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Small Community Rallies Around Its Coast Guard Families



by Meghan Williams (<https://militaryfamilies.com/author/meghanwilliams/>)


— January 23, 2019 (<https://militaryfamilies.com/military-news/small-community-rallies-around-its-coast-guard-families/>)



Food pantry volunteers pictured in front of the Astoria 'Be the Light' food pantry. Photo by Stacey Benson



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Two hours away from the fast-paced, swirling metropolitan of Portland lies the small town of Astoria, Oregon. And, it is no new kid on the block. Astoria is the oldest settlement west of the Rocky Mountains, with its roots to the ocean running deep. However, this isn't a story about the history of a quaint coastal



ing town, but rather a story about its heart. The entire community has rallied around friends and neighbors that serve in the United States Coast Guard (USCG) as they endure an unprecedented political (https://militaryfamilies.com/)

Astoria is one of 24 cities nationwide that is an official Coast Guard City (https://www.uscg.mil/public-services/Community-Relations/cities/), a formal designation by Congress to recognize communities that go above and beyond in their support of the Coast Guard family. USCG personnel and their families comprise roughly 10 percent of the local population, and recently, an estimated 1,500 USCG personnel in the area have found themselves working without pay. Combine that with the fact that one of the main local industries in Astoria is tourism, and January is one of the slowest months, one would be quick to surmise that this little community is sitting among a perfect storm of unfortunate circumstances.

Be that as it may, this little community has not buckled under the financial and political pressures that stands at its gate. In fact, it's been quite the opposite; when you walk around the town of Astoria on a drizzly day in mid-January you will see hope wherever you go. You will see it in the signs taped in the windows of local businesses offering discounts and free food, you will see it in the bins that businesses have placed out to collect the necessities of food and toiletries for USCG families – but most importantly, it lies in an intangible thread of community and partnership that is woven throughout the community as people come together to support one another.





Donation collections for USCG at a local grocery store. Photo by Meghan Williams.

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The tales of generosity are far and wide. Gift baskets and diapers are being left on the doorsteps of Coast Guard families, a bus driver on a route with military children sent each one home with an envelope that contained a ten-dollar bill. The most astounding of efforts is a pop-up food pantry that the community has come together to support.

Local military spouses partnered with the MOMS Club of Astoria

(<https://www.facebook.com/MOMSClubofAstoria/>) and Boy Scouts of America Astoria Troop 211 to create a pop-up food pantry where all federal workers affected by the government shutdown can come to stock their kitchen for the uncertain days ahead. Refrigerators were dropped off to store perishables, food donations from businesses and community members are arriving daily, and volunteers are working tirelessly to collect donations, restock items, and offer hugs and words of encouragement.



The 'Be the Light' pop-up food pantry is stocked for those affected by the government shutdown. Photo by Stacey Benson.

Over 1,300 USCG family members and federal workers visited the food pantry this past weekend and the pantry will remain open on the weekends throughout the government shutdown.





It is true that pantry staples are a drop in the bucket for families meandering a financial tightrope of uncertainty, the community of Astoria is giving their families much more than that. There is a message (<https://militaryfamilies.com/>) that through this difficult time they will not stand alone.

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Meghan Williams (<https://militaryfamilies.com/author/meghanwilliams/>)

Meghan Williams has been a Coast Guard wife since 2008 and is a mom to two rambunctious boys. She grew up in Alaska where she met and married her husband before embarking on the adventurous life of a military spouse. She is a freelance communications consultant and writer with a love for nature, yoga, and nutrition. She currently resides in the gorgeous coastal town of Astoria, Oregon.

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