

ELCA WORLD HUNGER'S



BACKPACK BUDDIES



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ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



CALLED *by* FAITH

As Lutherans, we recognize that hunger takes many forms – physical hunger for food, emotional hunger for support or intimacy, spiritual hunger for fulfillment and so on. Relief is a response to some of these immediate needs. When someone comes to the door hungry, they are fed. When someone is hurt, they are treated. Relief ministries like Backpack Buddies programs are the most immediate response we can offer when we encounter someone in need.

They are also opportunities for those serving to be fed spiritually, socially and emotionally, by being invited to share in the meaningful relationships that can be created when God creates community. Seeing our mutual need as both recipients and providers can be an important first step in helping our ministry be guided by the dignity of the people we wish to help – and by our own dignity.

In the New Testament, Jesus provides excellent examples of relief in the stories of healing. Jesus, by healing people around him, responds to people’s immediate needs and demonstrates God’s love and concern for everyone. People in need are welcomed and loved by God – so much so, in fact, that Jesus is willing to break the law by healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17).

Backpack Buddies programs meet an immediate need for food, but they also can be a witness that our abundant God has given us all we need to ensure that everyone has enough to eat and that everyone is welcome at the table. They are a testimony to faith, which draws Lutherans into relationships with other partners to help our neighbors meet their basic needs.

These needs, however, can’t be served entirely by relief ministries. Many children in the United States depend on public programs like the School Breakfast Program (fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program-sbp), National School Lunch Program (fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp) and Summer Food Service Program (fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program). National nutrition programs ensure that kids get the food they need to fuel their brains for learning and their bodies for proper development and health. These programs need your advocacy. Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, an ELCA state public policy office, conducted the “Feed My Lambs” campaign to help congregations learn about child nutrition needs in their area and to conduct advocacy for expanding school breakfast so kids could get a strong start to their days (lutheranadvocacypa.org/hunger/1751-2/). Child nutrition advocacy can start with your local school board or district nutrition staff to find out more about their programs, how they are accessed and how you can support them. It can include advocating for funding these vital programs on the national level. Sign up for e-advocacy alerts from ELCA Advocacy to learn how you can be both a “backpack buddy” and an advocate for children in your community.

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What is the Backpack Buddies program?

The Backpack Buddies program provides elementary school children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals a sack of healthy and easy-to-prepare foods. The sack is for the weekend when students are not at school and don't have access to the free-meal program. For many of these children, school meals may be the only reliable meals they eat during the week.



“Hunger in general has been something that has been important to me. Attending an ELCA World Hunger event fueled my desire to do something in my community. Learning about statistics in my community made it important to help those students, to be part of something that my church and the community were getting behind and to be part of something clearly much bigger than myself. Giving back to the kids in the community is a core part of my Christian faith and the Christian life, and it allowed me to learn and grow.”

— Minda Kuckuck, Iowa City, Iowa

Throughout the United States there are organizations that facilitate backpack programs locally and nationally. Your congregation can partner with or look to these programs as a model when starting your own program. A partner organization could be a local food pantry, social service agency or grocery store. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for example, the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program (HACAP) is a community-focused nonprofit dedicated to empowering and improving the lives of families living with the everyday barriers of poverty. As a partner organization of Feeding America, HACAP partners with community organizations and individuals to provide weekend food bags to children in Linn County.



“Remember, the children did not ask to be in this place, and if we can play a small part in this basic need, we can help them get a good education.”

— Jennifer Yeater, Hedgesville, W.Va.

Why a Backpack Buddies program?

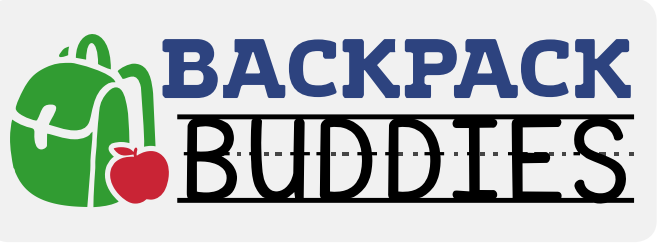
Hunger affects everyone, but it is especially harmful for children. When children don't receive proper nutrition, it impedes their ability to learn, grow and engage. Poor nutrition has an immediate effect on a child's health and academic achievement. When children are hungry, it is harder for them to concentrate and stay awake during class. Some of the short- and long-term health effects include headaches, iron deficiency, poor dental health, weak bones, obesity and delayed sexual maturity. Children who are food insecure can also experience behavioral problems while in school, such as anxiety, aggression and mood swings.

Why are children vulnerable?

Children are dependent on adults to provide them with the care and food they need. In the U.S., hunger is not caused by a shortage of food but by poverty. Children who are coming to school hungry are from households that are unable to make ends meet due to unemployment, insufficient wages and the like. Many Americans often have to choose between paying their utilities or paying for medical expenses and buying food. Households living just above the poverty line are even more vulnerable during times of emergency when unexpected costs occur. For children and families living in both urban and rural settings, food distribution and access can also be a problem. Fresh vegetables and fruits are not always readily available, and they are also more expensive to buy in economically distressed communities.

“You can make a difference if you work together.”

— Rachel Wright, Roseville, Minn.

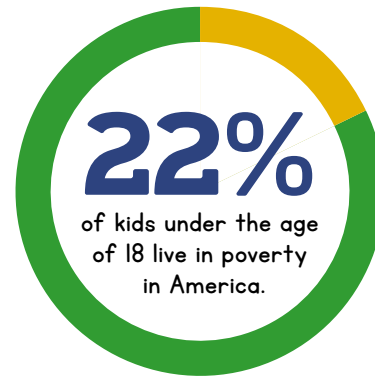


16 Million



Number of kids living in households without consistent access to adequate food.

That's **1 out of 5** kids.



