

Food Bank BackPack Program

The Food Bank BackPack Program began during the 2004-2005 school year. The program debuted at Clinton Elementary School, sending home food-filled backpacks on Friday afternoons with 50 kids. The program quickly took off and now is serving hundreds of students. The BackPack Program's mission is to help alleviate child hunger in Southeast Nebraska by providing hungry children with nutritious and easy to prepare food at times when other resources are not available, such as weekends and school vacations.

The BackPack Program provides backpacks filled with food to students in need of food over the weekend. The program primarily targets students who qualify for their school's Free Lunch Program. Many of these students rely on their school's breakfasts and lunches for their most nutritious meals of the day. In some cases, these are their only meals of the day. These students are then faced with a food crisis over the weekend. The BackPack Program is a way to help these students and their families until students return to school on Monday.

Currently, the BackPack Program sends 2,066 backpacks home to students on Friday afternoons in 22 Lincoln Public Schools, 4 Lincoln Catholic Schools and 12 rural communities in Southeast Nebraska (Beatrice, Waverly, Crete, Milford, Seward, Bennet, Norris, Elmwood, Utica, Falls City, Fairbury and Exeter).

The Program rotates six different menus throughout the school year. The goal of the BackPack Program is to supply a student and his or her family with four to five meals per menu. Although the Food Bank BackPack Program serves over 2,000 children, the need is great and there are still more hungry children in our community. Census figures for 2006 reveal there are 8,741 children under the age of 18 living below the poverty line in Lancaster County. During the 2008-2009 school year, 5,584 elementary students were enrolled in the free lunch program in the Lincoln Public Schools.

It takes a lot of strong financial support and hundreds of volunteers to make the Food Bank BackPack Program happen. Partners of the BackPack Program include: Lincoln Public Schools, Catholic Social Services, St. Mary's Catholic School, Sacred Heart Catholic School, Blessed Sacrament Catholic School, St. Patrick's Catholic School, Kiwanis Clubs, Southwood Lutheran Church, Sheridan Lutheran Church, Capitol City Christian Church, First-Plymouth Congregational Church, Saint Paul United Methodist, St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Hope Community Church, Living Faith Free Methodist Church, LPS VOICE students, corporations, foundations and individuals.

The food used for the Food Bank BackPack Program consists of purchased food to ensure a consistent supply of food for each backpack. Various menus include peanut butter and jelly, concentrated fruit juice, boxes of cereal, macaroni and cheese, canned fruits and vegetables along with bread and egg vouchers. Students in Lincoln receive two pieces of fresh fruit weekly and a voucher for a gallon of milk once a month thanks in part to the Community Health Endowment.

Please join the Food Bank, Lincoln Public Schools and our rural communities in our work to feed hungry children and their families.

Here's how you can help:

Provide financial support.

Sponsor a student for a week, a semester, a year or longer.

- The cost to supply one child with a backpack for one school year is \$200
- To sponsor a child for a semester is \$100
- To sponsor a child for a month is \$25
- The cost to sponsor one child for a week is \$5.88

Donate a backpack or coordinate a backpack drive (backpacks must be gender neutral with two straps and large enough to hold a box of cereal).

Food Bank Backpack Emergency Pantry

In response to the high need of hungry students and their families, the Food Bank in cooperation with Leadership Lincoln and Lincoln Public Schools opened a Backpack Emergency Pantry. This pantry is located at Lefler Middle School (1100 S 48th St). The pantry is open each day that elementary school is in session from 3:30-5pm. This pantry helps Lincoln Public Schools and Backpack Catholic Schools families in two ways. One way is that the pantry provides schools with emergency food boxes for families. The boxes are filled with 20 pounds of shelf stable food. Schools may hand these out to families experiencing a food crisis. The second way is to refer families to come and shop at the pantry for food. The amount of food families can have is based on family size. The food that stocks the shelves for this pantry is donated food from the community for the Backpack Program.

If you would like to help the Backpack Emergency Pantry here's how you can help:

Provide financial support.

One food box costs approximately \$15.

Donate food. See Backpack Program wish list.

Volunteer at the pantry.