

YWCA Thanksgiving Donations---Frequently Asked Questions (2025)

Why Does the YWCA provide Gift Cards for \$75 per person?

The gift cards are provided primarily to families in emergency shelter apartments—the most vulnerable and in need. The YWCA intends the gift cards to support the main holiday meal and a few days' worth of additional groceries. With the cost of food continuing to rise, and many food and other support programs cut, it's not a stretch to think that a family of four could easily spend \$300 on Thanksgiving dinner, plus their regular groceries for the week and some household hygiene needs. The YWCA wants to ease the stress of the holiday season and make sure families can enjoy the holiday meal and also have what they need to keep their kitchens stocked for the days that follow.

Who are the YWCA Families that Receive our Thanksgiving Assistance?

For Thanksgiving, the YWCA provides gift cards to families in its Emergency Shelters and Permanent Supportive Housing shelters. These families often come straight out of homelessness, are vulnerable and face a lot of economic uncertainty. These emergency shelters include apartments in the Central District which houses 12 families at the East Cherry location in our neighborhood, and shelters in Auburn, Renton, Beacon Hill and Lynnwood, as well as Passage Point, which supports families with formerly incarcerated parents, Family Village in Redmond, and the YWCA's Late Night Hotel program. The typical family in an emergency shelter such as the East Cherry Apartments is a family of 5—generally a mother and four children. In 2024, the YWCA helped 174 families for Thanksgiving and expects that number to be higher this year as its shelters are full.

How do YWCA residents end up in emergency shelters?

Most of these families are headed by parents who previously had jobs and housing, but faced eviction because of stagnating wages, increasing prices, or other financial problems that caused their expenses to exceed their income. Simple as that. Some are college educated. Most are people who never thought they'd be homeless. When people are evicted, everything gets left behind. Some begin sleeping in their cars or seek shelter in tent cities. Evictions increased when Covid funds dried up and Covid eviction bans ended, and people could not pay the back rent.

Another group of people are in emergency shelter because they are fleeing domestic violence. They also leave everything behind out of necessity.

Why does the YWCA provide grocery gift cards for Thanksgiving rather than donated food?

Many residents belong to ethnic groups whose traditions do not include the typical Thanksgiving meal that many Epiphany families would eat. Half of the residents are African American (generally not immigrants) and Pacific Islanders. The rest are a mix of ethnicities.

Cuisine appreciated by Pacific Islanders and Micronesians include pineapples, mangoes and Spam (not turkeys). Many African American families appreciate grits, pecan or sweet potato pies and other foods that originated in the American South. It's important to realize that for these families that we aspire to help, their dream of a comforting family meal may not be what many of us think of as a traditional turkey or ham centered meal. This is an important reason that it's best that these families choose their own food.

In past years, we provided thawing and cooking instructions for the turkeys because we knew that many families would not have cooked a turkey before. It must have been daunting for them. Now they can rely on their own skills and look forward to a more familiar experience that they can better control.

Another reason that the YWCA asks that we provide money for gift cards—rather than the meal ingredients directly--are that this fosters independence and self-sufficiency. Having to work within a budget helps with financial skill development.

Providing this assistance by gift card also frees up valuable YWCA staff time, which was formerly spent gathering large heavy donated baskets, and trying to get them to all of the families quickly, avoiding spoilage of highly perishable contents.

Epiphany volunteers formerly procured, assembled and delivered the food baskets to the YWCA. It was a very hard task. And the church did not have enough storage for all the turkeys and other items that people leaving town early wanted to donate, so some had to be stashed in parishioners' homes temporarily. It was a lot of work for the small team of folks that managed it.

Why does the YWCA need our donations so early?

The funds need to get from us to the YWCA and then the YWCA has to purchase the gift cards. Once they have the cards, they need to distribute them to the families who are situated all around Seattle. Then the families need time to get to the grocery store and shop. Many families rely on public transportation, and many are stretched for time.