

Blacksburg Partnership Fights Hunger in Low Income Youth

Background: 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) according to the National Center for Children in Poverty. In Montgomery County Virginia, 36% 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 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 all five Blacksburg area elementary schools and the Head Start Preschool.

Results: As of June 10, 2010 the following impact of the Micah's Backpack program were recorded:

- 5 elementary schools and Head Start Preschool participating
- 73 students participating
- 1693 backpacks of food were sent home
- 10,168 meals provided
- 29 Community Partners
- 53 Community Volunteers

One parent of a child receiving the backpack said that her child has been less hungry and better behaved due to the backpack program. Another parent said, "It's a really great program and we are really thankful for it." Parent also believe that due to the program, the family spends more time together. Chris Widrig, the principal at one of our partners schools said, "Thanks to everyone who has been associated with this program. You just don't realize what a huge difference you have made in the lives of these children and their families."

The program has become a model for other churches. Two Lutheran congregations in Virginia have started similar programs based on information presented at Synodical workshops and Pastor John has consulted with over 20 other groups seeking to start backpack feeding programs. St. Michael Lutheran Church is officially certified as a Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank agency.

Partners: Gilbert Linkous Elementary School, Harding Avenue Elementary School, Margaret Beeks Elementary School, Kipps Elementary School, Price's Fork Elementary School, Head Start Pre-School, Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, Christ Episcopal Church, Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, Shiloh Lutheran Church, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Virginia Tech, UCC of the NRV, Virginia Synod (ELCA), ELCA Domestic Hunger, MOPS at Blacksburg United Methodist Church, MOPS at Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Kroger on University City Blvd, Food Lion - Heathwood, The Fitness and Nutrition Club at Virginia Tech, Operation Santa Claus, Blacksburg Women's Club, AARP, Moss in the New River Valley, DECA at Blacksburg High School, SHARE, Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Food Bank, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, and individual community members.

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