

Podcast 104 – Holiday Food Drive

Host: Tania Anderson, CEO ARISE

Guests: Josh Solazzo, Local Systems Advocate/Disability Rights Advocate

Jim Cronk, Independent Living Advocate

Tania Anderson 0:09

Welcome to the ARISE Podcast. I'm Tania Anderson, CEO at ARISE, and it's my pleasure to have with me today. Josh Solazzo, who is our local systems advocate and disability rights advocate in our Oswego office. Welcome Josh.

Josh Solazzo 0:22

Thanks for having me,

Tania Anderson 0:23

And also, Jim Cronk, who is an independent living advocate in our Oswego office. And welcome Jim.

Jim Cronk 0:28

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Tania Anderson 0:29

So, we are getting into the holiday season as we are recording this podcast, and our Oswego office has been for many, as many years as I can remember, putting together a holiday food drive that literally fills the gap in the community. So, Jim, Josh, what have you tell me about this food drive?
Josh,

Josh Solazzo 0:55

Okay, this year is going to be our 14th year. They've been doing it longer than I've been here. But we do 35 baskets for people, usually families that we work with. But we also do get referrals from Office for the Aging in Oswego County, Department of Social Services and VA. So we get the referrals, and then we put together baskets for Christmas for them, so they can have dinner filled with like canned goods, Turkey, all macaroni and cheese, stuffing, all that. And they're according to the size of each family. We put, if there's five people in the family, we'll put more if there's only two.

Tania Anderson 1:41

So, this is a really a coordinated effort. Because I think, as you said, they're families that connect with ARISE for other services. That might be in need of a holiday basket, but the people that are referred to ARISE are folks that there's no other option for them for a basket. Is that how it works?
Jim Cronk That's correct. Tania Anderson Okay, thanks, Jim and and it sounds like there is a lot more in this basket than just one meal.

Jim Cronk 2:07

Yeah, sometimes in the past, we've done things like sandwiches and then things or things for four sandwiches, like even if it's just peanut butter and jelly, but one of the things we always include is usually macaroni and cheese, and we usually try to include a few extra things for the kids, because we know that they're on vacation. So if things work out well enough, we have enough of the supplies, we'll try to add in a few extra boxes of macaroni and cheese, knowing that maybe they might be able to use them another day, or other items along that line. So we do that as often, as much as we possibly can, but it depends on donations and what we have to work with.

Tania Anderson 2:39

So let's, let's talk a little bit about the donations and what we have to work with. So, Jim, where do the donations come from?

Jim Cronk 2:48

A variety of places. There's some businesses that help out. We have Pathfinder bank, who's helping us. And I forget the other one, Josh?

Josh Solazzo 2:56

It's Price Chopper and Market 32.

Jim Cronk 2:59

Yeah, Price Chopper and Market 32 is going to, is going to help us out with the baskets this year. We have a couple of other businesses that do donate, but right now we haven't confirmed that, so we're still working with them. And other donations that people bring in. We have people that donate. Just hear about it, know about it, and they drop things off that to the to the ARISE office, unless we go and every little bit we get helps. And I said we depends on what we get, what we work with, as to how much we can do.

Tania Anderson 3:24

And Josh, so remind people where we are in Oswego, so that if they hear this podcast and they want to drop something off.

Josh Solazzo 3:33

Yeah, it can be dropped off the Oswego ARISE office, and we're at 293, State Route 104, East in Oswego,

Tania Anderson 3:39

And that's the plaza that everybody knows about. Creekside Plaza, great. And so, I think you mentioned, Josh, that there's about 35 baskets is the goal, and some of those are multi people, and multiple people live in the household. So about how many people you think are impacted by this drive

Josh Solazzo 4:02

We had, I believe it was 84 people last year we put together, like I said, I think we had 33 baskets. Last year it was 33 total. We had 35 but two fell through, so we had 33

Tania Anderson 4:16

Wow. And it is a lot to coordinate in terms of knowing the family size and what they need. There's kids, and tell me a bit about the production of the baskets, what that looks like. Who helps out with physically putting everything together?

Jim Cronk 4:36

There's a group of volunteers that usually help out.

Josh Solazzo 4:39

That's we usually have the army recruiters that are in the Oswego County area. They will come that morning, and then employees. And we set out all the baskets, and we have cards for each family so we know what to put in each basket. And we go around, we have a table out with all of the produce, and we put it in all the baskets. And then. Last year, the army recruiters actually delivered a lot of them for us.

Tania Anderson 5:04

Wow. So, it's a real assembly line. Josh Solazzo Oh, yeah, yes, exactly, exactly. Tania Anderson That's amazing.

Josh Solazzo 5:08

Yep. It usually takes us two hours to get everything put together, and then we have pickups, where people can come and pick it up, or if they call and they do need delivery, we can deliver it.

Tania Anderson 5:20

Because transportation is a big issue in Oswego County, and many rural areas.

Josh Solazzo Yeah, yeah.

Tania Anderson

And are you, Jim, you might be the one to answer this question, because I you've been with ARISE, I think, a little bit longer. Have you seen the need increase in the community for these sorts of baskets?

Jim Cronk 5:38

Definitely! You know, we always get the last minute calls from like DSS, like, you know, we've got a family that has nothing at this point for some whatever reason, they didn't qualify for something, or didn't know about some baskets. And so we get phone calls like that every year, and we always keep a couple and, you know, in reserve, because we know that's going to happen. And there's, it's, always there. The need is always there, no matter what you know, and things have been pretty tough lately for on a lot of people. So we definitely expect that this is going to be huge help to a lot of families,

Tania Anderson 6:10

Wonderful. And if someone is not able to just physically come up and drop off an item, can they make a cash donation and also have that go towards buying food. Does that work? Josh Solazzo Oh yes, yeah. Tania Anderson Okay, great. So folks who want to get on the website ARISE inc.org, we can connect them with helping out with the food drive. Does that work? Josh, okay, they're nodding their heads on a podcast. So I think this next question, the answer might be pretty obvious, but I'll ask each of you this question. I'll start with you, Josh, how does this project impact you as someone who works with people with disabilities and works in the Oswego community, I mean you, you're both helping people one on one every day with a huge variety of issues and systems change, and

this is one project of what you're doing. How does this project stand out for you? Josh, as different or special or,

Josh Solazzo 7:13

It's always, I know, I've been a part of this a couple times, and it's always when you see the families that they've got kids and they're scrambling around to try and make Christmas time special, it's nice to be able to provide them with the food baskets they don't have to worry about that they have their Christmas dinner set, and they can take some of that stress off of them. Which is nice.

Tania Anderson 7:41

Absolutely. Jim, how does this project impact you?

Jim Cronk 7:45

Really about the same way, you know, it is great to see the families have that little bit of relief. You know. What are we going to do for food, you know? And we're supplying that, you know. So it's helping them on a lot. It's a feel definitely a feel good situation, you know? It's, it's something that we wouldn't have been trying to keep going for 14 years, because it is a lot of effort. There's a lot that goes into it and but it's worth every bit of it, every year what we do and what we get back from that, you know, just the feel good part of it is why we do it.

Tania Anderson 8:13

Wonderful. Well, I can't thank you enough for doing it all these 14 years, all the coordination, the effort, you're making a real difference for people and thank you both for what you do every day, for ARISE.

Josh Solazzo

Thank you.

Jim Cronk 8:26

Thanks.