21 Million

rely on free or reduced-price lunch



3 of 5 teachers

see students coming to school hungry



1.5 days

school attendance increases with sufficient nutrition



17.5%

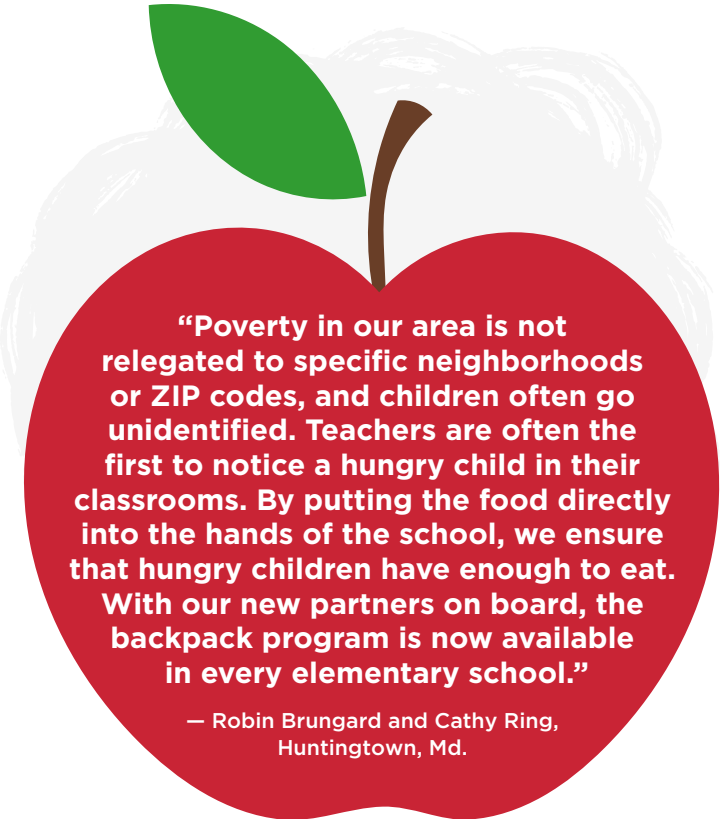
test increase with sufficient nutrition



ASSETS		CHALLENGES
RURAL	Farm stands and local growers may be able to provide fresh produce.	Employment is more concentrated in low-wage industries, causing higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. Transportation and work-support services such as child care can be harder to find.
SUBURBAN	Large chain stores may provide access to more affordable fresh food.	The fastest growing rates of food insecurity are in the suburbs, which may have few food pantries and where unemployment and a lack of rental properties can make housing unaffordable.
URBAN	Urban areas often have access to safety-net programs such as housing assistance and food pantries.	It can be harder to access fresh fruits and vegetables, and in the city many things cost more - transportation, child care, housing, utilities, food.

Step 1: Learn

Domestic hunger affects all our communities. In the United States, 1 in 5 children is food insecure. An important aspect of the Backpack Buddies program is educating your congregation about domestic hunger so they understand what the face of hunger looks like and how it affects your community. There are many educational resources you can use: ELCA World Hunger blog (blogs.ELCA.org/worldhunger/) and resources (ELCA.org/hunger/resources), Feeding America, Bread for the World (bread.org) and National Geographic - "Why are people malnourished in the richest country on Earth?" (nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/hunger/) are just some examples. You may also want to consider making "A Place at the Table," a documentary on hunger in the United States, available for folks to view. Learn more at takepart.com/place-at-the-table.



STORY

Hunger issues were always on Leslie Heird's heart, so when she heard about Luke's Backpack program through Shenandoah Valley Lutheran Ministries, she felt called to be part of it. The program provides six meals - breakfast, lunch and dinner for two days - in addition to milk and snacks to children in Shenandoah County, Va. Their outreach in the community helped build support for the program that ensures kids in the community have the food they need to learn and grow. This program is supported in part by ELCA World Hunger.



When you speak with organizations, create a short presentation that touches on the statistics and reasons for hunger - especially childhood hunger - and share a basic overview of what the Backpack Buddies program is and an invitation for them to get involved. Be sure to leave plenty of time for questions. You can also use presentations with community organizations as an opportunity to collect food or monetary donations.

Educate your community

Often, others in our communities may be unaware of the extent of hunger in the area, so it's important to educate your community. Look for opportunities to raise awareness with local organizations such as:

- Rotary International
- Toast Masters
- Kiwanis Club
- Parent and teacher organizations
- Ecumenical partners
- ELCA congregations in your area

The Backpack Buddies program is also a great opportunity to collaborate with fellow Lutherans at your ELCA synod assembly and explore opportunities for partnership. By educating your community you will connect with volunteers and advocates who want to help by joining your congregation in fighting childhood hunger.

A good place to start for numbers on child hunger in your area is the number of children receiving free or reduced-price lunch at local schools. This federal program ensures that children whose families are food insecure are still able to have healthy meals during the school day. Your Backpack Buddies program will help supplement this during the weekend and breaks, when many of these children don't have easy access to the food they need to grow and live. One important thing to remember is that many school districts participate in a program that offers free or reduced-price lunches to every student. Because of this, some students who are not food insecure may be included in the total number. Here are some links to get you started:

1. selfsufficiencystandard.org/self-sufficiency-standard-0
2. census.gov/did/www/saipe/data/interactive/saipe.html?s_appName=saipe&map_yearSelector=2014&map_geoSelector=aa_c
3. feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/



As soon as Zion Lutheran Church in Iowa City, Iowa, began to share about Goosetown Operation Backpack Program and how food insecurity was affecting the children and families in their neighborhood, I began to receive requests to present from organizations and volunteer groups who were interested in learning more. One of the presentations I gave was to one of the local Girl Scout troops. The troop leader wanted to provide an opportunity for the girls to not only learn about the backpack program but also support it. Prior to my visit, I gave the troop leader a list of suggested food items, and when I arrived at the meeting I was blown away by the amount of food the girls had collected. I left that night with my trunk full of boxes! ”

— Minda Kuckuck, Iowa City, Iowa

Step 2: Gather the tools

STORY

“In February of 2014, a group of concerned citizens from all walks of life met to discuss the need for a backpack program. There had been some concern that students were coming to school hungry on Monday mornings. Teachers were noticing this and had shared their concern. A local minister spearheaded the meeting. Before school let out in the spring of 2014, they sent out a letter to all families in the school district letting them know that in the fall a backpack program would be up and running and to look for more information coming in August. We truly didn’t have all the kinks worked out but decided to forge ahead and figure it out,” says Mary Brown, Montevideo, Minn.

