

## BY POPULAR DEMAND: INTRODUCING “PANTRY FRESH”

This spring we piloted Pantry Fresh, a program modeled after popular meal kit services like Hello Fresh and Blue Apron. The idea is simple: every month, clients can pick up a prepackaged meal prep kit that contains a recipe and the ingredients to make it.

Traditional meal kit services are expensive and out of reach for most clients. Jo Ella, a client dealing with health issues related to her diet, looked into a few of those services on her quest to learn how to prepare her own healthy food.

“I refused to cook as a child and that defiance has stuck around,” said Jo Ella. “I don’t like to cook! But I have weight issues and I want to start learning recipes, cooking veggies. I’m supposed to eat lean protein and kale—what the heck is kale?—but I don’t know where to start. I looked into Hello Fresh and it was highway robbery. Who can afford that? So, I started complaining to our Client Advisory Committee and saying we should start our own at the Center.”

### Food that’s fun *and* nutritious

Client Advisory Committee members talked about ways to feel more confident about cooking and came up with recipe ideas that would be delicious and easy to make at home. Our staff then worked to adapt the recipes to include ingredients regularly found at the Center. Bringing home the instructions and ingredients, our testers made careful notes about adjusting preparation instructions and ways to boost the flavor of the final product.

“It’s a really fun project to be involved in,” said Danielle, Development Director at the Center. “When we bring home a recipe to our ‘test kitchens’ we start with the instructions as written, making little tweaks along the way if we think they will improve the dish. Then, we all get together to compare notes and finalize the recipe before it goes out to clients.”

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“These kits are easy and healthy. I’m figuring out how to follow a recipe. I’m trying new things. All because of this program.”

—Jo Ella, client and board member



Volunteers Kristen and Madin making tacos at home

## COOK WITH US—AND BE “SOCIAL” ABOUT IT!

If all this talk about Pantry Fresh is making you hungry, join us and make our latest recipes in your own home. If you take photos or videos while you’re prepping and cooking, we’d love to see them. You’ll find the recipes and photo-sharing instructions at [northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh](http://northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh).

TAG US!



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During the first month of Pantry Fresh, we distributed a spice kit including **garlic, cumin, oregano, chili powder, pepper,** and **cinnamon** to each family so that they would have the right options for future meal kit recipes.

Exciting partnership opportunities are available for the Pantry Fresh program! If you're a local business interested in sponsoring this unique program for clients, please email Danielle Brown, Development Director at [danielle@northampton-survival.org](mailto:danielle@northampton-survival.org).

# Unpacking the kits: the many stories of Pantry Fresh

## WAS IT A GLITCH?

Clients placing online orders for curbside pickup can request a Pantry Fresh kit along with their regular groceries. When our Pantry Manager Alexander noticed that Jasmine's order included the shepherd's pie kit **three weeks in a row**, he wondered whether the online store had malfunctioned. When he followed up, Jasmine said, "I ordered the Pantry Fresh meal kit twice to get comfortable making it. Now that I'm used to the recipe, I'm ordering it again because I can get creative with it—I feel confident that I can. We're going to try it with ground turkey [instead of chicken] tonight and some extra veggies I'm picking up today."

"The staff actually eats the same food you give out? That is so cool!"

Jasmine's daughter Ava piped up from the backseat of the car, "I love shepherd's pie!" "Ava is a real picky eater," Jasmine said, "but she does love this recipe. It's why we keep asking for it in our curbside orders—now it's in regular rotation."

Smiling, Alexander gave Jasmine and Ava a sneak peek of the next month's turkey taco recipe and mentioned that Center staff were testing it out at home.

"The staff actually eats the same food you give out?" exclaimed Jasmine. "That is so cool! I can't wait to come back for the tacos."



## FRESH ROSEMARY BRINGS THE WOW FACTOR

When our Office Manager Chris and his husband tested the shepherd's pie recipe at home, they thought it was tasty but ultimately missing something that made it feel like the comfort food they remembered.

"When we made the dish for dinner it was delicious, but it was missing something that made it 'shepherd's pie,'" Chris said. "We realized the addition of rosemary would really bring the whole meal together."

Back in the office, we got to work trying to source rosemary, which isn't a regular staple of the pantry. We quickly decided *fresh* rosemary would be an even bigger treat, so Program Director Sarah and Distribution Manager Carlos met to figure out which of our vendors could get some. We tested a small batch and once we deemed it was of good quality and could be easily packaged for clients, we ordered enough for all the Pantry Fresh kits going out the following week.

"Having the opportunity to test and improve our Pantry Fresh meals is a really wonderful way to feel connected to the programming here at the Center," said Chris. "I love hearing that people enjoy making the recipe at home!"

