



OCTOBER 2016 FEATURE

Backpack Buddies

Backpack Buddies has been a community project for the Junior League of Minneapolis since 2008. This program provides students from food-insecure families with a take-home backpack filled with nutritious food for use over the weekend during the school year.

This year the committee is serving over 550 first through fifth grade students at three Minneapolis schools: Anderson United Community School, Prodeo Academy, and Cityview Community School. League and Committee members support the project by procuring food, maintaining a warehouse for supplies, and packing backpacks to be handed out to students and families on Fridays.

Food insecurity affects about 10% of Minnesotan families, which includes an estimated 195,660 children. Indicators of food insecurity include being worried that household food will run out, having limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and reducing or eliminating food intake due to availability without means to buy more. Food insecure individuals are found within every county in Minnesota.

While some governmental programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formally known as food stamps) and Women, Infants, and Children

(WIC) provide nutritional support – **about a quarter of the need is met by local charitable organizations like the Junior League.**



Filled bins are labeled by school and loaded onto pallets. They will be transported to participating schools for distribution on Friday.



In October, members of the Junior League along with help from women from the Mall of America filled backpacks – bringing the backpacks total up to 2,051 for the year so far!



In the warehouse JLM members pack backpacks in an assembly line.

These bright red, black and blue tote bags are new this year and replace older bags that were at the end of their lifespan. The bag color indicates which school they go to. The marker boards indicate what food to pack and how much of each item goes into the bags.

Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of inadequate nutrition. Hunger affects growing minds and bodies and can cause both insufficient physical growth and brain development. **Studies show that children who come from food insecure households are emotionally, cognitively, and physically behind their food-secure peers.** It has been recognized as an important economic cause of widening the achievement gap as measured by student test scores.

Over 90% of the students at our partner schools qualify for free or reduced price lunch during the week, however this safety net disappears over the weekend. Children who receive backpacks to fill this gap return to school on Monday better prepared to learn. Backpacks are filled with nutritious, shelf-stable food items that can quickly be combined to make a meal or snack. Backpacks filled with foods that require a microwave or stove are categorized as “cook”.

Hunger in childhood has lifelong implications.

Other backpacks are prepared for families with limited access to kitchens and are filled with foods that require minimal preparation or heat and are categorized as “no cook”.

New to the program this year is the option of a halal bag. These bags contain items that are allowable under certain religious traditions.

“We heard that some families who keep halal were choosing not to participate,” commented Tristan Hatch, Backpack Buddies chair. “We wanted to try to serve this population and so far about 25% of the families enrolled from that school have chosen to have a halal bag.” The committee hopes to roll out the program to all three participating schools next year.

BACKPACK BUDDIES

Because hunger doesn't take the weekends off

Mission: To reduce the effects of childhood hunger by providing nutritious, easy-to-prepare food over the weekend to children residing in food-insecure homes in the greater Twin Cities area. Health and wellness education is also provided.

WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR?

MALL OF AMERICA

This partnership allows us to provide the food to students and families that need additional help with obtaining food on the weekends.

HALAL BAGS

We wanted to try to serve this population and so far about 25% of the families enrolled from that school have chosen to have a halal bag.

IMPACT NUMBERS



550 Students signed up so far this year



\$2.50 Average cost per meal/student



Serving 3 schools this year: Anderson, Prodeo & Cityview



Grades Served? Students 1st - 5th