Purpose statement

As your congregation begins a Backpack Buddies program, it is important to create a purpose statement. Your purpose statement will help give your program focus and provide congregational leaders and volunteers with a response when they are asked why a Backpack Buddies program is being started. When writing your purpose statement make sure it says how the program is helping children and families in your community and connects to the head and the heart – serving as a form of motivation for your congregation and community.

Example: Backpack Buddies alleviates childhood hunger by providing nutritious meals to the children in our community and by educating and engaging our community in the fight to end hunger.

As you finalize your purpose statement, there are also a few organizational details that will need to be taken into consideration before you are able to begin providing food bags.



Stick to your mission. If your mission is to reach children for the weekend, to cover that gap, resist the urge to make it more. We are clear – we do food and we do it better than anyone else. We stay on task with the mission to what God gave us. ”

— Robin Brungard and Cathy Ring, Huntingtown, Md.

Space

As you gather volunteers you also need to determine the logistics of how your Backpack Buddies program will operate. Select a location that has an adequate amount of space for packing the bags. Also, consider how your space and other logistics of your program best meet the needs of the families. Taking into account the families' needs and your own capacity, you can choose to pack the food bags week by week, bi-monthly or monthly. In addition to determining where the bags will be packed, you and the school need to agree on the day, time and frequency the prepared bags will be delivered. One thing to consider is that many families facing hunger often experience their greatest need near the end of each month. Keep this in mind as you plan your schedule. The school needs to make sure they have adequate space to store the food bags and staff members to help place the bags in each student's backpack. This should be done discreetly so that students do not feel embarrassed for receiving food assistance and so their participation is kept confidential. In sum, how and when your program operates should be based on the needs of the family, the school's capacity and your program's capabilities.



Food storage and safety

Congregations must designate a food storage area that meets food storage requirements. Doing this first can help you determine your program's capacity. Food should be:

- stored in a dry, clean and pest-free area;
- at least 6 inches off the ground and 6 inches away from walls;
- stored between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit;
- rotated regularly to ensure that the oldest product is used first and not wasted;
- in a space that can be locked; and
- stored in compliance with local laws and regulations.

For more information on local regulations for food storage, contact your county health department.



The school determines if you will set one foot in that door or not. You need to meet that need for the school. If you serve them first, it changes everything. ”

- Robin Brungard and Cathy Ring, Huntingtown, Md.

Contacting the school

When approaching the school about partnering with your congregation in the Backpack Buddies program, the principal is your main contact. Begin by requesting a meeting with the principal. One important question to ask is if another program is already happening or being planned. There may be a program or plan in place you can be part of. The purpose of the meeting is to describe what the Backpack Buddies program is (you can refer to your purpose statement) and how it will benefit the school and the children. When meeting with the principal, ask if you can give a short presentation at an upcoming staff meeting. You will need to earn the teachers' support and trust, as they will help determine the children who would benefit from participating in the program and hand out the bags every week. They can also be your biggest advocates. Many of them are aware of students facing hunger and will appreciate the program. Meeting with staff is your opportunity to explain the program, their role and answer questions. Attending a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting may also be beneficial when starting the program. Ask the principal if you should reach out to the school's PTA.

“It’s so much fun, and it’s fun for the church – getting together and packing a backpack. It’s rewarding because you know you are doing something that will help a child. It’s really a bag of love.”

— Leslie Heird, Toms Brook, Va.



Volunteers

Who can volunteer? EVERYONE! Engage your congregation's youth, families and adults. Packing food bags is a fun and easy task that people of all ages can do. When recruiting volunteers, look beyond your congregation and into the community. Reach out to business owners, other faith communities, neighbors and the school PTA to share the program with them and to invite them to participate. Important: Be sure to ask the school about background checks, health forms or other information needed for people who will enter the school.

“We were very blessed and fortunate to have parent volunteers. It’s important to find dependable people who are going to stick with the program.”

— Paul Tyson, Hedgesville, W.Va.

Key volunteers and teams

- **Program coordinators** (two people) are the main contacts for the school, congregation, community organizations and volunteers. They oversee the volunteers and make sure that roles are filled as needed. They also manage the food inventory and create the shopping list for volunteers or the food donation list for gifts.
- **Food buyers** (two to four people) are responsible for purchasing or picking up the food needed and unpacking and organizing the food in the storage space.
- **Bag packers** (8-15) are responsible for packing the weekly food bags, making sure the right items are in each bag and that the bags are ready to be delivered to the school. The number of people you will need will be determined by how many bags you will be packing and how often.
- **Transporters** (four to six) deliver the food to the school. Take into consideration how many volunteers need to help at one time based on how many containers of food bags are being transported and the weight of containers.

STORY

Micah's Caring Initiative in Blacksburg, Va., started with a group of five people at St. Michael's Lutheran Church. Their first funding allowed them to serve five children, but when the community found out about the program, their support grew. Now, 50 to 100 volunteers come to the church on Thursdays to pack backpacks for more than 200 students at 10 schools. By being open and inviting other partners to participate, Micah's Caring Initiative is helping meet the need for food in a community where nearly 1 in 4 students relies on the food they receive at school. This program is supported in part by ELCA World Hunger.

- a statement barring the program from liability for adverse reactions to food; and
- assurance that the child's identity will remain confidential (see below).

Once the signed consent form has been returned to the teacher to keep on file at the school, the student can begin receiving food bags. At any time, the parent or guardian can request that their child be removed from the program.

“At first it seems overwhelming, but somehow everything seems to fall in place – the funding, the volunteers, community support, etc. I’m not saying it is easy, as it does require a lot of hours and commitment to the program, but the benefits well outweigh the work.”

— Mary Brown, Montevideo, Minn.

Program forms (see appendix)

Hunger warning signs: This form outlines hunger warning signs that will aid school staff in identifying which students would benefit from participating in the program. Provide the flier to the principal or staff member who is your contact. Once staff have identified a student for the program, the school personnel should contact the parent or guardian of the student.

Site agreement: This form is signed by the program coordinator and the principal at the school you are partnering with. The agreement outlines what everyone's roles and responsibilities are, keeping everyone on the same page.

