

Press Release  
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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum working group addresses food insecurity, expanding resources

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- When the Community Action Planning Council (CAPC) Mobile Food Pantry rolls onto Fort Drum on March 17, it will be the result of concerted efforts from on- and off-post organizations to provide military families with expanded access to food assistance.

The Fort Drum Food Insecurity Group formed in November 2023 as a MEDDAC effort and has grown its membership to include representatives from Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F), Soldier and Family Readiness Division, Mountain Community Homes, and Child and Youth Services, among others. Off-post partners include CAPC, Food Bank of Central New York, Feed Our Vets, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

“Our working group is a collaborative effort led by MEDDAC (U.S. Army Medical Department Activity) that works with on-post and off-post organizations to identify food insecurity in our Fort Drum community,” said Capt. Kimberly Whitbeck, MEDDAC-Fort Drum chief of nutrition. “We collectively work to fill any gaps and expand food resources inside the gate.”

As working group co-leads, Whitbeck and Lisa Proulx, MEDDAC population health nurse, helped establish the first monthly off-post CAPC mobile food pantry site in LeRay last spring, dedicated to Fort Drum Soldiers and family members.

“Now, after working with Fort Drum garrison leads, CAPC received approval to bring the mobile food pantry onto the installation,” Whitbeck said. “Organizations like the Fort Drum Soldier and Family Readiness Division have been instrumental in working behind the scenes to pull this through the final stages.”

The mobile food pantry is scheduled to be at the Rhicard Hills Community Center, 10 to 11:30 a.m., and the Adirondack Creek Community Center, 12:30 to 2 p.m., March 17. It will return the third Monday of every month.

“We’re going to make sure that the families who come to our programs know about this resource, and we’ll be promoting it on social media,” said Amanda Mason, Fort Drum Soldier and Family Readiness Division chief.

Mason said they want to emphasize that everyone who qualifies for the CAPC program – Soldiers, family members, civilian employees and retirees – can take advantage of the Mobile Food Pantry on post.

“A key factor we considered was the locations, so that it can be easier for families to get what they need and not have to travel far,” Mason said. “And then we also wanted to make sure it was available during lunch hours, so Soldiers and DoD civilians aren’t missing out on this opportunity because of their work.”

Caroline Feasler, CAPC Family Center director, said people already registered in the program can receive their personalized order when the Mobile Food Pantry is on post. Everyone else will receive a pre-packaged food bag as a sample of what is offered to registered individuals and families. While there, they can sign up to receive a personalized food package for the following month.

For more information, call (315) 782-4900 (ext. 221), or visit [www.capcjc.org](http://www.capcjc.org).

The Fort Drum Thrift Shop has long maintained a free community Blessing Box with non-perishable food, personal hygiene items and other necessities, but the staff recently converted a military clothing room into a food pantry.

“We have people who come in to use the Blessing Box regularly,” said Jasmine Carpena, shop manager. “So, between me and my team, we had always wanted to see if we could make this bigger and help out more people.”

They had no trouble filling the shelves after receiving some timely contributions during the holidays.

“It was around Thanksgiving last year when one unit, the 2-14th (2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment), 2nd Brigade Combat, came and donated over 4,000 non-perishable food items,” said Amy Schardt, Thrift Shop board chair. “And then we got a handful of other donations from some organizations.”

Schardt said they are exploring ideas to sustain the food pantry, such as organizing food drives.

“I think the addition of the food pantry fits in great with all of our initiatives to give back to the community,” she said. “Along with the Thrift Shop itself, we have scholarships for military students and the community grant program.”

Both Schardt and Carpena represent the Thrift Shop in the Fort Drum Food Insecurity Working Group.

“This working group came at the perfect time because we had this plan on opening the food pantry and we wanted to get involved in helping the community more,” said Carpena.

Schardt said the working group has been a productive way to share resources and connect with organizations that can assist one another.

