



Community Food Share distributes the compassion by Douglas Brown, The Denver Post

Most nonprofits depend upon volunteers. But at Community Food Share in Longmont, the people who work for free are more than helping hands. They are the backbone of the agency.

"It's a lot of warehouse work. It's moving pallets around. They help us with office work too," said Community Food Share chief executive Jim Baldwin.

The 28-year-old agency serves as the food nerve center for 58 Boulder County and Broomfield County organizations that help people in need.

"I like this kind of work. I like helping people," said volunteer and corporate retiree Brian Crist, 63. Crist was moving food around one recent morning in the warehouse, a large space filled with boxes and refrigerators packed with everything from loaves of locally made whole-grain bread to packs of ground beef and sacks of potatoes and carrots. "I have a heart for helping people who are working and still need help."

Community Food Share each year relies on 2,500 volunteers, who put in more than 35,000 hours. Only 15 people work full-time for the organization. Without volunteers, Community Food Share would have to either hire a lot of new people — thereby pulling resources from the needy — or just offer less. Numerous people depend on the agency.

The agency's region includes at least 50,000 people who have difficulty putting food on the table, Baldwin said. That number includes 10,000 kids in Boulder Valley and St. Vrain school districts who receive free lunches.

The typical customer is "a family of four making less than \$27,000 a year," Baldwin said. "They are employed. They are not homeless. It's staggering."

The point of Community Food Share, he said, is about more than just loaves of bread and canned tuna. Giving people food, he said, removes at least some of the pressure on the family budget. With some of the groceries covered, people have more money to pay the rest of the bills.

The homeless shelters, food banks and soup kitchens in Boulder and Broomfield counties use Community Food Share as a central warehouse. The agency receives shipments every day from donors — most of which are supermarkets ridding their shelves of excess product — and, using its own fleet of trucks, distributes the goods to organizations that need the food.

Broomfield resident and volunteer John Vogt, 69, said he offers his time because "it gives you a good feeling." "You figure you are helping," he said. "These food banks are busier than ever."