## Background in culinary services inspires client

I have had much training in the culinary field. I've been to culinary conferences and cooked with famous chefs from around the world, had my own restaurant and catering business, trained people how to cook, and worked in culinary services for 15 years. And I have still needed the Survival Center over the years to make ends meet; first, as a single mother of three kids and as a retired disabled woman now.

Food services and human services have been most of my life's profession. Now I use that knowledge in my

work with the Client Advisory Committee. When [the idea for] Pantry Fresh came up, I thought shepherd's pie would make a great meal kit. Because the kits are easy to prepare, you can have dinner on the table and not worry about having the money to buy ingredients to feed your family or yourself.

The Center is so helpful! I feel like I owe this place some dedication for the service it has provided me over the years. So, I am very happy to be a part of this group and to help make Pantry Fresh a reality. —*Laura, a client*

## Chomping into Turkey Tacos



## Digging into Shepherd's Pie



## THE MAKING OF A TACO: A RECIPE TESTER TELLS ALL

I'm not the best cook in the world, but I can follow a recipe pretty well and tacos are always an easy go-to meal at my house. I chose to make the vegetarian version of our Pantry Fresh taco kit because I'd never tried the veggie crumbles we're featuring. Trying new foods is one of the best parts of cooking and I definitely wasn't disappointed.

The prep for these tacos was quick and straightforward and I cruised right through it. As I was working through the instructions, I found that our original recipe didn't have enough liquid to fully integrate the ingredients, so I decided to add a little salsa. (I'm still patting myself on the back for that idea.) And that's one of the best parts of Pantry Fresh in my opinion: the recipe is there as a scaffolding but there are tons of opportunities to make it your own with suggested additions and encouragement to experiment.

I dressed my tacos up with some extra sour cream I had in the fridge and some hot sauce because I love spice. Then it was time to dig in. I'm not ashamed to say that I probably ate about six or seven of these tacos before I made myself stop. I'm usually a flour tortilla kinda guy, so it was nice to mix it up with the Mi Tierra corn tortillas. Am I a corn convert? I might be!

Recipe testing with the rest of the team here at the Survival Center means that the morning after we try the recipe, there's a flurry of excitement in sharing our successes and missteps. We all want to show off our photos and trade suggestions about how we can make this the best recipe possible. Our vision for Pantry Fresh centers around a real community experience, and here at the Center, the staff is the first step in that process.

—*Alexander, Pantry Manager*



## LOCAL BUSINESS REFUSES TO TAKE OUR MONEY!

When we called Mi Tierra to purchase 350 packages of their popular fresh organic tortillas for our turkey taco Pantry Fresh kit, co-owners Jorge Sosa and Michael Docter said,



"absolutely not!" and **donated them instead.**

A regular donor to the Center, Mi Tierra is a local tortilla bakery that specializes in tortillas made from 100% organic non-GMO New England corn, ground limestone, and water. They're processed using an ancient method called nixtamalization, which is a simple way to extract the naturally occurring nutrients out of the corn, maximizing the nourishment you get when you eat the tortillas!



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**WELCOMING NEW STAFF MEMBERS**



**Danielle Brown**  
 Development Director

*Having grown up in a low-income family, I know how vital places like the Center are in ensuring that folks can access necessary resources. I'm grateful to work with people who prioritize working with clients in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.*



**Liv Combest**  
 Program Coordinator

*I grew up volunteering at food pantries with my mother and strongly believe that access to nutritious food is a core human right. My experience addressing issues of equity and access helps me connect our clients with Northampton's wide array of social services.*



**Miriam Desgazon**  
 Client Outreach Assistant

*I'm a family clinician with the Institute for Health & Recovery. By also working with the Center, I hope to reach more people who are struggling with food insecurity so that I can provide them with options for obtaining healthy food.*



Be the first to know about exciting programs like Pantry Fresh by updating your email address with the Center. Scan the QR code or visit [northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh](http://northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh) for breaking news and event information.



**MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS**



**Aurora Fields**  
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**Building skills, building community**

For clients who are already comfortable in the kitchen, Pantry Fresh is a fun and simple way to add a new meal to their repertoire. For folks who don't have as much experience cooking from scratch, the kits are intended to be an easy introduction to cooking good food on their own.

Since the recipes don't require too many ingredients, special tools, or overly complicated steps, they provide the building blocks necessary for healthy home cooking: recipes that are simple to follow and allow you to learn as you go. We throw in

preparation tips and hope that as clients get more comfortable in the kitchen, they'll feel at ease substituting ingredients and adding their own flourishes to the recipes.

After several months piloting Pantry Fresh and getting feedback from clients, the meal kits are now offered every month. All the recipes are available in English and Spanish and there's a vegetarian version of each recipe. While the full kits are only available to clients, the recipes are available to everyone! If you want to cook with us, you'll find the recipes online at [northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh](http://northampton-survival.org/pantryfresh).