Community Cupboard food bank improves shopping experience

The changes to the Cupboard are modeled after what other food banks have done, Mark said. "You could say this is a wave of the future for food banks, providing people with more choice in their food banking experience. They can pick the foods they want for the month, instead of being presented with a box or something like that. It gives people more options," Mark said.

Each client gets 75 points per month, then more points depending on family size. Each family member earns 10 additional points with a maximum of 135 points. Mark said those are just the parameters set up initially. He thinks they will probably end up tweaking things, but there had to be a starting point. They will see how it goes from here.

"You get your points and we have some guides, which can help you shop. You tick off the points as you use them. Then when you're done, we tick off the points used for that day. We make note of that. You can come and go as much as you want throughout the month. It goes into the decision, Mark said. They get a lot of dried beans, which don't fly off the shelves, so that might cost a point.

"Things like peanut butter is more expensive so we end up buying it. Those might be two or three points and there might be a limit on how many you can get per month. There is a variety of factors that goes into it. We try to make it useful for folks so they can get maximum value, but also balance that against what we have to purchase," Mark said.

There are also non-food items available like toilet paper, toothpaste and pet food. Most of those items were purchased by the Cupboard, while the Humane Society donated the pet food. Mark said they typically have pet food on a daily basis.

At this point, it is not known whether this new method will cause the Cupboard to give out more food or less.

"It really hard to say, at this point. We are going to wait and see how it plays out. What people choose to take home with them is going to determine what we keep on the shelves. Before, I basically filled the gaps with things we were missing. Now, people are choosing what they want. That will shape what we keep on the shelves," Mark said.

It used to be folks could drop by anytime to collect the free items like pastries and breads. As you can imagine, some took advantage of that more than others. The change is that now that is part of the food bank, so perhaps more equitable.

"It was always once a month food box, but there were separate sections. There was the food bank and the free stuff for everybody to grab out front. We've wrapped all the food into the same system now. It's all part of the food bank," Mark said. "In that sense, I think it will be more equitable because the food that does come in. Everyone will have equal access to that food based on the points they have. In certain way, it will be more equitable."

Ian Dunn can be reached at 548-5286 or editor@leavenworthecho.com.