

Blacksburg Partnership Fights Hunger in Low Income Youth

Background: According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, almost 40% of children under the age of 18 live in low income families (\$41,000 for a family of four or twice the national poverty level). In Montgomery County Virginia, 35% of public school children are eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program. Poverty has a significant impact on children. They are more likely to suffer from poor nutrition which leads to poor brain development and academic difficulties in school. Low income children are also more likely to be obese, experience health problems and emotional distress, have a lower life expectancy, and have an increased chance of academic failure and teenage pregnancy. Many low income families in Blacksburg, Virginia struggle to eat healthy meals and snacks every day.

Action: Micah's Backpack, a free ministry sponsored by St. Michael Lutheran Church in Blacksburg helps families eat more healthy meals and snacks through their local elementary school. Each Friday afternoon school children receive a backpack of healthy food and snacks. On Monday the child returns the empty backpack to their school nurse or counselor to be restocked with food for the following Friday. Currently, Micah's Backpack works with families at Price's Fork Elementary School, Kipps Elementary School and Gilbert Linkous Elementary School.

Results: As of June 15, 2009 the following impact of the Micah's Backpack program were recorded:

- 3 elementary schools participate
- 16 students participate
- 298 backpacks of food were sent home
- 1,788 meals provided
- \$5,783.80 in donations
- \$2,873.05 in food expenditures
- \$9.64 cost per backpack per week
- Price's Fork Elementary School teachers donated \$400 to the program
- 6,000 volunteer hours packing, transporting backpacks, meeting, and planning

In addition seven volunteers have assisted with the logistics of the program on a weekly basis. One parent of a child receiving the backpack said that her child has been less hungry and better behaved due to the backpack program. The parent also believes that due to the program, the family spends more time together.

The program has become a model for other churches. Two recent workshops presented at the Synod level resulted in 15 people attending from 12 churches and 25% of those churches indicated they plan to start a similar program.

Partners: St. Michael Lutheran Church, Price's Fork Elementary School, Kipps Elementary School, Gilbert Linkous Elementary School, Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, Shiloh Lutheran Church, Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Kroger on South Main Street, Kroger on University City Blvd, The Fitness and Nutrition Club at Virginia Tech, SHARE and donations from individuals support Micah's Backpack.

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