

# Making a difference at Food For People

Volunteers needed to help with charitable food distributions

*By Maureen McGarry*



After numerous visits to see her grandchildren, Melissa Hoffman decided it was time to leave Salt Lake City and make Humboldt County her new home. Once she got here, she knew she wanted to do something to help her new community.

In her last job in Salt Lake City, she worked at a nonprofit that served low-income households and seniors by designing home improvements for people with disabilities. She was a residential designer in architectural design.

Before Salt Lake City, she had volunteered for 10 years with Habitat for Humanity while living in Florida. She found it to be a stress reliever on the weekends from her very high-stress job as a systems analyst in computers.

"I loved it because the volunteer work was very hands-on and outdoors," she said. Her work and volunteering focused on housing.

Once in Humboldt, volunteering at the local food bank felt like a natural transition. She has been a volunteer at Food for People now for two years. Hoffmann likes the hands-on volunteer work. "I was looking for someplace where I could truly feel useful."

Now a Eureka resident, she works at Food for People in the pantry as an intake interviewer. She also enjoys working at the produce market during the summer.

"It's a really fun thing to do one Thursday a month from May to October," she said. "When you volunteer at Food for People, you are seeing the immediate results of what you're doing. It is a good fit for me."

Hoffmann is also an RSVP volunteer, which means her work at Food for People is tracked and counted by the Corporation for National Community Service.

Hoffmann just took on a new role at Food for People, volunteering for the Senior Homebound Program. There's a set route with five to seven stops delivering food to homebound seniors once a month. The food allotment consists of a bag of groceries — mostly canned goods and bread — and a bag of fresh produce.

According to Phillip Anderson, FFP volunteer coordinator, there are 15 routes that deliver in Eureka — all to homebound seniors. There are a few routes for Arcata. Southern Humboldt comes and picks up their "Senior Brown Bags," which are then redistributed through churches and community centers.

"We are trying to get a steady group of volunteers in three more routes, and also need some backup drivers," said Erin Tharp, Community Food Programs coordinator. "It only takes about an hour to deliver and do the paperwork for the list of clients."

For seniors in need to sign up for this program, they are required to fill out a Senior Brown Bag application and show proof of income and ID.

"We sign seniors up on-site at Food for People and at Silvercrest in Eureka, at the Co-op Community Kitchen in Arcata, and at Mountain View Apartments in Fortuna," Tharp said.

Hoffmann realizes that some seniors may be a little reluctant to come to a food bank to pick up their food. Many don't have transportation. They also may have age-related disabilities that make mobility difficult.

"I know sometimes people might be a little concerned about the clientele at Food for People, but it's really a mix of people. No one seems any better or worse than anyone else. It's a very upbeat place to work."

Food for People holds an orientation for prospective volunteers each Monday. "Potential volunteers can come down and see how it all works," said Hoffmann, who loves working at Food for People and encourages others to get involved.

"I worked full-time for so many years. When I quit, I wondered, 'What am I going to do?' Food for People needs more volunteers for the senior program. It's a growing need. There would be no Food for People without volunteers. It's one place where volunteers are invaluable."

For more information on volunteering at Food for People, contact Phillip Anderson at 445-3166, ext. 310, or contact VCOR/RSVP at 442-3763.

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