Food drives for those in need are part of the High Holy Day season
Collections help restock Family Table's shelves

By Daniel M. Kimmel
Advocate staff

At numerous synagogues, next Tuesday night is not only about the beginning of Yom Kippur and the chanting of Kol Nidre. For the Jewish community it is the time of one of the biggest collections of food for families in need. People attending services on Rosh Hashanah were encouraged to take one or more shopping bags and return with them filled with the foodstuffs that that congregation is collecting. It could be raisins, cans of tuna, boxes of cereal, peanut butter, or any one of a number of items.

According to Bernice Behar, program manager for Family Table, deciding what will be collected at a given synagogue — or at the Jewish day schools and community centers that also participate — is a matter of negotiation. “We know what we need over all, and we work with each site as to what they’re willing to collect and in what amounts.”

A site attracting mostly older people might not be a good place to ask for bulky or heavy items, and so members might be encouraged to bring in cans of fish, fruit, or vegetables. On the other hand a school with lots of active children is a good place to encourage bringing in big boxes of cereal. In addition to making sure that a variety of food is collected, as opposed to every-

Jewish day schools, they are not the only group operating such a program. Behar noted that some synagogues may support a local food pantry instead while others support a local program as well as Family Table.

Whether on a one time or regular basis, volunteers are always welcome. Besides assisting in the collections from various sites the 250 or so volunteers each month are also involved in distribution, helping to put together bags of groceries and making deliveries to those lacking transportation or otherwise unable to drive to the distributions in Waltham or Marblehead. The program encourages families to volunteer together, noting on their website, “Families with young children are welcome to volunteer. In this way, children experience hands-on tzedakah and truly come to understand that they can make a difference in the lives of others.”

While donations are encouraged all year round, the High Holy Days brings a welcome replenishing of supplies. Since the drives are done by the individual synagogues and not coordinated, it’s not always certain when another flood of goods will arrive. Behar said that many schedule a drive around Passover, whether it’s to help people get rid of their unopened chometz or else to provide kosher for Passover foods for those in need.

Whether now or later, it helps make a difference in the lives of
families in need. “We really do appreciate the food drives people do,” said Behar.

Email familytable@jifsboston.org for more information about volunteering. If you need food assistance, call 781-647-JFCS (5327).

Volunteers of all ages help pack groceries for clients of Family Table.