Parental consent: It is important to gain parental consent before a child begins to receive a weekend food bag. The parental consent form should include:

- an explanation of the Backpack Buddies program;
- a description of the types of food their child may receive each week;
- a notice that the backpack may contain items like milk, soy and nuts;



Confidentiality best practices

When training volunteers, stress confidentiality. Volunteers will not meet or get to know the families their work benefits. The stigma of hunger can make families reluctant to participate and can have a negative effect on children at school. The dignity of each parent and child can be honored when the families' needs and privacy are respected.

- Protect any records that may contain identifying information.
- Ask the school to help advise your program about protecting the privacy of the children and their families.
- If you offer a program during breaks or during the summer, avoid asking about participation in the Backpack Buddies program on intake forms or in conversation with clients.
- Use practices of confidentiality as an opportunity for your congregation to talk about the stigma of hunger in the United States.



Funding

Start-up funding will be needed as your program gets off the ground. As you estimate how much you will need, here are some questions to ask:

- Will we need to purchase shelving or storage for the food?
- What will we store the prepared food bags in, and how will we transport them to the school?
- Is our food supply coming from an affiliate organization, donations or direct purchases?
- How many children will be in the program at the start, and how quickly do we want to grow the program?

There are many ways that your congregation can seek funding to support your Backpack Buddies program. Here are some options to consider:

- ask your congregation for a special offering as part of a “Hunger Sunday”;
- solicit donations of money, food and/or time from local businesses;
- ask the parents and teachers organization to put an appeal in one of its newsletters; or
- apply for a Domestic Hunger Grant through ELCA World Hunger.



Domestic Hunger Grants

ELCA World Hunger supports more than 300 ministries in the United States each year, including Backpack Buddies programs, through the Domestic Hunger Grants program. These grants do more than just give food to people who are hungry – they fund projects in community development, community-based organizing and advocacy that strengthen the foundations of communities affected by hunger and poverty. Applications are accepted in late spring every two years. For more information, visit ELCA.org/DomesticHungerGrants.

“The Domestic Hunger Grant from ELCA World Hunger was instrumental. It allowed us to know that we had enough money to get us through this year and through December. We were able to tell the teachers, yes, we can do this again next year!”

— Mary Jo Hallberg, St. Paul, Minn.



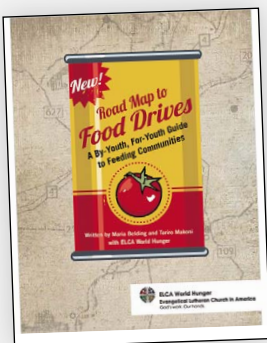
Getting food

Some affiliate programs can help you connect with a food bank to acquire food for your program. Your congregation, feeding ministry or a partner may also have a relationship with a food bank. This is a great, inexpensive way to get food. You can also collect donations and purchase the food with offerings from your supporters.

Having periodic food drives that your congregation and community can participate in is one way to gather the food you need. To determine how often you should have a food drive, take into consideration how large your

storage space is and how many students are in the program. Also, consider purchasing food that can supplement the food you receive from the food drives.

As you are exploring options for food, keep diverse dietary needs in mind. Are any of the students vegetarian? Do the foods contain allergens like nuts? Are the foods culturally appropriate? Respecting the dietary needs of the children and families is an important way to do service with integrity by respecting the dignity of participants. Teachers and staff at the school can help with this, as can community partners.



If youth in your congregation are interested in helping, ELCA World Hunger’s Road Map to Food Drives has all the steps to lead a successful and fun food drive, including timelines, activity ideas and suggestions for involving the whole congregation. Originally written by youth, for youth, the Road Map is great for people of any age.

Download or order the resource from ELCA.org/hunger/resources. Click on the “Hunger Ed” tab.



