

# BLUE CAP PANTRY BRINGS FRESH GOODS TO A FOOD DESERT

## SUCCESS STORY

Deborah Shirley, a caretaker living in Robbins, took a break from her daily duties to pick up groceries for her family. Unfortunately for her and her neighbors, there are no quality grocery stores within the city limits.

In addition to living in an area known as a “food desert,” Deborah was working on a tight budget. Instead of traveling miles to the closest affordable store, she stopped at Blue Cap Pantry, a food bank serving Blue Island, Robbins and the surrounding communities.

“You know, it’s kinda rough out here. You gotta go to other towns to get something fresh,” Deborah said. “I really do appreciate it. Times are really hard, and it’s just a blessing to be able to come here.”

The creation of the Blue Cap Pantry illustrates the power of partnerships built through United Way of Metro Chicago’s Neighborhood Network Initiative.

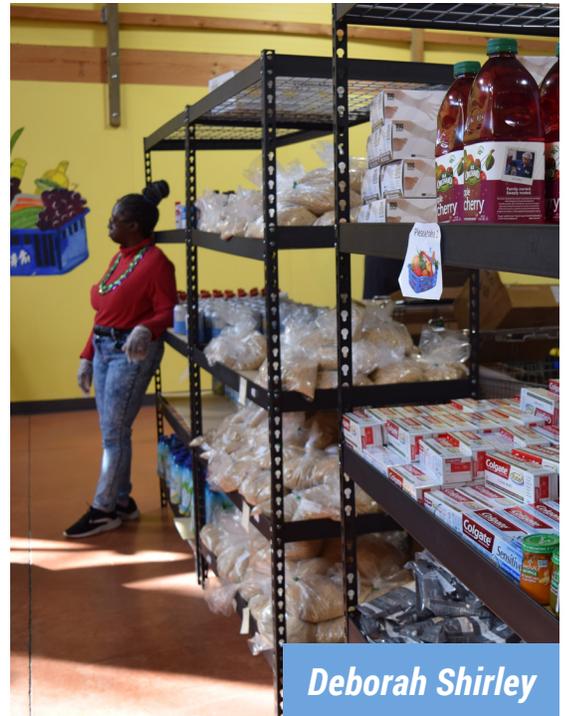
Members of the Blue Island-Robbins Neighborhood Network agreed that issues faced by children and families in the area, like poor health and high poverty, are rooted in a lack of access to healthy foods. Together, the Network built the Blue Cap Pantry to change that.

Unlike some pantries that offer only dry goods, Blue Cap boasts an abundance of fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs. Instead of receiving prepackaged bags, shoppers select their own groceries just as they would at the store.

Not only do the pantry’s patrons benefit from access to free food, the pantry’s volunteers, most of whom are Blue Cap clients, also shop there and learn important life skills through their service.

Each Tuesday, they open the doors and greet patrons, stock shelves, and load groceries into shoppers’ cars. This experience prepares them for jobs in the community and teaches them management skills to use in their day to day lives, like planning a budget for a shopping trip.

Keith Konsoer, a long-time resident of Blue Island, has worked at the pantry every week since it opened. “I love everything here. They’re all my friends,” he said of the other volunteers. ■



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