Church members distribute back packs full of food

For many kids, school breakfast and/or lunch is the only meal they eat during the day.

That's only when classes are in session which leaves out vacations and other times school is dismissed.

State officials estimate that one in five kids in Nebraska, under the age of 18, is at risk of hunger.

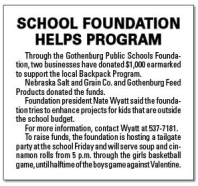
The fact that some kids and their families are hungry is what prompted Kendra and Shawn Boyd to start a Backpack Program in Gothenburg.

Back packs are filled at the American Lutheran Church with non-perishable goods, to make food easier to carry, one week and are to be returned the following week to be re-stocked.

Usually, the pack provides two breakfast meals and two lunch or dinner meals.

Kendra said the program, launched in 2006 in Nebraska and Iowa, helps families that are struggling to make ends meet.

The push for Kendra and Shawn to start the program, she said, is because 29% of the students who attend Gothenburg Public Schools receive free- or reduced-price meals.



SCHOOL FOUNDATION HELPS PROGRAM

Through the Gothenburg Public Schools Foundation, two businesses have donated $1,000 earmarked to support the local Backpack Program.

Nebraska Salt and Grain Co. and Gothenburg Feed Products donated the funds.

Foundation president Nate Wyatt said the foundation tries to enhance projects for kids that are outside the school budget.

For more information, contact Wyatt at 537-7181.

To raise funds, the foundation is hosting a tailgate party at the school Friday and will serve soup and cinnamon rolls from 5 p.m. through the girls basketball game, until halftime of the boys game against Valentine.

And they were noticing hungry children who attend J.A.M. (Jesus Alive in Me), an after-school church program open to all elementary-aged children, and who frequent the local food pantry in the church.

“The meal they get at J.A.M. is often the only evening meal they get and it’s after school,” she said.

The couple was also involved in the Backpack Program, through their church, when they lived in Lincoln. There they saw how the program could provide meals over the weekend and during vacations.

Kendra said the Boyds brought the idea to the mission team at their church, did a fund raiser and launched a local Backpack Program last spring.

Money from the fund raiser was used to buy backpacks and food. The backpack program is maintained as a separate program from the food pantry in the church.

“It feels good,” Kendra said about the distribution of food to children and families that need it. “Anytime you do a mission that can be direct and local, it impacts the community.”

At the moment, Kendra said food distribution is stalled because volunteers don’t have enough names of families in need.

Such families or people with suggestions of families are asked to call the American Lutheran Church at 537-3433.

Kendra said they hope to do another food distribution in March.

In 2012, the program distributed backpacks full of food six different times.

Besides Kendra and Shawn, other coordinators of the Backpack Program are Wenda Keiser and Jim Long.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636