We’re Planning an Exciting Year!

Over the last two years, our organization has seen an amazing transformation - I think we are just getting started. We focus on not just the immediate food insecurity a family may be experiencing, but also the root causes that may be keeping that family in a state of trauma. **This more holistic approach has led us to develop short and longer-term programming aimed at shortening the line of need.** Feeding America reports that the average gap due to food insecurity is 7 pounds of food per week, so a family of four needs an additional 28 pounds after they have exhausted their cash, SNAP benefits, or other food assistance programs they may access. Depending on a family’s circumstance, that gap is approximately 6 meals varying from week to week, sometimes day to day.

**Our School Pantry Program** (our long-term strategy) is organized to ensure that every family receives at least 7 pounds of food per person. The long-term impact comes from bringing families and the school staff together in relationship building, which will boost student success at school. We are getting some great feedback from school staff and parents who are participating.

“Relationships are critical for building academics because until a child knows that you care about them, they won’t necessarily work as hard as they could have.” – Melissa DeWitt, Grissom Elementary

She isn’t talking about a food distribution; she’s talking about children responding positively by working harder in school when adults in their lives are working together.

“When you make a child happy by helping that home, it shows in their work. It shows in their attitude toward other students...We’re stepping out of the norm, out of the classroom. We’re here to bring our community together and meet the needs.” – Donna Sloss, Anderson Elementary

**It’s not about the food. It’s about relationships.**

We now have 22 schools in seven counties and will be adding more throughout 2018. Our funders are excited about this program; some have made multi-year commitments. We are looking for additional partners in funding and volunteering, so let us know if you would like to make an impact in the lives of thousands of children and their families.

Have a great start to your year,

Tim Kean
President & CEO
Enriching Youth

Forward S.T.E.P.S. is committed to helping the youth of our community thrive. We know that small intentional actions can have long-term benefits and can shift a child’s trajectory for a lifetime. That is why interns from Ball State University work with participants in the Youth Enrichment Program on a broad range of activities: teambuilding, self-esteem building, emotional intelligence, career exploration, financial literacy, mindfulness, problem solving, college/Next Step exploration, math and science, arts and crafts, health and wellness, and more. This semester BSU students will assist with our reading program and helping youth to successfully complete their weekly “jobs.” This will help develop important soft skills that are of high value to employers.

**College students and youth work together to teach each other about empathy, reciprocity, and what it means to be a “leader.”**

Older youth are invited to apply for the “Skills for Success” program that helps them develop leadership and problem-solving skills. Initial feedback suggests it has made an impact. In spring 2017, a 13-year-old participant shared, “Before the training I thought leadership was bossing people around and telling them what to do. Now I know it is about helping people to be their best.”

We also know that the Forward S.T.E.P.S. Youth Enrichment experience impacts the interns as well. Erin, 2014 BSU grad, recently shared, “I want to let you know how thankful I am to have been a part of the internship. It was both challenging and rewarding, and I know those memories will serve me well in this position, as well as in the future.” Ethan, 2016 BSU grad, stated that the internship experience completely changed his perspective about poverty and the community. Another student writes: “I have developed better people skills with interacting that I will continue to develop after school and I have developed ways to express my empathy for others.” Another student shared, “There is nothing that would make me happier than being able to alleviate the poverty within Delaware County. To have lived through the shame pushed onto the working poor by those higher up, it has a special place in my activism.”

The interns’ instructor, Melinda Messineo, summed up their messages with these words: “Forward S.T.E.P.S. is a gift. We learn so much from each other in countless ways. There is no classroom experience that can replicate the transformations that happen here.”

For more information about Forward S.T.E.P.S. contact Dorica Watson at dwatson@curehunger.org or visit our website.

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**PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: FORWARD S.T.E.P.S.**

Students receive homework help at weekly meetings
Winchester Area Churches and Community Food Pantry

The Winchester Area Churches and Community Food Pantry (WACCFP) has helped many food insecure individuals in Randolph County since its establishment in 1989. WACCFP started as a collaboration of church food pantries: Friends Church; Presbyterian Church; Methodist Church; Main Street Church; and East Street Congressional Church. Now WACCFP collaborates with more than 150 churches, organizations and individuals each month.

The pantry has had multiple homes over the years. The first location of WACCFP was in Winchester’s Community and Family Services building. In 2011, they became an independent 501c3 organization and started building The Shalom Center in Winchester, where they reside today. This new location allows WACCFP to serve more people efficiently, and offers WACCFP more space for functions and updated equipment, such as a new walk-in refrigerator and freezer. These new amenities have allowed WACCFP to receive and store more food. Since the opening of the new site, the number of people helped in the community has increased. According to Feeding America, WACCFP distributed 211,518 meals in 2016 and 245,279 meals in 2017.

Demand for pantry services in Winchester is increasing; in 2017 WACCFP distributed an additional 33,761 over the previous year.

“Moving to a large facility gave us three times the storage space,” said Pam Ferguson. This move allowed WACCFP to store more food than they have in the past. “We are also able to ‘get things’ when they are on sale. This allows the pantry to reduce a large amount of our costs.”

Besides purchasing discounted retail items, WACCFP relies mostly on donations to fill the pantry. The Church of Winchester is a major food source, as well as donations from local stores and food drives. They also partner with Second Harvest to buy discounted food by the pound. This allows the pantry to choose what items they receive in bulk in addition to donations of non-perishable goods.

Volunteers are the heart of WACCFP - more than 50 volunteers work a the pantry. In fact, they are entirely managed by unpaid staff. For every volunteer at the pantry helping clients choose food, collecting client data, and greeting people (20 volunteers work in 2 hour shifts each week), there are 10 volunteers one doesn’t see who work when the pantry is closed to restock shelves, clean the building, unload food trucks and pick up donations.

The food pantry has developed a long way from where it started and plans to continue the growth. One of WACCFP’s goals for 2018 is to work more closely with Second Harvest Food Bank to fulfill its desire to help feed those in need in the Randolph County area.