



CHILHOWIE COMMUNITY

In the Spotlight



The Chilhowie Community Backpack Program, is in its seventh year of existence, and continues to grow and serve the children in Smyth County and beyond. It began as a community effort to help children in our schools who are identified as being at risk of food scarcity in the home, the program has expanded beyond what any of us imagined. Seven years ago the first 25 children were identified at Chilhowie Elementary School who could use a little extra food in their home pantries. Two ladies began stuffing those backpacks every other week and delivering them to the school. By the end of the first school year, the list had grown substantially to about fifty students. Today, the program is serving almost 300 children in seven Smyth County schools with one more school in the works to begin soon.

With the loss of much of Smyth County's industrial base, our economy and people suffer under the stress of lack of income. Drug use is an overwhelming factor in the plight of our children's welfare. Grandparents, on fixed incomes, are now raising many of the children in our communities. Whether by choice, or by circumstance, their children are the ones who really suffer.



With over 60% of Smyth County students on free and reduced lunches, the need appears obvious. Countless stories of children in need are told to us each year. Children digging in trash containers at school, asking teachers if they would buy their bicycles so they would have food money, older children kicked out of a parents home for whatever reason and trying to survive on their own, just to name a few! How can in be, in our affluent society, that children are going to bed hungry? I will say, our problems cannot compare to third world developing hunger, but we cannot ignore a child in our community who has a need.

ENDING LOCAL HUNGER



The children are recognized by the school staff and permission slips are sent home. Once a child has been added, they receive a backpack of food every other weekend. The bags are full of nutritious food items such as beef stew, canned vegetables, canned fruits, shelf stable milk, peanut butter, juice, macaroni and cheese, crackers, cereal, fruit bars and cookies. They take these bags home and return their empty bags to the school the following week to be refilled.

Almost all of the food we purchase comes through the Feeding America Food Distribution Bank in Abingdon. We try to stretch our funding as far as possible and this is our best outlet for affordable food. We have estimated in the past that we were spending about \$15,000 per year on food. With the tremendous growth this year, that number may well reach \$20,000 or more. Local churches, businesses and individuals are the source of all the backpack program's funding. We do not get any funds from any government bodies or United Way. We feel it is very important, therefore, that we are extreme in our efforts to be good stewards of the gifts bestowed to us. We are extremely grateful to organizations such as yours who are generously supporting our efforts!



CHILHOWIE COMMUNITY

In the Spotlight



We are also run totally by volunteer staff. No one who works with the backpack program receives any monetary reward. At the present time, we have about 50 volunteers who willingly give of their time to make sure the program continues.

We like to add a few extra items from time to time for the children we serve. Hygiene items (toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, and deodorant) are distributed to the children a few times each year as well as feminine hygiene items for the older girls we serve. This past year we have also been able to give new athletic shoes to many of the children in the program. They were very excited to receive these at a Christmas party last year and before school began this fall.



While we have accomplished so much in the past 6+ years, the work continues to grow as the need continues to grow. Funding continues to be the most pressing issue we face day to day but with the help of caring individuals and business partners, we can keep feeding the children in our communities!

Dawn Kegley