BACKPACK BUDDIES

Filling, easy-to-make
meals

Vegetables

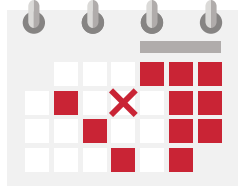
Other useful,
small items

Nutritious
beverages

Healthy
snacks



Timeline

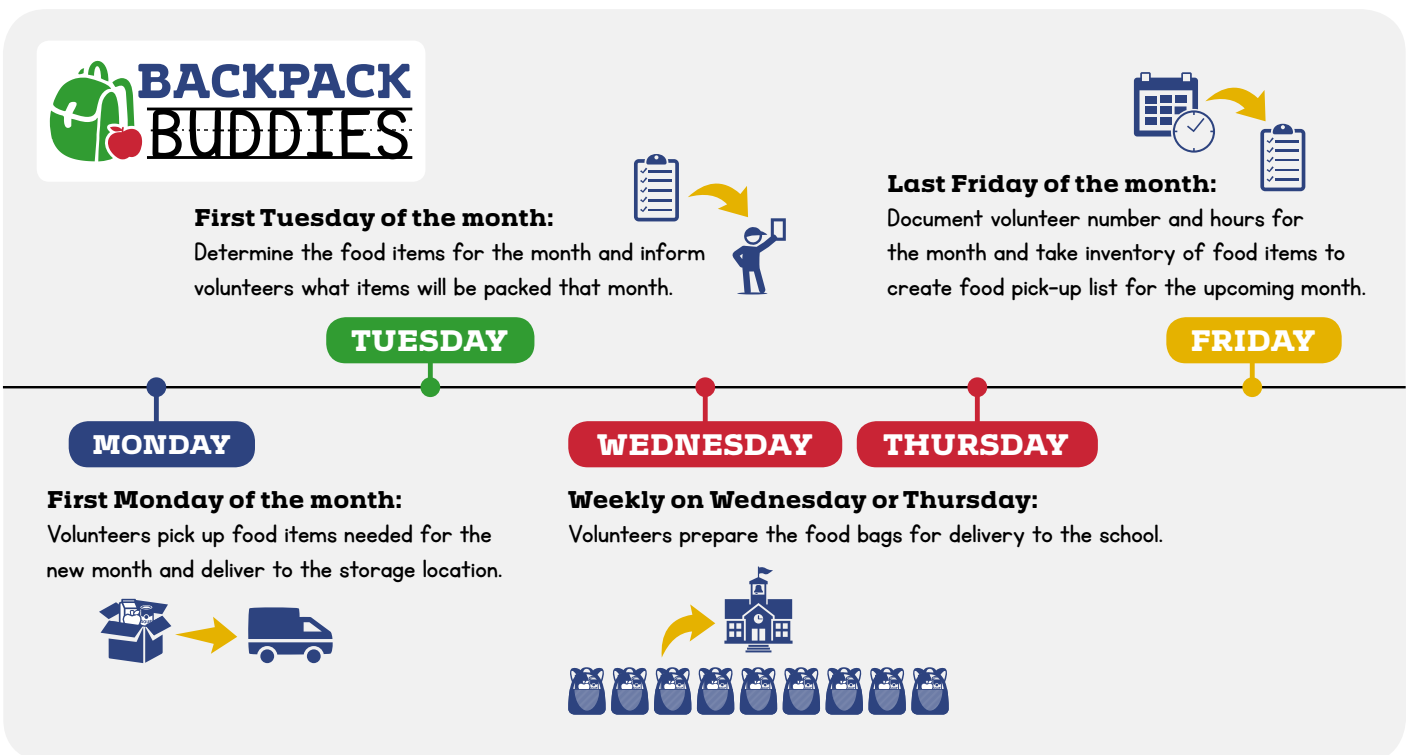


As you prepare for the Backpack Buddies program to begin, it is important to create a timeline that will help the coordinator, school and volunteers stay organized. Depending on your method for acquiring the food items, first decide when food will be picked up or bought. Will it happen at the end of every month or at the beginning of every month? The next step is to determine when the food bags will be packed. Will they be packed once a week, twice a month or once a month? Bags will be distributed to the students on Friday before students go home for the weekend. Work with the school to determine what day and time is best for their staff to have the food bags delivered. At the end of every month, or prior to the time you have set to pick up or purchase food, a food inventory will need to be taken so you know exactly what you have and can make sure that the oldest food is pulled to the front and the newest food is sent to the back.

Supplies

- Plastic grocery bags: These can be donated by grocery stores if they are not already provided by a third-party organization you are working with. You can also buy plastic bags in bulk.
- Shelving and containers: These will be used to store and organize the food so it is easy for volunteers to gather the items they need when packing food bags and for the food buyers and deliverers to put away the food. These items would be a one-time purchase or donation unless you need to buy additional containers.
- Containers or bags to store the prepared food bags: This could be a multiple-time purchase or donation. You may need to buy more or bigger containers as the program grows. Determine what kind of containers will be easiest for volunteers to transport.
- Method for organizing volunteers: There are many free programs that will help you organize volunteers. One popular free online program is Volunteer Spot (<https://signup.com/volunteerspot/index>). You can also use online tools such as Google Calendar.

Sample timeline:



Step 3: Let's get packing!



“Up until this backpack program, I really haven’t been very deeply involved in my community. I feel that God placed me in this program for a reason. I feel that my life is blessed and that this program allows me to share of my time and talents with others. I have become a better person and my faith has definitely grown.”

— Mary Brown, Montevideo, Minn.



Organizing a packing event

Packing the food bags can be a fun event for your congregation. If you want to pack a month or more of food bags at one time, get the whole congregation involved. The packing event can be during the education hour or after worship. Set up long tables with each item that needs to go in the bag running down each side. Make sure it is clear how many of each item goes into a bag. It is helpful to have one to two people assigned to each table to oversee the packing. Have the plastic bags at one end so members can grab a food bag and walk down the table putting in the food items. This is a great way to involve people of all ages and connect through service as a congregation. This time could also be used to share information about the program and facts about child hunger.

Tips for getting started

- Learn about ethnically appropriate food. Is your school's demographic different than that of your congregation? Work with your school partners to determine if there are specific items that should or should not be included.
- Have someone with you to help plan and organize all the "little details." Starting and maintaining a backpack program is a lot of work and there are lots of details to oversee. It is important to have at least two people who can work together as the coordinators.
- Involve people outside of your congregation! Don't be afraid to reach out to your community. Once they know what the backpack program is and the need it is meeting, people will be eager to support through donations and volunteering!
- Start small! Start with 10-15 children and grow as the program gets on its feet. This will make it easier to work out any "kinks" in the program as it gets started.
- Make sure you have the school's support to get this program going. In order for the backpack program to be successful the administration and key staff members need to be 100 percent committed to the program.
- Regular, consistent communication with the volunteers, school and congregation is important. Consider sending monthly communications to your volunteers thanking them and letting them know how the program is going. Check in periodically with the school to make sure things are running smoothly on their end. Send quarterly updates to the congregation letting them know how the program is going and progressing.
- Be very clear about the logistics of packing and even have a written guide. Have a volunteer training or make sure one of the coordinators is present the first time a volunteer is packing the bags to show them the ropes.

FAQ

Q: What happens when there is a difference between capacity of the church and the need?

A: Congregations that cannot give to every hungry child can still provide what they can. Due to confidentiality, the school will either choose which children will receive the bags, or the program will be first-come, first-serve. If you know that your congregation only has the capacity to serve 10 children, don't be discouraged! Just let the school know, and work hard to find other partners to increase your capacity.

Q: What happens during breaks from school?

A: During the shorter breaks, congregations can give out larger bags to help the children through those long weekends. For longer holiday breaks and spring break, additional items can be added to each food bag. In preparation for summer break, connect students and families with summer food programs and food pantries in the community. If the school has approved it, you can include fliers in the bags. Another option would be to provide the information to the school to share with students and families. Congregations can also consider if it is feasible to have children and families pick up weekly food bags from the church in the summer or have them delivered to each child's house.

Here is a link that can be used to find summer food programs: feedingamerica.org/about-us/helping-hungry-children/summer-food-service-program/.

Q: When can we start planning for the next year?

A: This is at your congregation's discretion. Many congregations take the summer to plan and get ready for the fall term and in many cases to get ready for growth. Most schools will not be prepared to tell you who will be in the program until school has started. It can take two to three weeks for the school to determine which students need to be in the program and to get their parent's permission.

Step 4: Evaluation and learning

A few months into the program it is important to begin thinking about how it is running. Here are some of the key questions you should ask:

- Are we coordinating well with the school?
- Are volunteers properly supported with training?
- Is the food storage location working?
- Is the food supply staying at the level it needs to be?
- Is our service helping honor the dignity of the children and families? Are we doing our service well?
- Are we reaching all of the children who need the program? Can we adapt to growth?

