

BackStory



Volunteers unload food at The Cupboard's opening.

A Stocked Pantry

BROWARD COUNTY'S FIRST COMPLETELY KOSHER FOOD PANTRY AIMS TO ELIMINATE HUNGER WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

BY ALYSSA FISHER

Stephanie Silverman Houser has a spiel. As director of The Cupboard, a new kosher food pantry in Davie, she's responsible for its day-to-day operations. She efficiently gives the breakdown, explaining how the pilot program has been helping 100 families struggling with food insecurity.

But when asked why there's a kosher—adhering to Jewish religious dietary laws—food bank in Broward County, Houser slows down, and her tone becomes softer.

A statistic spurred action.

About a year ago, the director of Goodman Jewish Services, Stephen Jackman, was at a board meeting when he heard there was a growing number of Jews in Broward County going to bed hungry. He looked at his friend.

"You've got to be kidding," he recalls saying. "We live in a world where we never see that."

They combed through information from Feeding South Florida and U.S. Census Bureau and rounded out the research with a demographic study by the Jewish Federation. They found that in Broward County, 2,300 Jewish households—about 4,400 people—report an income below federal poverty levels, with 1,800 households reporting they don't have enough to eat.

He got to work, reaching out to the community for financial support. With the addition of \$100,000 allocated by the Goodman Jewish Services board, The Cupboard celebrated its ribbon cutting Sept. 14. It has since been receiving donations in droves.

"This is a happy project," Jackman says. "It makes the people who need the assistance happy, and anybody who touches this feels happy."

The process begins with an appointment. If a family qualifies for assistance, they're asked if they keep kosher. On the wall of the warehouse where The Cupboard is located (4703 SW 51st St., Bay 4) there's a laminated, rabbi-approved list of kosher-food symbols it can stock.

Families get 15 minutes to shop the shelves of the warehouse, which is equipped with refrigerators holding produce and freezers stocked with frozen chicken. There also is a delivery component for elderly and other homebound clients, who account for nearly half of The Cupboard's demographic.

"Think about a Holocaust survivor; they should never have to compromise their religious values because of financial circumstances," Houser says. "As a community, we want to support their desire to maintain kosher."

Get Involved

- The Cupboard will accept any donations, Houser says. Whatever does not meet its needs is sorted and shared with another local pantry.
- "We're dependent on volunteer muscle," she says. The pantry provides service hours. A chaperone is needed for those 18 and under, and drivers must be 21 and over.
- For more information, visit jfsbroward.org/cupboard.