

STREETWISE

EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO WORK

FOR 27 YEARS

Chicago's
Fight
for
Food
Justice



venmo



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- Kellie O’Connell, CEO, Lakeview Pantry



Beyond the Pantry

Lakeview Pantry, one of Chicago’s largest and longest-operating food pantries, serves about 9,000 unique individuals annually through its client-choice pantry model that offers a grocery store-like experience where clients can pick up two weeks’ worth of their choices of wide-ranging nutritious foods, with the opportunity to come back weekly for fresh fruits, vegetables and bread.

“Oftentimes our clients have to make really tough trade-off choices,” says Kellie O’Connell, CEO of Lakeview Pantry, “Do I pay for rent and utilities this month, or do I buy food? Do I purchase the medication I need, or do I put food on the table for my family?”

In order to reach more community members, Lakeview Pantry launched in September an online market, the first of its kind in Chicago, where clients can order food available at the physical pantry and pick up at their convenience.

“It really cuts down on the time spent coming in, and it amps up the dignity factor for folks that might feel embarrassed or nervous about coming into a food pantry,” O’Connell says.

Those experiencing food insecurity usually are dealing with other life issues that make access to food all the more challenging, such as unemployment, unstable housing and health struggles.

At Lakeview Pantry, the nonprofit offers counseling for clients dealing with anxiety, depression and generalized grief, serving 2,500 people annually.

“We address the immediate need of hunger when people come in, and we pair it with social services and mental health counseling to address whatever might be going on beneath the hunger – what’s bringing them in,” O’Connell says.

At Heartland Alliance Health, the leading healthcare provider for the lowest income people in Chicago, Elizabeth Murphy, a community dietitian, provides dietary evaluations to clients at federally qualified health centers, many of whom are experiencing homelessness. She frequently consults with low-income patients experiencing diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

“It makes it a little more challenging when you are unstably housed to be able to prepare foods or know where your next meal is coming from – what you’re going to be able to get at the soup kitchen or what you’re going to be able to get at the food pantry,” Murphy said.

V.W., a 49-year-old StreetWise vendor living in an Uptown SRO, or single room occupancy housing, worked with Murphy for eight months through a weekly program focused on behaviors for healthy lifestyles for people dealing with dietary and mental illnesses. From exercise classes to tours of local grocery stores, V.W. learned about portion control and nutritious eating tips, in addition to developing fitness habits.