You also should create a strategy to evaluate the success of the program. The strategy should include:

- a method for tracking volunteer numbers and hours each month;
- a method for tracking the amount of food and money donated;
- a survey or way for teachers and parents to provide feedback; and
- monthly or bi-monthly check-ins with the school to ensure the program is running smoothly.



Share your story!

ELCA World Hunger would love to share the story of your program with the rest of the ELCA!

Email Hunger@ELCA.org with your stories, photos or questions.

Expanding your backpack program

If you have created a successful program that meets the needs and concerns of your community and you have the resources (or can find the resources), think about expanding in other directions. The most important thing to consider is the need of your community and where you can best be of assistance. Strive to keep learning about the situations and services available for children and families in your area.

Opportunities to consider could include:

- Provide **school supplies**: Your congregation could organize a school supply drive before the beginning of the school year. Ask the school what the main donation items should be. If your congregation has an alternative gift market during the holidays, consider having one of the donation options be a monetary donation that will be given to the school to purchase supplies.
- Provide **recipes** with simple instructions that can be easily followed and prepared by families. A few recipe ideas include: yogurt parfait with fruit and granola, ants on a log, tortilla with peanut butter and banana, or tortilla with deli meat and cheese, baked potato cooked in the microwave, cheese pizza on pita bread.
- Provide **reading materials** for children through a used-book drive.
- Host nutritional **cooking classes** at your church or at the school. Work with the school to determine how the program can be organized and how students can sign up. Does the school have an after-school program that this can be a part of?
- Provide **fliers** once a month in the food bags about health and nutrition for the students and their families to read.
- If permitted by the school, provide **hand-made cards or short notes** once a month in each bag. Remember that congregations should be sensitive to the different faiths of the families. Religious cards and notes can make families hesitant to take the bags. This can also create legal problems for the schools that can undermine your program.
- Is the school interested in starting a **school garden**? Would your congregation be able to partner with them in that endeavor? (Check out ELCA World Hunger's "Community Gardens How-To Guide" at ELCA.org/hunger/resources to get started. Click on the "Hunger Ed" tab.)
- Are there **other people in your community** facing food insecurity? Consider expanding some opportunities to the rest of the community, too. For example, if you decide to offer cooking classes, invite seniors who may be facing food insecurity. You might also consider offering slow cooker recipes and ingredients to families and individuals.



Slow cookers

Some congregations and community organizations have started slow-cooker projects alongside backpack programs. At the start of the year, these projects provide each family with a slow cooker. Throughout the year, families receive ingredients and recipes to make healthy, delicious meals at home. These small appliances can be a huge help to parents whose work schedules make cooking at home a challenge.

Faith

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” – Matthew 6:1-4

“This work gives me great faith in the church, that we can do this - it really is ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ It does make a difference. It gives me great faith.”

– Rachel Wright, Roseville, Minn.

As your congregation begins a backpack program you will not know or meet the children who receive the weekly food bags. And the same is true for the children and families. They will never have the opportunity to know who is making sure they have enough to eat. This, of course, does not stop your congregation from including the families in your prayers.

We encourage congregations to incorporate special services and blessings as another way this important work is kept as an active ministry of the church.

Blessings

As a congregation, commit to consistently praying for an end to hunger. Prayer is an important part of our faith life and our relationship with God. Through prayer, God provides us with God’s grace and prepares us to do the work we are called to.

God fills the hungry with good things.

May God fill you with good things,

a passion to sow fields of hope and vineyards of faith,

a commitment to a fruitful harvest and an end to hunger,

and always the blessing of the

Father, (+) Son, and Holy Spirit,

now and forever. Amen.

*(Blessing written by the Rev. Dan Kuckuck,
St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Urbandale, Iowa)*

Today, we ask God’s blessing on these bags of food,

That they may nourish those who receive them,

That they may display the bounty of God in their contents,

That they may show the fruits of love of neighbor,

That they may open our eyes to our dependence on one another,

That they may be reminders of the goodness God has promised us all.

Amen.

Blessing of offering

Abundant God, all creation displays your goodness. For the hungry, you provide food. For the thirsty, you give water. To the wandering, you promise a home. You have blessed us with your gifts that we may be your hands and feet to share these gifts with our neighbors. Bless our offerings, that they may be signs of your grace in our world. As we share with others, keep us mindful of our own need – for food, water, shelter and community. May our gifts be an invitation to a deeper relationship with each other and with you. In the name of Jesus Christ, your gift to the world. Amen.



Special services

Designate a special “Hunger Sunday” for worship. Use prayers and readings that connect with our call to accompany our neighbors in need and a sermon focused on hunger and hope. This Sunday can also be used as a day to receive donations of food or money, or to receive or bless new volunteers.

For a full service plan for a “Hunger Sunday,” contact ELCA World Hunger at Hunger@ELCA.org.



Thank you

This resource was developed because of the inspiring work that community organizations and congregations like yours are doing to help feed children in their communities. Thank you to all the people who helped create this resource by sharing their insight, knowledge and stories on how they started a backpack program.

Mary Brown

Montevideo, Minn.
Bring It Home Backpack Program

Robin Brungard and Cathy Ring

Calvert Churches Pantry
Huntingtown, Md.
End Hunger in Calvert County

Minda Kuckuck

Zion Lutheran Church
Iowa City, Iowa
Goosetown Operation Backpack

Leslie Heird and Susan Fleming

Shenandoah Valley Lutheran Ministries
Toms Brook, Va.
Luke’s Backpack

Jennie Hodge

St. Michael Lutheran Church
Blacksburg, Va.
Micah’s Caring Initiative

Rachel Wright

Lutheran Church of the Resurrection
Roseville, Minn.
Bountiful Backpacks

Jennifer Yeater and Paul Tyson

Hedgesville, W.Va.
Berkeley County Backpack Program Inc.

