ACAP prepares celebration for Community Cupboard first birthday

AROOSTOOK COUNTY – Employees at Aroostook County Action Program are preparing a birthday celebration in honor of Presque Isle and Houlton Community Cupboards’ first year helping provide food security to people in Aroostook County.

The public is invited to attend birthday bash celebrations happening concurrently at both the 771 Main Street in Presque Isle and the 91 Military Street in Houlton ACAP office locations on Wednesday, August 30 from noon to 4 p.m. In lieu of traditional birthday gifts, ACAP staff are encouraging people to bring donations of non-perishable food items to help stock the cupboards as we head into the fall season.

On Aug. 31, 2016, ACAP mounted a special wooden cupboard to an exterior wall near the front entrance of its 771 Main Street Presque Isle location. At nearly the same time, ACAP’s Houlton Center also launched their own version of the community cupboard, but opted to locate their project inside the lobby area of their Military Street facility. Since then, that cupboard in Presque Isle has served as a source of food for those who need it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, while people can access the Houlton Cupboard by visiting the center during office hours. Some community members visit the cupboard to leave food items, and others take what they need so they will not go hungry. Before long, the project began to inspire other communities to follow suit.

“Currently, we know about five other cupboards throughout Aroostook County, including the communities of Mars Hill, Washburn, Mapleton, Perham and Houlton,” said Heidi Rackliffe, LSW and ACAP case manager.

With one in four Aroostook County residents facing food insecurity, the cupboards’ all-hours access seemed to fill a need in the community. In addition, the ability to access the cupboards privately, without having to provide names or financial information, appealed to many people who might otherwise avoid a traditional food pantry. The success of the project is evident by how often the cupboards are used.

“The cupboards are used more than we could have ever imagined, verifying that the need is out there. They are stocked by the generosity of the community and used by our neighbors,” said Rackliffe.

The cupboards’ timely launch last year invited local gardeners and farmers to share their bounty. It’s become common throughout the harvesting season to find as many locally grown vegetables, like zucchini, cucumbers and squash available in the cupboard as it is to find more typical non-perishable food items. While ACAP staff primarily support the stocking of the Houlton Center’s cupboard, they do accept donations from the community. Staff also regularly bring in

ACAP provides equal opportunity in employment and services
food to help stock the Presque Isle cupboard location, but the community is a primary contributor as well, and ACAP continues to welcome the donations.

“It is evident, by the use of our cupboard and the others that have since been added, that a critical need is being met as it relates to food insecurity in our region. As we mark the first anniversary of this great community partnership, it is my hope that the milestone will encourage more people to help stock the shelves of these important local resources,” said ACAP Executive Director and CEO Jason Parent.

Rackliffe says there will be sweet treats available to those who stop by at either of the ACAP offices for the birthday celebrations. While the events will bring recognition to the service the cupboards have provided in the community this past year, they will also serve as an opportunity to raise awareness of how hunger impacts our neighbors in Aroostook County. Rackliffe says it’s important to note that the cupboards are not a long term solution if people are facing food insecurity, and anyone who finds themselves depending on a cupboard daily should come in to the office and talk to staff about options.

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ACAP is celebrating 45 Years of Making Life Better in Aroostook County! ACAP provides the people of Aroostook County with services and resources that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, and workforce development services. For more information on ACAP, or to make a tax-deductible contribution, please contact the agency at 771 Main Street, on the web at www.acap-me.org, or by calling 764-3721.