Hope is a Full Stomach: Let’s End the Risk of Hunger for Kentucky Children

With my sister and brother, I spent much of the summer outside at my grandparents’ home along the Cedar River in Iowa. We chased each other through blankets of humid air and drank cool water from a hose. We sang louder than our radio, but not the cicadas. We fished along the riverbank and caught lightning bugs until Mom called us in for supper. Those are the types of childhood memories we hope every kid and teen experiences in summer. Nothing to worry about except blistering sunburns, biting mosquitoes, and what dessert will be that night.

Unfortunately, for far too many Kentucky youth, summer memories are full of uncertainty and hunger. They include the times when they bring leftover food home to a sibling, when they open an empty fridge, or when they start a countdown to eating regularly at school again.

**In the Food Bank’s 50-county service area, 1 in 4 children are at risk of hunger. In sixteen counties, it’s 1 in 3.** And the food insecurity we see is not strictly in homes that are experiencing poverty. On average, 25% of children facing hunger in our region do not live below the poverty line; in some counties it’s up to 52%. Their working caregivers make too much to qualify for government assistance, but not enough to cover their needs with increased housing and food prices. Regardless of their family’s situation, God’s Pantry Food Bank works hard to ensure no child goes hungry.
Our network of over 500 food pantries and meal programs helps thousands of neighbors each year, including kids and teens. Partnerships through the BackPack Program, School Pantry Program, Summer Meals Program, and Kids Cafe help address childhood food insecurity directly. This work matters because we all know this: **Hope is a full stomach.** With every filled plate for a child, there is hope for the best outcomes in education, relationships, and health. Hope for summer memories without worry and with more joy.

We are so grateful for the folks that make feeding our young neighbors possible—every pantry and meal program worker, teacher, volunteer, and donor. And you. We couldn’t do this work without your help.

Thank you so much for supporting your neighbors through God’s Pantry Food Bank.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Halligan
CEO

Making a Difference for Kentucky Youth

In 2023, 45 partners participated in the Food Bank’s childhood hunger relief programs, sharing 213,165 meals with kids and teens. Additional to these programs, making a difference for Kentucky youth experiencing food insecurity means empowering programs organized by our partners, like **The Backpack Program of Laurel County.** Their program supports 900 kids across 16 schools!

Our partner pantries and meal programs share food with neighbors of all ages, including children and teens. In 2023, God’s Pantry Food Bank distributed enough food to create nearly 38 million meals. If you lined up the trucks needed to distribute this food, they would stretch nearly 11 miles. If the first truck was parked at our Lexington warehouse, the line would not stop until close to Southland Christian Church in Nicholasville. **Almost 11 miles of food—together, we did that!** Thank you for supporting this work with your time, money, food, and your voice. We couldn’t do it without the power of neighbors helping neighbors.

Thank you so much for supporting the Arby’s Foundation. Their matching donation of $25,000 last month is helping us create over 300,000 meals for children across Central and Eastern Kentucky.
Our mission at God’s Pantry Food Bank is to feed our communities by working together. It’s important that as we increase our neighbors’ access to food, we also increase access to nutrition. Fresh produce is often reported as a favorite food item by people seeking assistance. So far this fiscal year, the Food Bank has distributed 16,095,607 pounds of produce. Summer’s bounty often brings zucchini for the grill, tomatoes for the salad, and peaches for the cobbler. Because we believe fresh food is a human right and not a luxury, God’s Pantry Food Bank works hard to consistently distribute fresh fruits and vegetables to our network of 500+ partner pantries and meal programs. We are so grateful to collaborate with grocers and farmers that make sharing fresh food with our neighbors a possibility.

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One Town, One School, One Family:
The School Pantry Program at Robertson County School

Robertson County, the smallest county in Kentucky, is home to 2,207 people. “We are a small community with the biggest hearts” is how Staci Johnson describes the area. As the Family Resource Youth Services Center (FRYSC) Coordinator for Robertson County School, she works closely with families who are experiencing challenging times and has seen firsthand the good that comes when neighbors help each other.

Their district educates K-12th grade students in one building. Staci works with a team of educators and social workers to ensure that children and families have access to the nutrition they need. The Food Bank has partnered with the school since 2017 as the primary source of food for their pantry. We also supply items for their backpack program, which has been a great success.

The school pantry is open year-round. According to Staci, working directly in schools to address food gaps is important because they are equipped to recognize and assist those who are experiencing difficulties quickly and confidentially. “The [food pantry and backpack program] allows relief to parents who are struggling and provides students with extra weekend snacks, so they have food when they are not in school.”

The FRYSC in Robertson County sees the need. And they see hope. Like the time they took extra steps to make sure a single mother without transportation had a holiday meal for her family. The FRYSC’s efforts not only brought immediate assistance, but also cultivated a relationship. When her financial situation changed, this person began giving back to the program, became a friend, and now serves on the school’s FRYSC Advisory Council.

God’s Pantry Food Bank is grateful to work with schools across Central and Eastern Kentucky. Our commitment is strong because we know that when our neighbors are fed, especially our youth, great things happen. Staci and her team at Robertson County School also know this, and we are thankful to have them in our network of neighbors helping neighbors to reduce food insecurity.

Learn more about Kentucky FRYSCs and their good work! Scan here.