Backpack Buddy affiliate programs

blessingsinabackpack.org

hungerfreecommunities.org

hungerfreecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/HFC-Toolkit-for-starting-a-BackPack-Food-Program.pdf

hacap.org

Web-based resources

Advocacy:

[ELCA Advocacy - ELCA.org/advocacy](http://ELCA.org/advocacy)

Bread for the World - bread.org

Federal school meal programs:

fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp

fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program-sbp

Food in the Bible:

christianity.about.com/od/biblefactsandlists/qt/foodsofthebible.htm

openbible.info/topics/food

Food deserts:

americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts

huffingtonpost.com/marian-wright-edelman/urban-food-deserts-threat_b_410339.html

Food security:

ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us.aspx#.VBnxy5dX58

Food miles:

foodmiles.com

pbs.org/e2/teachers/teacher_food_miles_project.html

Food-waste statistics:

Society of St. Andrew - endhunger.org/food_waste.htm

Global policy:

worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture

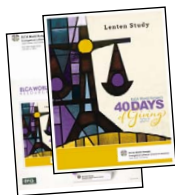
oxfam.org

oxfamamerica.org



ELCA World Hunger resources

Want to learn more about hunger or find other ways to get involved? Check out these great resources from ELCA World Hunger. All of these are available for download or order from ELCA.org/hunger/resources, unless otherwise noted.



ELCA World Hunger Resource Packet

This collection of resources designed to raise funds and awareness for ELCA World Hunger is made available in a packet twice per year.



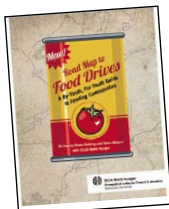
ELCA World Hunger Video Series

Stories of individuals and communities affected by the work of ELCA World Hunger. Watch online at vimeo.com/channels/elcaworldhunger.



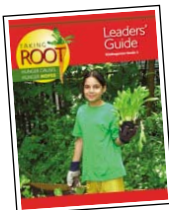
Digging In: A Leader's Guide to Service Learning

A comprehensive guide to getting the most out of your service experience, whether it is short-term or long-term. Developed in partnership with leading experts in service learning.



Road Map to Food Drives: A By-Youth, For-Youth Guide to Feeding Communities

A step-by-step guide to effective, meaningful food drives written by youth with input from community agencies. Contains easy-to-use sections for youth to lead the drive themselves.



Taking Root

A comprehensive curriculum available in four age-level courses, designed to teach the root causes and solutions to world hunger. Includes curriculum, leader's guide, handouts and videos.



Hunger Education Toolkits

Activities, prayers, lessons and songs to create local education experiences on many themes related to hunger and poverty.



ELCA Good Gifts Catalog

A catalog of global gift-giving opportunities that represent areas the ELCA supports domestically and internationally. View online at ELCA.org/goodgifts.

Sample Guidelines

– From Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn.



1. Have all helpers wash their hands.



2. Follow the chart posted to see which eight food items go in on your week. Set the food out in an assembly line. Make note of which (if any) items will get more than one. For example, two oatmeal packets may be given if you see a (2) next to oatmeal on the food sheet.



3. Find the plastic bags. Use these first if they are there. If not, there are some smaller, white bags that have been purchased and can be used. Pack x amount of plastic bags with the eight food items.



4. Put the plastic bags into the containers (describe them clearly) and place them in the location where they will be picked up for delivery by a volunteer on Friday morning.



5. Please flatten and break down any cardboard you cleared out and place it in the appropriate recycling and garbage location.



Pita Bread Pizza

Ingredients:

- 1 pita bread
- 2 tablespoons pizza sauce
- 1/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- Spices of your choosing – basil, garlic, oregano
- Olive oil (optional)

Directions:

1. Brush a little olive oil on the pita.
2. Spread sauce on top of the pita.
3. Sprinkle on the shredded cheese.
4. Sprinkle on pinches of desired herbs and spices, and add any toppings you'd like.
5. Place on a baking sheet, bake for 5-7 minutes at 400° or until cheese is melted (times may vary).



Ham and Cheese Quesadilla

Ingredients:

- 4 10-inch flour tortillas
- 1 pound thinly sliced cheese
- 1/2 pound thinly sliced deli ham

Directions:

1. Heat broiler.
2. On half of each tortilla, layer the mozzarella and ham. Fold the other tortilla half over to cover. Place on a sheet pan.
3. Broil until the cheese has melted and the tortillas are browned, 2 to 3 minutes per side.
4. Serve with a side of fruit.



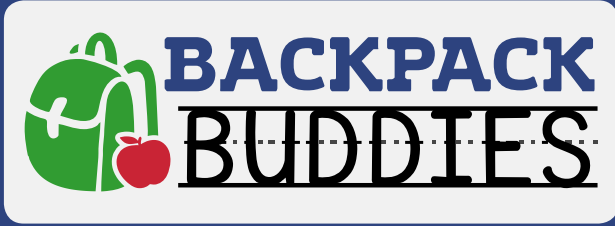
Peas and Carrots Alphabet Soup

Ingredients:

- 6 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 carrots diced
- 1 cup alphabet pasta or any kind of small pasta shape
- 1 10-oz. package frozen peas
- 1 can of beans (optional)
- Salt

Directions:

1. Place the broth in a large saucepan and bring to a boil. Add the carrots, pasta and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Simmer until the carrots and pasta are tender, 6 to 8 minutes. Stir in the peas and beans (optional) and cook until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes.



SIGNS OF HUNGER

Hunger affects everyone, but it is especially harmful for children.

When a child doesn't receive proper nutrition it impedes their ability to learn, grow and engage. Poor nutrition has an immediate effect on a child's health and academic achievement. When a child is hungry it is harder for them to concentrate and stay awake during class.

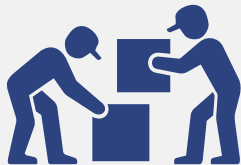
ADDITIONAL SIGNS OF HUNGER INCLUDE:

- ✓ Displays extreme hunger on Monday morning
- ✓ Asks when the next meal/snack will be served
- ✓ Asks teacher for food on a regular basis
- ✓ Saves, hoards, or steals food for themselves and/or sibling
- ✓ Asks classmates for food they don't want/asks for seconds



Appearance

- EXTREME THINNESS
- DRY/CRACKED LIPS



Home Environment

- MOVES FREQUENTLY
- AT/BELOW POVERTY LEVEL
- CARES FOR YOUNGER KIDS (SIBLINGS/COUSINS)



School Performance

- CHRONIC TRIPS TO CLINIC OR SCHOOL NURSE
- CHRONIC TARDINESS WITHOUT BREAKFAST
- SHORT ATTENTION SPAN
- UNABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON WORK



Dear parent/guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in the _____ Backpack Buddies program. This is a partnership between _____ and the _____.

