

Remote Food Locker Program Bethel Community



The Bethel Food Locker program is designed to combat food insecurity in a rural and underserved area of Watauga County. Leveraging a substantial grant from Second Harvest Food Bank, Hospitality House of Northwest N.C. embarked on a mission to provide nutritious, locally sourced produce and meals to our community members.

This innovative program not only addresses the immediate needs for fresh food but also funnels money into the local economy by purchasing exclusively from the High Country Food Hub and F.A.R.M. Café, ensuring that every dollar spent helps to sustain local food production.



In 2023, the program served an average of 40 clients every month, ages ranging from 3 months to 84 years. Each household received a delivery twice a month full of healthy, all-local groceries and fresh frozen meals averaging around \$100-150.

Grant Impact: Instrumental in developing Bethel Food Locker, supporting local agriculture, and promoting food as medicine.

Nutritional Tailoring: Food is medicine, so our team customizes food boxes for clients with diabetes, celiac disease, and food intolerances, offering vital support and filling nutritional gaps in their unique diets.

Local Produce: Commitment to local-only produce benefits local farmers and ensures clients receive fresh, nutritious food. We spend close to \$1000 every week on strictly locally produced food.

Rural Accessibility: Overcame rural settings and logistical challenges to improve client access to the program.



Bethel Community



The Bethel Community in Watauga County sits on the North Carolina - Tennessee border and is a two-hour round trip from Boone - the county seat and closest town.

Households here live in a food desert with little to no access to fresh, local, healthy food. Their nearest "grocery store" is a Dollar General ten miles away.

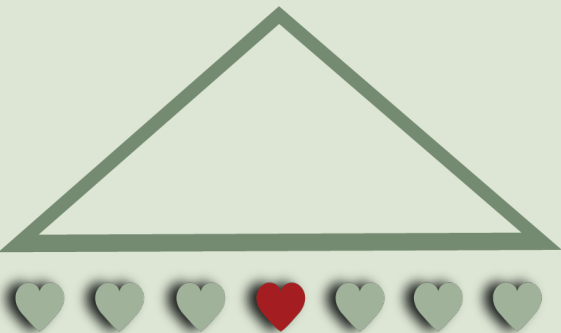
Many families here live below the federal poverty line and can only afford one tank of gas per month. Most often they use that tank of gas to "come to town" and take care of all personal needs - doctor appointments, prescription refills, food pantry visits, etc. in a single day.

Additionally, this region has a high percentage of elderly residents, living on a fixed income, with limited mobility and no means of transportation.

This Food Locker program, conveniently located outside Bethel School, the heart of the community, is a literal lifeline for people living in this rural community.



- **Geographical Challenges:** Overcame rural isolation and initial personnel scarcity.
- **Program Transition:** Program stabilized after changing leadership multiple times. Original team from Bell & Howell, Bethel School, and Hospitality House moved on to other positions, so the program experienced continuity challenges. As of May 2023, Aaren Grant, took over the program as Local Food Coordinator for Hospitality House.
- **Growth Since May 2023:** Expanded from 10 families to 32, serving approximately 90 clients and now delivering twice each week to begin 2024.
- **Impact & Necessity:** Demonstrated the program's increasing importance and effect, we saw consistent demand and need for food box deliveries every week of this past year.
- **Client Communication:** Established direct communication lines with each client, enhancing satisfaction and engagement.
- **Positive Feedback:** Achieved "Very Good" ratings in every on-site review of the locker program.



HOSPITALITY HOUSE
 NORTHWEST
 NORTH CAROLINA

"When the Bethel Food Locker team learned about my son's severe autism and his very specific dietary needs, they didn't hesitate to go above and beyond. They tailored the food boxes just for him, addressing his unique preferences. I cannot express enough gratitude for the care and dedication they showed. There is a clear depth of their commitment and the significant impact their program has on families like ours."

—Bethel Resident and Client of the Bethel Food Locker Program



The Bethel Food Locker program stands as the "first of its kind in rural America." Supported by Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest N.C., we have not only met the nutritional needs of our community but have also fostered a sustainable local economy that benefits farmers, clients, and the broader community of Bethel.

Looking ahead, we are committed to expanding our reach, refining our operations, and providing essential services to those in need, ensuring that everyone has access to local, healthy food.

