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Irvine Food Pantry Requests ‘Unexpected’ Food Donations



Volunteers sort donated food for the South County Outreach Food Pantry in Irvine, Calif. (Courtesy of South County Outreach Food Pantry)



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A local food pantry in Irvine, California, is seeking out a variety of “unexpected” foods from donors amid heightened demand for such supplies over the last few months.

According to volunteers at South County Outreach Food Pantry, families with children out of school for the summer are in need of sandwich ingredients, specifically peanut butter and jelly.

Additional items needed, officials said, include cooking oils, butter, flour, sugar, baking powder, spices, and condiments. Such ingredients, the nonprofit said, are often forgotten by donors and are needed for cooking certain meals.



Volunteers load groceries into a car at the South County Outreach Food Pantry in Irvine, Calif. (Courtesy of South County Outreach Food Pantry)



Donated food at the Reform Temple of Laguna Woods. (Courtesy of South County Outreach Food Pantry)

The number of those in need has sky-rocketed following economic pressure and the heightened cost of living in the area, according to officials from the nonprofit.

“It’s inflation. It’s gas prices. It’s rents going up. The eviction moratorium is over. So it’s all these things coupled together, where people are really seeing, ‘Oh, wow, it’s gonna be hard to feed our families,’” South County Outreach Director of Programs Catherine Oseguera told The Epoch Times.

The food pantry has reported an increase of new individual clients of about 300 to 400 each month. From January to May of this year, it has served over 11,000 clients, officials said, a 17 percent increase from the same time during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The pantry also reported serving over 7,000 clients from March to May of 2023 alone, which was more than they served for the entire summer of 2022.



Volunteers sort donated food for the South County Outreach Food Pantry in Irvine, Calif. (Courtesy of South County Outreach Food Pantry)



A volunteer hands toys to children at the South County Outreach Food Pantry in Irvine, Calif. (Courtesy of South County Outreach Food Pantry)

“At this rate, we anticipate busier summer months in our pantry than seen in the last four years,” representatives told The Epoch Times in an email.

The organization, which has provided food and aid to low income residents and unhoused individuals in the area since the mid-1980s, said the increased need was due to COVID-19 relief programs ending and other compounding rising economic pressure felt by locals.

Food pantry organizers said such need has driven their efforts even further and provides meaning to their work in the community.

“A lot of teamwork goes into making this operation happen from day to day,” Ms. Oseguera, the pantry’s director of programs, said. “Working here, you cry once a week. When someone is so thankful to get groceries because they were worried about feeding their children tonight, and you know that their kids have gone to bed hungry and that [we were] able to step in and help, means a lot.”