The Blessing Pantry is open from 10:30 a.m. until 4:45 p.m., the first Wednesday of every month inside the Thrift Shop, Bldg. P-1454 on Fourth Street M.

For more information, visit <https://fortdrumthriftshop.com>.

Whitbeck said that MEDDAC-Fort Drum partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension to allow on-post medical providers and dietitians to refer Soldiers and families to the North Country Produce Prescription Program.

Also known as the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRX), eligible community members attend preventative nutrition education workshops and receive vouchers to purchase fresh produce.

The program's goal is to assist people in learning new and healthy ways to eat more fruits and vegetables to reduce risks of food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease. Cornell Cooperative Extension recently expanded the referral capability to any health and wellness or social services providers who assist Soldiers and their families, and local community members as well.

"We get several referrals monthly but perceive there may be a stigma involved with Soldiers seeking out help," Whitbeck said. "We would love other groups to take part and provide this benefit to Soldiers and family members in a potentially more-welcoming environment than their health care provider or nutrition appointments at the clinic."

To that end, Fort Drum Soldier and Family Readiness Division personnel have recently been granted the authority to make referrals.

"The Fruit and Vegetable Program is a great way to help you feed your family, or yourself, better," said Nicole Wetzel, Fort Drum Family Advocacy Program family development educator. "We all want to eat healthier, but you may find it can be quite costly to do that. So, if we can take away a little of that burden so you can be a healthier person or have a healthier family, we want to help do that."

Wetzel said referrals can be made within every SFRD department, including Army Emergency Relief, Exceptional Family Member Program, and Employee Assistance Program.

"This is going to be a huge benefit when you think about all the programs involved and all the people we work with," she said. "It takes away a hurdle that maybe people wouldn't think about. And the great thing is you can literally go to anyone in these two buildings (Family Resource Center and Soldier and Family Readiness Center) and find assistance."

Wetzel said that SFRD professionals often find themselves in the position where they can suggest this additional resource, whether it's during a Financial Readiness budget-planning session, or at a Family Advocacy Program parenting or cooking class.

“I think this is just going to make the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program more accessible to people,” Wetzell said. “And any way we can make it easier for them, and eliminate any hesitancy in asking for help, it’s just a huge step in the right direction.”

For more information about the Fort Drum SFRD, visit [www.facebook.com/FortDrumSFRD](https://www.facebook.com/FortDrumSFRD) and <https://home.army.mil/drum/my-fort/all-services/soldier-family-readiness-division>.

Whitbeck said they are working on a partnership between CAPC and installation chaplains to coordinate emergency food boxes for Soldiers and military families in need. Additionally, the Fort Drum Food Resource Guide has been updated with 2025 information and is available via QR code (see photo gallery). The digital brochure offers a comprehensive list of local food and financial resources available on post and in the tri-county area.

“These projects are all a direct result of groups coming together with a passion to help our community,” Whitbeck said. “Our efforts will continue to further educate, share resources, and track utilization of new resources to determine future need.”

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Media with questions regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Katie Wright, 315-772-9043 or [katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil](mailto:katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil)

Photo Captions -

Resources1: In addition to their Blessing Box, the Fort Drum Thrift Shop now works to maintain a food pantry that is open to Fort Drum Soldiers and Family Members. *(Photo Credit: Michael Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)*

Resources2: Informational products inside the Fort Drum Soldier and Family Readiness Center highlight the local resources that are available to all community members. *(Photo Credit: Michael Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)*

Resources3: Members of the Fort Drum Medical Activity (MEDDAC) recently held a food drive to benefit the community. *(Courtesy Photo)*

Resources4: The Community Action Planning Council (CAPC) Mobile Food Pantry will begin making monthly visits to Fort Drum starting March 17. This is a result of efforts by the Fort Drum Food Insecurity Working Group, with representatives from several on- and off-post organizations to provide military families with expanded access to food assistance. *(Graphic by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)*