(name of program)
(your congregation)
(affiliate program or school)

The Backpack Buddies program provides a food pack of kid-friendly, non-perishable food for your child for weekends and school breaks. This is a free program, without cost to you.

Items may include pop-top canned meals, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, cereal, fruit juice, shelf-stable milk, fruit and granola bars. The food will be placed in a bag and given to your child at the end of the day. The food is not intended to be opened until your child is home.

Parents and guardians concerned with food allergies need to be aware that the food bags may contain ingredients such as nuts, soy, wheat, eggs and milk. The _____, _____, and _____ will not assume any liability for adverse reactions to food consumed.

(affiliate program) (your congregation or program) (school)

The _____ and _____ strive to include healthy and safe food. All food is labeled and sealed by the manufacturer. If you open a package and notice a problem, please contact us immediately.

(affiliate) (your program)

The program is scheduled to begin _____ and will continue throughout the school year. To enroll your child in the program, please fill out the enclosed registration form and return by _____.

(start date) (date)

For questions, please contact _____.

(contact person)



Operation Backpack registration form

Parent/guardian name, address

Phone School

Please list only the children enrolled at this school.

Name	Grade	Teacher
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By signing this form, I agree to allow my child/children to participate in the Operation Backpack program of the HACAP Food Reservoir.

I understand that for children with food allergies, Operation Backpack items may include allergen-containing ingredients. Parents/guardians concerned about food allergies need to be aware of this risk. The HACAP Food Reservoir, Operation Backpack program, and _____ will not assume any liability for adverse reactions to food consumed. (school)

The HACAP Food Reservoir and the Operation Backpack program strive to include healthy and safe food. If you open a package and notice a problem, please contact the Operation Backpack program immediately.

By signing this form, I agree to assume any and all risks associated with my child's/children's participation in the Operation Backpack program, including any adverse reaction my child may have to foods consumed.

Parent/guardian signature Date



Operation Backpack 2012-2013 parent/guardian survey

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Your comments and suggestions will provide assistance as the program expands within the HACAP service area. Please return this survey to the school office. Thank you.

Parents of multiple children enrolled in the program need only complete one survey form.

Number of children in program _____ Ages of children in program _____

Have you noticed any of the following since your child or children began participating in the Operation Backpack program?

- Improved health Improved behavior Improved academic performance Improved concentration

Was the amount of food supplied for the weekend enough to meet the needs of your child or children?

- Too much Just right Not enough

What changes do you recommend for the program (amount of food received, types of food received, number of times food received, etc.)?

What did you like most about the Operation Backpack program?

Please share any comments about the difference Operation Backpack has made in the daily life of your child or children.

Which of the following types of educational information have been helpful to your family?

- Healthy, kid-friendly snack ideas and recipes Fun food facts and activities
 Mealtime conversation starters Websites for kids and parents
 Family activities promoting movement and exercise
 Information on health issues concerning nutrition

Please feel free to include additional comments on the back of this survey.



Operation Backpack 2012-2013 student survey

Age _____

Did you like getting food in a backpack for the weekend?

Yes No

Was a filled backpack too heavy for you to carry comfortably?

Yes No

How did you feel about the amount of food given to you?

Too much Just right Not enough

Were you able to prepare most of the foods by yourself?

Yes No

If not, did someone help you prepare the food?

Yes No

If yes, who helped you? _____

What two foods did you like the best? _____

What two foods did you like the least? _____

While involved with Operation Backpack, did you:

Feel healthier? Yes No About the same

Feel you did better academically in school?

Yes No About the same

Feel your behavior improved?

Yes No

Feel it was easier to concentrate?

Yes No

How did being involved in Operation Backpack help you during this school year?



Operation Backpack site agreement

 Name of school and location Year

By signing this agreement, both parties acknowledge their respective duties and responsibilities related to the administration of Operation Backpack, a program of the HACAP Food Reservoir.

Our school agrees to:

1. Identify children to participate in the program using criteria in the Operation Backpack information.
2. Send home an informational letter and permission form before the program begins. The permission form should be returned before sending home a food pack with a student.
3. Store any food inventory in a secure, dry, pest-free room. Food should be placed 6 inches off the floor and 6 inches away from the walls. The space should have a room temperature between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The inventory should be rotated at each packing session with the oldest items being used first.
4. Distribute food packs as agreed upon. A weekly list of items to be distributed will be sent along at the time of food pick-up.
5. Encourage families, children and support staff to complete evaluations of the program as requested by the HACAP Food Reservoir, Operation Backpack program and Feeding America.
6. Record and report the number of food packs filled and distributed each month as outlined in the Operation Backpack information.
7. Notify the Operation Backpack program coordinator of any changes in the program immediately.
8. Monitor visits conducted periodically by representatives of the HACAP Food Reservoir and the Operation Backpack program.
9. The HACAP Food Reservoir is the fiscal agent for the program. Any fundraising and promotion of the program needs to be done in partnership with both entities.
10. HACAP takes seriously food safety, the needs of children, and the best practices for this program. We'll work with you if there are any concerns but appreciate your communicating with us if any aspect of this agreement cannot be maintained.
11. We understand that the food items provided by the HACAP Food Reservoir and the Operation Backpack program cannot be sold, used for other school programs or fundraisers, given to staff or used for any other purpose other than to provide food to hungry children.

This agreement may be terminated at will by any either party with written notice delivered to either party not less than 30 days prior to the desired termination date. Upon termination of this agreement, the site coordinator will return any equipment or materials provided by the HACAP Food Reservoir and Operation Backpack program to the HACAP Food Reservoir within 30 days of the program termination date. This agreement will be renewed for each year of participation in the program.

 Signature of principal Date

 Signature of site coordinator Date

 Signature of HACAP Food Reservoir program manager Date

 Signature of Operation Backpack coordinator Date



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.