

# Facility Spotlight: Fresenius Kidney Care

## *Addressing Social Determinants of Health by Lending a Hand in Hermitage*

When staff at Fresenius Kidney Care in Hermitage, Pennsylvania noticed a growing concern with patients gaining access to nutritious food, they decided to address the challenge directly. The result has become a community-wide effort known as the “Lend a Hand Stand” and it’s making positive changes for people in Hermitage.

It all started about seven years ago when one of the facility’s nurses encountered a few patients who would come to treatment and talk about lack of access to food. The nurse happened to have a mother-in-law who was the director of a local food bank. Each time a patient would express this type of food insecurity, the nurse would contact her mother-in-law and get food for the patient from the food bank. The food bank would always end up bringing a couple of boxes of food to patients in need.

In 2016, staff at the facility decided to host a food drive as a way to say “thank you” to the food bank for helping patients. Everything collected during that initial food drive was donated back to the food bank.

The food drive was so successful that the facility decided to continue hosting one each November. Food collected during the first few years was stored on a shelf in the dialysis facility. Even the facility’s patients got involved. Staff encouraged participation by putting food items out on a counter in the treatment area so patients could see and be inspired to bring in items.

“The food drives get bigger every year,” Sonya Conti, Clinical Manager at the facility, said. “During one of the first years, our entire conference room was filled with food. That year, our staff divided into teams and made it a competition to see which team could bring in more food. Teams were bringing in food by the cases!”

In 2018, after a couple of years of food drive success, staff at the facility had an idea to construct an actual food cupboard at the facility. The facility’s charge nurse, Chad Park, offered to design and construct the free-standing structure, which included doors and shingles. Other staff members helped paint the structure before placing it behind the facility. It’s now called the “Lend a Hand Stand.”

The food drives usually take care of stocking the Stand for most of the year. If supplies get low, staff at the facility contribute food to keep everything stocked until the next food drive. There are no requirements about the type of food donated. Staff always make sure there are diabetic-friendly food items available.

Patients as well as other community members have free access to the Stand when needed.



*Fresenius Kidney Care of Hermitage's  
"Lend a Hand Stand"*

“All of the patients know that it’s there and the whole community knows it,” Conti said. “Some people from the community donate food items, as do some of our patients. It’s sort of become like a pantry for the community as well.”

In addition to the food drive each year, the facility also collects mittens, hats, and winter clothes for the community. These items are donated to women’s shelters and schools. Staff have also started making meal boxes for some patients before Easter each year.

“The patients are always very appreciative,” Conti said. “There have been a couple of times when a patient has been emotional and talked about how much it meant to them.”

The facility is located in a rural business park in the Shenango Valley area. The door to the Stand is left unlocked so people can drive around the back of the building and pick up a few items at their own discretion, allowing for more convenience and privacy. The Stand operates on the honor system and the facility has never had issues with people taking advantage of the offering.

“We’ve had no issues with anyone cleaning us out,” Conti said. “It’s a pretty tight community. Our rural location has also helped. Not every dialysis clinic location would be conducive to something like this.”

News of the food cupboard has spread mostly by word of mouth and social media. Although the facility has never officially promoted the cupboard, some community members have posted about it on their Facebook accounts.

“We will keep it going as long as we’re able,” Conti said. “As long as we can contribute enough. Anything that can benefit our patients and the community as well – it’s just kind of a given now.”

For more information about the Lend a Hand Stand or Fresenius Kidney Care of Hermitage, Pennsylvania, please visit the facility’s website at [www.freseniuskidneycare.com](http://www.freseniuskidneycare.com) or contact Sonja Conti, Clinical Manager, at (724) 981-1328 or [sonya.conti@fmc-na.com](mailto:sonya.conti@fmc-na.com).