

FIGHTING HUNGER, ONE BACKPACK AT A TIME



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EUGENE

The end of summer marks the beginning of the school year for students. And while some children won’t be too excited about going back to school, others are looking forward to it. To them, it means returning to a life where meals may be possible again – it signals a child’s hope for food.

Enter Eugene Bentley, a licensed professional counselor who spends his time working with children at a local public charter school, where the Food Bank’s Backpack program actively provides food assistance to children in need. The program aims to support specific students who are at risk of missing meals over the weekend, when they are not in school.

“We have 36 kids who are part of the Backpack program and they look forward to it every single week,” said Bentley. “The Backpack program is not only able to feed the kids over the weekend but it is also able to help feed their siblings in some cases. That really helps those families out.”

Bentley sees students in his office daily who may be struggling in school for a number of different reasons. Many times, it is simply because they are hungry and unable to focus in the classroom.

“Think about this, if a kid is hungry – to be honest - do you think they really care about what’s going on in the school system?” asked Bentley. “They are starving - they are hungry. But the Backpack program helps these kids because it gives them something to look forward to, and I believe it helps them with their schoolwork also – because it helps them to know they are going to have those meals over the weekend.”

Adding to the stress of finding adequate meals, Bentley said most of the children he counsels are often carrying a significant workload at home that has nothing to do with school at all.

“Kids are faced with so many things these days. The socio-economic status of these kids, the culture of these particular kids, you are looking at kids living in poverty,”

said Bentley. “They are 12, 11, sometimes even 9 years old – they don’t have a childhood because they have to take care of their siblings, wash them off to come to school, iron their uniforms, wash their clothes, even cooking for themselves. With the Backpack program, it really helps them in regards to the food. That’s one less thing for them to worry about.”

Bentley expressed his gratitude for the Food Bank and the program being available to these students in need, but more importantly he is truly grateful to the local community who donates funds to make sure the program can continue.

“I want to thank everyone who is donating to the Backpack program,” emphasized Bentley. “You’re saving the lives of these kids, in the sense kids are getting hope from the backpacks. Sometimes that backpack is their only sense of hope for having something to eat that day. They really look forward to those backpacks on Friday.”

VOLUNTEERING KNOWS NO AGE LIMITS



“These people shook his hand and said, ‘Thank you for thinking of us on your birthday,’” Aneecha recalls. “He is always thinking of others and it makes me proud.”

ANEETCHA

For his 7th birthday, Antonio Thomas, II wanted to celebrate turning one year older differently than other children. While most first-graders would wish for money or toys for their birthday, Antonio only had one wish — to feed people who are less fortunate and were desperately in need of a nutritious meal.

With help and support from his mother, Antonio and Aneecha Bradley prepared and packed boxes of food, and delivered these care packages along with cases of water to an area in Baton Rouge where many homeless people are known to normally congregate. Antonio even gifted his birthday money to someone he felt needed it more than him.

“These people shook his hand and said, ‘Thank you for thinking of us on your birthday,’” Aneecha recalls. “He is always thinking of others and it makes me proud.”

At first glance, Antonio seems like a typical 7-year-old boy. He loves lollipops. His favorite animal is a dinosaur, and he recently earned his Tiger Cub Scout badge in the Boy Scouts of America program. Antonio can be bashful at times. Yet once he speaks on the topic of helping others, he is enthusiastic while maintaining a sense of altruism and selflessness well beyond his years.

“Antonio cares about giving back to those in our community who are in need and less fortunate,” Aneecha says. “He wants to help serve his community.”

Giving back to the community is something that Antonio is extremely passionate about. His desire to serve others is encouraged by his mother Aneecha, who aims to instill charitable morals and values within her children, Antonio and Amaya, who is 8 years old. By volunteering during Family Night, Antonio and his family are given the opportunity to spend more time together and also have fun while sorting through various food products and packing boxes for distribution.

“Family night and volunteering teaches them the importance of community service and shows them how rewarding it is to see their impact on others,” Aneecha states.

On the second to last Tuesday of every month, the GBR Food Bank hosts “Family Night,” which provides our volunteers with the opportunity to serve with younger children. Traditionally, the age requirement for volunteering is 10 years old with a parent or guardian. However on this particular evening, we do not operate any machinery thus allowing us to lower the volunteer age to 7 years old.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit brfoodbank.org and click on our volunteer calendar.





THE HISTORY OF YOUR FOOD BANK

Through the years there has been a lot of growth from volunteers distributing food in the parking lot of Victoria Baptist Church to where we are now, however the mission and purpose of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank still remains – and that is to feed the hungry.



In 1984, the economy in Baton Rouge was among the worst in the country and many people in the community were in need. The downtown churches and social relief agencies, all members of the Urban Ministries Coalition, noticed about three times the usual number of people coming to them, seeking help.



A small group of volunteers, who later became the steering committee for the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, got together and began distributing collected bread and food items in the parking lot of Victoria Baptist Church in Baton Rouge. This group of volunteers was able to move from the parking lot of the church, to a small home located on 21st Street.



As the mission grew, so did the Food Bank's needs. The Food Bank was able to move to a new warehouse located on Chippewa Street. With the help of numerous partners and donors, the Food Bank then moved to a 29,000 square foot warehouse located on Choctaw Drive in 1996.



This warehouse served us well for 17 years, when the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank was able to move to a new location at 10600 S. Choctaw Drive. With nearly six times more square footage than the former warehouse, this facility has allowed the Food Bank to better serve its 11 parishes by increasing capacity, efficiency and output.



Although the Food Bank was flooded with 4-feet of floodwater in August 2016, donors from the community and across the country continued to rally alongside us and helped us to get back into our facility quickly.



