



Social Justice

Hunger in Story County

A group of women from St. Cecilia Parish* is working with others in their sorority, called *Charites*, to help alleviate hunger in Story County children. *Charites* is partnering with Meeker School to set up the Backpack Program this fall and plans to partner with Sawyer School in the future. The Backpack Program provides healthy, kid-friendly food to low-income children on weekends and school breaks.

According to Jean Kresse, President and CEO of United Way of Story County, UWSC piloted the Backpack Program in November, 2011, after learning the free and reduced lunch rate at Mitchell School was 47%. By September 2012, that percentage had risen to over 50% and the Ames School District had 28.5% on the free and reduced lunch program.**

In the program, school counselors identify children who would benefit from having nutritious food on the weekend; the recipients must qualify for free or reduced lunches. Each Friday during the school year, a backpack is filled with food for one child for the weekend and discreetly placed in the student's locker. There



are no identifying marks on the backpack to indicate it is anything but a backpack. The contents of the backpacks vary each week, but contain a variety of items such as pop-top meals or soup, 100 percent juice, single-serve cereal, fruit cups, peanut butter and shelf-stable 2 percent milk. The food is purchased at reduced prices at the Food Bank of Iowa. Cost per student per year is estimated at \$145.60.

Currently, the schools that have partnered with United Way of Story County and the Food Bank of Iowa to implement the program include Mitchell (24 children); Ballard (24); Nevada (50 - UWSC covers 30 and the Food Bank covers 20);

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A Committee of St. Cecilia's Catholic Church

Issue 6
Volume 3
August 2013
Editor: Lynn Franco

*Cindy Baughman, Margy Hanson, Janet Kazwell, Laura Frantzen, Judy Blum, Patty Huisenga and Betsy Baum.
** Income guidelines for 2013 for a family of four are as follows: Yearly income at or below \$30,615—eligible for free lunches; yearly income at or below \$43,568—eligible for reduced-price lunches. Source: Iowa Department of Education.

SAINT CECILIA CONTACTS:

**ALTERNATIVE GIFT
MARKET.** 1-800-842-2243 STC
Contact: Cynthia Shriver 292-
6584

AMOS. STC Contact: Mary Ross
232-6232

APPALACHIA WAREHOUSE,
2019 Pullman Street, Ames. STC
Contact: Lynn Franco 232-0898

BIRTHRIGHT OF AMES, 108
Hayward Ave., Suite 202, Ames
515-292-8414. STC Contact:
Kathy Ridnour 232-1697

**CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS OF
THE AMERICAS. STC Contact:**
Sharon Jenkins 233-2570

**EMERGENCY RESIDENCE
PROJECT. STC Contact Julie**
Haas 232-7138

FOOD AT FIRST, 516 Kellogg
Ave., Ames. 515-344-4357 STC
Contact: Doreen Berg 956-3414

**GOOD NEIGHBOR
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE,**
INC., 3206 S. Duff, Ames 515-296-
1449. STC Contact: Doreen Berg
956-3414

**HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF
CENTRAL IOWA. 515-232-8815.**
STC Contact: Alan Christy 231-
8099

MEALS ON WHEELS
(Homeward), 1114 S. Duff, Ames.
STC Contact: Cathy Kaspar 233-
0517

OPERATION RICE BOWL. STC
Contact: Cynthia Shriver 292-
6584

PRISON MINISTRY. STC
Contact: Dave Temple 232-9271.

**SAINT CECILIA SOCIAL
JUSTICE COMMITTEE. STC**
Contact: Mary Ross 232-5080

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE.
STC Contact: Garland Dahlke
(515) 460-0403

(continued)

Meeker (new this fall with 20) and Edwards (also new this fall with 15). Many more children are eligible but do not yet participate in the program.

However, children are not the only citizens who are food insecure (i.e., unsure of where their next meal is coming from). In Story County, 13.5 % of the people live at or below the poverty level. That is equal to 12,000 people, 2,570 of them children.

Community efforts by UWSC and its Hunger Collaboration to reduce hunger in Story County include:

- Food Pantry Collaboration; Food at First; Free Market; Food Drives; Backpack Program
- Congregate meals; Home-delivered meals; Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program
- Nutrition focus: Healthy Food Vouchers; School Gardens; Cooking classes
- Encouraging bringing in more federal dollars for summer food programs for children.

For more information on the Backpack Program or other United Way of Story County hunger programs, please contact UWSC at 515-268-5142.

Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels volunteers help by delivering meals to Ames residents over the lunch hour. Typical routes include 5-10 stops that are arranged as much as possible by geographic location. First, volunteers stop at MGMC to pick up the meals in carriers and the route information, deliver the meals, and then return carriers to Mary Greeley Medical Center. Volunteers provide their own transportation. Hours are 11:30 a.m. start, typically shifts last 1-1.5 hours. Volunteer substitutes are always needed. For more information, please contact Cathy Kaspar at 233-0517.

The Saint Cecilia Social Justice Committee meets on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Sunroom. Everyone is welcome to attend. All donations are made in accordance with Catholic Social Justice teachings. Financial reports and budget information are available from the parish office. Minutes from the meetings are posted on the parish website.