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# **SWAMPSCOTT PANTRY STILL FEEDING FAMILIES**

BY [DAVID MCLELLAN](https://www.itemlive.com/author/dmclellanitemlive-com/)| June 1, 2020

SWAMPSCOTT — Laura Spathanas isn’t wary when a driver she doesn’t recognize pulls into her driveway: She knows it’s someone bringing canned and boxed goods, or even whole bags of groceries to donate to the Anchor Food Pantry’s food assistance program.

Those foods go out to dozens of seniors and families each week, delivered by Spathanas, other members of the Anchor Food Pantry Board of Directors, and volunteers, and Spathanas said the program will keep rolling all summer.

Swampscott has run a town-wide food assistance program since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Swampscott High School, all residents — not just students — of Swampscott and Nahant have been able to pick up free meals daily. That “grab-and-go” meal program is ending June 19, the end of the school year.

However, there have been other meal programs operating during the pandemic, namely from Anchor Food Pantry and the Swampscott Senior Center, and Spathanas said they will continue to provide meals after the school program ends.

“We have about 30 seniors on Wednesdays that we deliver meals to, and about 50 families on Monday and Wednesday that come to pick up food,” Spathanas said.

The Anchor Food Pantry was an idea conceived just last fall, and a group of residents began looking for a permanent place to put the pantry. With COVID-19’s onset, the pantry operated from the Senior Center, setting up tables at the high school to complement the school program, and accepting donations at Spathanas’ house, 43 Berkshire St.

“This is an awful time emotionally, and economically, and personally, with people losing loved ones and people having lost their jobs,” she said. “For some reason, our group, our Anchor Food Pantry group, had started talking about this food pantry in the fall, when none of us knew the pandemic would happen. I believe that timing was for a purpose.”

“When we spoke, we weren’t planning on getting up and running until this month, in June. With COVID-19, and the need increasing, the Anchor Food Pantry started that week of March 16, right away, when everything got shut down,” Spathanas said. “We were able to put together 40 bags of groceries that week, and we had no money, just the planning we had done since the fall.”

Since the Anchor Food Pantry got involved with COVID-19 food assistance the week of March 16, the pantry has delivered more than 500 bags of groceries, and has supported more than 60 seniors and more than 60 families.

“The need was immediate, for families that were already struggling, and then others who, in the blink of an eye, all of a sudden are called and told not to go into work, and have no check, no money,” Spathanas said. “This pandemic is not a good thing, but it has moved the food pantry into a position it could serve.”

Spathanas said the goal is to find a permanent location for Anchor Food Pantry by the fall. For now, the immediate focus is continuing to provide meals once the school meal program ends.

To fine-tune that goal, a survey is being circulated among residents online asking what type of assistance residents have been receiving, what level of assistance they will still need, and preferred pick up or delivery options.

Spathanas said the survey will help dictate how the pantry serves residents after June 19, and that hopefully the group will be able to deliver meals on Mondays and Wednesdays to residents. The food pantry is also collecting information on whether people would rather receive prepared meals or grocery items.

Anchor Food Pantry is raising money on its Paypal account, available on the pantry’s Facebook page.