

Joe Adcock – Featured Volunteer

We are always glad to see Joe at AFAC. He has a wonderful light-hearted and caring spirit that makes him a favorite of staff, fellow volunteers and clients.

“I think I was recruited by someone who visited the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington. That was, maybe, three years ago -- or so. I mostly helped out with registering clients at the reception table. Being able to speak Spanish was helpful. I'd say that maybe 3/5ths or 2/3rds of AFAC clients are essentially monolingual Spanish speakers.

Then the UU Church gave a small grant to finance cooking demonstrations that would help clients figure out what to do with some of the mysterious things they were receiving in their weekly allotments. Beets, greens, winter squashes, cabbage, oatmeal -- even apples in some cases -- were not necessarily self-explanatory for some people.

The demonstrations -- involving simple, stovetop cooking, or even no cooking at all -- helped clients figure out what to do with some of the food that they were receiving. My volunteer work shifted to being a sort of sous chef, waiter and bilingual culinary explainer for the cooking demo head chef. I wander around the reception room with a tray, giving out little plastic cups filled with the plat du jour. I also hand out printed recipes, in English and Spanish, that explain how to prepare whatever it is we are cooking that day.

One of the benefits to me of this volunteer gig is definitely keeping alive my ability to speak Spanish. I learned Spanish at Swarthmore College and in Perú more than 50 years ago and I became fluent when I had a year's scholarship in 1961 at the Universidad Nacional de México.

It is fun chatting with people -- yesterday a woman from Bolivia was explaining to me the multiplicity of agricultural products (for example dozens of different types of potatoes) that come from her native region, Cochabamba. And a woman from El Salvador held that Latino men are fickle -- her husband went off with another woman and it is very hard to get him to pay child support.”