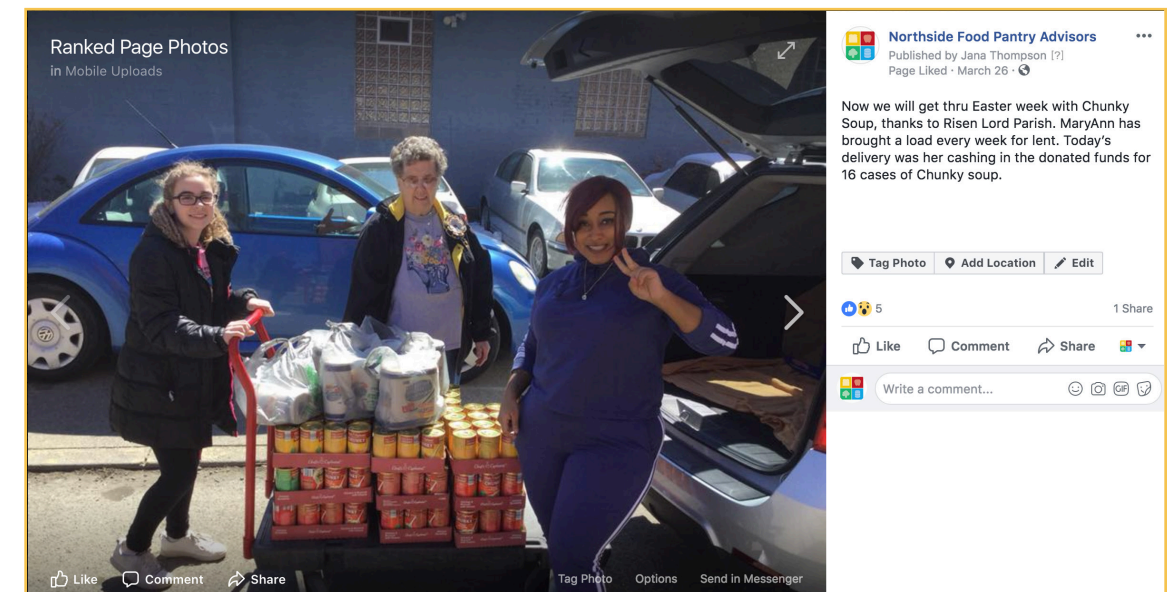
6. Community ownership

Bake sales, house collection jars and advocates

Children and teens have gotten involved, pitching their own project ideas, such as bake sales at the annual Mexican War Streets neighborhood house tour and yard sale. Both the MWS neighborhood and the neighborhood of Manchester help spread awareness of the pantry, donating advertising space each year in their house tour guides. And neighborhood groups regularly hold their own dinners and events that result in cash donations to the pantry.

Volunteers who help say thank you

Thanking our donors is a critical part of the process. We are still working out the best process, but draft language has been created by volunteer development professionals for both mailed letters and email responses. Volunteers help us send out all the thank yous in January, so that all of our donors from the prior year receive documents they can use for filing their taxes.



7. Informational nights

Once or twice a year, the FPA holds an informational night at the pantry itself, in the evenings. This event successfully attracts new volunteers and the donors, giving them access to the physical space and the ability to ask direct questions of both the NCM executive director and the pantry manager.

Northside Food Pantry *is operated by
Northside Common Ministries, an affiliate
of Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania*

1601 Brighton Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15212
412.323.1170

northsidefoodpantry.org

NORTH SIDE
**FOOD
PANTRY**

