NW COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRYNOTES

Fall | 2026



Judith Ingram
Founder and
Director, NWCF

A message from Judith Ingram, NWCF Founder and Director

Recently I've been thinking about how many people it takes to make our pantry thrive.

On any given weekend, about 100 volunteers deliver food, pack it up, and distribute it to our guests. But they are just one part of a much larger community. Scores of neighbors keep things moving in large and small ways, donating food and supplies, contributing money, and partnering with us to help us meet our mission.

Food may be our focus, but community is our real strength— and our aspiration. This pantry exists because people show up for one another, again and again. I'm deeply grateful for the extraordinary community of people who sustain it.

Sadly, we are mourning the loss of one of those people, Joe Ficke, who joined us in 2021 and quickly established himself as our undisputed recycling czar. Joe passed away in September at age 60.



Joe's life at the pantry is a reminder of what community really looks like. It is all of the people who notice what needs doing and step in—whether that means delivering a bag of groceries, making a donation, flattening a cardboard box, or simply showing up.

Each act matters and together, they are what make a community strong.

— Judy

Connecting guests with services

Naomi Whitaker knows something about overcoming barriers. As a college athlete, she did hurdles and high jump, two events that demand focus, persistence, and grace under pressure. Those attributes now come in handy in her role as the pantry's new social-resource coordinator, part of a pilot program NWCF launched last summer, where she helps guests navigate the sometimes confounding maze of available social service resources.



"Many guests are juggling multiple stressors at once, and sometimes what they need most is someone who

For many guests, finding programs tailored to specific situations—from breaking the cycle of eviction to accessing legal advice to finding mental health care—can be daunting. “These resources can be overwhelming to navigate,” says Whitaker, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in family health at the University of Maryland.

will simply listen, help them sort through what’s happening, and point them toward the right support.” —NAOMI WHITAKER

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

An urban oasis feeds thousands





If you’re driving through the Brookland neighborhood, you could easily miss the iron gates that open onto *Franciscan Monastery Garden Guild,* a hidden gem that feeds thousands of food-insecure residents across DC. Bordered by a fruit orchard and a grape arbor, rows of garden beds overflow with vegetables, herbs, and flowers. A few yards past a pre-Civil War blue barn sits a sprawling greenhouse. Twenty beehives produce flavorful honey, which volunteers harvest, bottle, and sell to help cover the Guild’s operating costs.

The urban farm provides about 130 pounds of seasonal produce to NWCF each week.

The farm has been a regular donor to NWCF since 2021. Squash, tomatoes, Swiss chard, peppers, eggplant, zucchini and okra are among the vegetables that make their way to the pantry. The orchard adds its own bounty of apples, pomegranates, pears, persimmons, and even paw paws.

“We grow what we can and make sure it gets to the people who need it most,” says manager Tyler Hendon. Since he began volunteering in 2019, the farm has become ”a place for me to find respite from the rest of DC” and a way to give back. Now a paid employee who runs the farm, he notes how the place evokes a similar sense of peace for the many volunteers who till the soil, tend the plants and flowers, and bring in the harvest.

Goodness by the pound



JULY CABBAGE
800 LBS!



AUGUST TOMATOES
1700 LBS!



SEPTEMBER CORN
1800 LBS!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

College fare on the menu

When American University students realized the large quantity of untouched, perfectly edible leftovers from their dining halls going to waste each week, they reached out to Caroline Boone, who manages AU's zero-waste and sustainability efforts. The problem of excess prepared food is not unique to AU, but Boone's solution to partner with NWCF has been a win-win.The school now donates about 110 pounds of prepared food to the pantry every week.

Every Friday, Boone's team delivers multiple containers of tasty food that have been methodically packed and sealed by the cafeteria's chefs.

On our end, pantry volunteers portion it into portable containers for Sunday distribution. The donation has enhanced the quantity and variety of nutritious meals we can offer guests, particularly those who have no access to cooking facilities, and the reviews have been overwhelmingly positive.

Okra is okay by us!





Recently, 320 pounds of okra made its way from a six-acre farm in Damascus, MD, to the NWCF pantry courtesy of Nia Nyamweya, the founder of the Black woman-owned Beauty Blooms Farm. She had learned about the pantry serendipitously during a walk around the UDC law school, and she and her partner Nick Walker immediately offered to donate the produce.

Six years ago, she launched Beauty Blooms Farm to celebrate cultural heritage through food, which dovetailed with her interest in healing justice. “I want to provide people with food they grew up with and love,” she says, “foods that relax our nervous system, particularly among people of color.” Amaranth, a green leafy vegetable, and okra are two culturally significant crops she grows on her organic farm.

Nia’s father grew up farming in his native Kenya before moving to Maryland, where he operated a landscaping company for 40 years. In addition to farming, Nia is pursuing a law degree at UDC so she can specialize in agriculture law and help farmers of color.

NBC4 and Telemundo44 give $1,000 to NWCF

In July, NBC4 and sister station Telemundo44 awarded NW Community Food a gift of $1,000 through the stations' *Food 4 Families* program. “We are so grateful to NBC4 and Telemundo44 for this generous gift,” said NWCF founder and director Judith Ingram. “We have a lot of people on various assistance programs, and those programs simply aren’t keeping up with people’s needs.” The funds purchased an overflowing truckload of watermelons that went to every guest during our Sunday distribution in August.

Want to help? We'd love it!



DONATE

Your financial support keeps shelves stocked and our fridges full.



BRING FOOD

Drop off non-perishable and household items on Sat. and Sun.,10 am-3:30 pm.



VOLUNTEER

Join our volunteer team—sorting food, greeting guests, or making home deliveries.

Unsubscribe

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