

How does FISH Work?

The FISH phone number (277-0818) is keyed to an answering machine. People who need food are referred to FISH by the Department of Labor, churches, social workers, health clinics, Alaska 211 and neighbors. Try calling the FISH number to see what you hear.

The FISH Help Line opens at 8 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and the last 2 Saturdays of each month. On those days, a volunteer takes the first 20 messages on the machine and calls those people back to get details about their needs, the size of their family and their address. The first question they ask is: "Have you received food from FISH within the last 30 days?" This is the only limiting criterion we have for helping folks.

The telephone volunteer relays the client information to the volunteer packer for the day who writes it all down on index cards. The names and addresses are then checked against lists we keep in the FISH pantry to be sure the client is eligible, that is, has not received food in the last 30 days. If anyone is ineligible, we add a name as needed from the day's call list. Typically, FISH receives many more calls for food help than we can accommodate.

The packer(s) packs groceries for each family, using a guide as to how much of each staple to give based on the size of the family and ages of the children. FISH tries to honor special requests and dietary needs and allergies. They prepare grocery bags that are ready to go by about 1pm.

Two volunteers are scheduled each day to deliver to the 20 families on our list, so that no one has to make more than 10 stops. The packer divides the deliveries into the East and West sides of town. It takes about 2 hours to deliver the food. Many of our volunteers find they can do this job after work. Drivers use the cards prepared by the packers and often call clients with their cell phones so that able-bodied people can pick up the food at the car. **FISH is the largest food pantry in Anchorage that delivers food to people's homes on a regular schedule.**

The pantry is stocked by volunteer shoppers who scour The Food Bank of Alaska (FBA) for its supplies and fill in what's needed mostly from Costco. A typical shopping bill is about \$1000 per week if we haven't had a recent food drive. Each shopper keeps the pantry stocked for one week a month. We also have staples supplied by several churches: Anchor Park Methodist - tuna fish, St. Mary's Episcopal -peanut butter, Gloria Dei Lutheran - baby food, First Presbyterian- pasta, St. Innocent's Cathedral – soup. St. John Methodist has two huge food drives a year that completely fill the pantry. Turnagain Methodist and First Congregational Church both have a monthly food collection, and various scout troops and school groups hold food drives throughout the year.

FISH operates completely through **70+ volunteers**. FISH has no paid staff. A volunteer does the schedule; volunteers stock the shelves and keep the pantry clean. Volunteers shop and stock the pantry, contact our clients, pack the food, and deliver it. We also rely entirely on donated food and funds. We are not connected to any government agency or programs.

Money for the staples in the FISH pantry comes from individual donations and grants from public spirited businesses, like Wells Fargo and BP. Switchboard Alaska and Beltrami Associates, PC donate accounting and the answering service to FISH. Community organizations like the Church World Service (The CROP WALK) and the National Association of Letter Carriers also contribute. FISH is always working to increase its outreach to other businesses and organizations. Our largest single fund-raiser is the annual FISH Golf Tournament, which began in 1992. Nearly 50% of our budget is raised at this annual event.

FISH has a governing (up to) 7 member board that meets quarterly to plan fundraisers, review finances, discuss pantry supplies, etc. Board members may or may not be active volunteers also.