GREATER BATON ROUGE FOOD BANK

MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Q: Can I receive food at the Food Bank?

A: Not directly. Food is collected and warehoused at GBR Food Bank, then distributed to the 115+ member agencies we serve throughout the area - organizations such as food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. These member agencies receive the food from the Food Bank and give it to those in need.

Q: How can I get help?

A: During regular business hours, you can call us at (225) 359-9940 and our receptionist will be able to direct you to a member agency near you. If you're in need of help outside of our regular business hours, you can contact Capital Area United Way by dialling 211 or (225) 932-2114.

Q: I'd like to volunteer with my family. Can children volunteer?

A: Once a month, we host a family volunteer night. These events usually take place on Tuesday evenings. Children aged 7-14 must be accompanied by an adult. Visit our volunteer calendar for more information! If you'd like to volunteer outside of our family nights, there is a minimum age requirement of 14 years old without a parent/guardian present and 10 years old with a parent/guardian.

Q: Are there weekend volunteer shifts available?

A: We are open on Saturdays from 8-12. These volunteer shifts fill up quickly, so make sure to book early! More information is available on our volunteer calendar at volunteer.brfoodbank.org/calendar.

Q: How can I organize a food drive with my organization?

A: Start by filling out a food drive registration form, located on our website at brfoodbank.org, or contact @yvonne@brfoodbank.org. Once your food drive is confirmed, decide on a drop-off location, set a collection goal and start spreading the word to motivate others to donate!

Q: Is it more helpful to donate funds or food?

A: The Food Bank accepts both food and monetary donations. While food donations provide a significant proportion of the Food Bank's food supply, monetary donations are much appreciated as they enable the Food Bank to purchase food at wholesale prices.

Q: What is the best type of food to donate?

A: We are grateful for all food donations, as they go a long way in assisting our fight against hunger. While we accept many food items, some nonperishable foods are better than others. Canned vegetables and fruits, canned soup, dried or canned beans, canned meat, rice, pasta, and breakfast cereal are items always in demand.

Q: Does the Food Bank accept baby food and baby formula?

A: Yes! However, these items need to be within the "best by" date.

Q: Does the Food Bank accept pet food?

A: Yes! Many of the seniors we serve appreciate donations of dog and cat food.

Q: Does the Food Bank accept fresh produce?

A: Absolutely! If you have excess produce from your harvest, the Food Bank will gladly accept it.

YOU ARE THE SAVING GRACE FOR OUR SENIORS



“I don’t think people realize how easy it is to struggle from just one event.”

EDITH

As a reflection of today’s economic uncertainty, many senior citizens find themselves in need of food assistance for the first time in their lives. After a lifetime of work, many seniors in our community are living on fixed incomes that make it difficult to pay for all their basic and medical needs such as groceries, medication or paying for utility bills.

Following the loss of her elderly aunt in January, Ms. Edith Mosley Doucette suffered another loss - a source of income. In need of food assistance, she applied for the Food Bank’s Senior Grocery Program to alleviate her financial burden and to continue to support and care for her younger sister on dialysis.

“If I didn’t have the help from the Food Bank, life would be very difficult. I don’t think people realize how easy it is to struggle from just one event,” she said. “You can be up today, and down the same day. You can have it one minute and the next minute, you don’t.”

Once a month, Ms. Edith receives a supplemental package of shelf-stable food and a box of household items, such as paper towels and paper plates. The food box is made up of donated product including breakfast foods, assorted canned and dried fruits, vegetables, proteins and sweets. Ms. Edith also collects

fresh fruit and vegetables at True Light Baptist Church each month as part of our Farm Fresh Healthy Food Initiative.

“It’s a blessing; the fresh vegetables, the fresh fruit and the box we receive once a month,” Ms. Edith states. “I thank God for the Food Bank.”

A recent report released by the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger ranked Louisiana as the second worst state for seniors at risk of hunger, with approximately 24% or one in four seniors facing food insecurity. The purpose of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank’s Senior Grocery Program is to feed the senior population in our community, and as a result, improve our assisted senior’s quality of life by allowing them to stretch their budgets to cover other expenses.

Without aid from the Food Bank, it would be very difficult for Ms. Edith to put food on the table, and she has a message for all who support our mission.

“To the people giving to the Food Bank, you’re doing a great job and continue to do it. God bless you. I also want to thank God for the people that the Lord touched their hearts to just give to the Food Bank, because in my book, it’s very much needed.”



Q&A

WITH BOARD MEMBER
ROWDY GAUDET

In part of an ongoing series, we will be sharing thoughts and ideas on the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank in a Q&A format so that you can get to know our board members better and also learn how we are working to better serve those in need. We recently sat down with our board member and past Chairman of the Board, Rowdy Gaudet.

Q: What is something that most people would not know about you?

A: Rowdy is my real name, and it comes from an old Clint Eastwood character, Rowdy Yates, on a show called Rawhide that ran in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Q: What are some of your hobbies?

A: I enjoy exercising, reading, and spending time with my 4 children.

Q: What has surprised you most about your experience of serving on the Board?

A: Twice since I've been on the board, I have mentioned through conversation to people about serving on the Food Bank board and those people expressed to me that they had utilized the Food Bank to get through a rough patch in their lives. In both instances, these were individuals who work and are raising a family. They both told me that because they were supported during their time of need, they now give back to the Food Bank as a sign of appreciation.

Q: Why do you think the work of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is important to the community?

A: 2016 was the year I was blessed to have served as President of the Board, and also the year of the flood in our region. The resilience of the Food Bank staff, the continuance of the mission immediately following the flood in spite of a flooded facility, and the support of the community for this organization is something I've been very proud of as a member of this board.

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