

Blessings in a Backpack

2012-13 Year-end Review

Blessings in a Backpack – Akron (BiB) completed its second school year of hunger relief efforts on May 30, 2013, by supporting all the children at Helen Arnold Community Learning Center (HACLC) and 10% of the student population at Akron Digital Academy (ADA). Each week the students took home nutritional and easily prepared food to help them stave off hunger during the weekends. We at BiB-Akron are grateful for the many individuals and organizations who offered support to move the program forward and help feed children in Akron's inner city.

Beginning September 6, 2012, four BiB teams rotated responsibility each week to pick up, deliver and pack the food in plastic bags at HACLC located at 450 Vernon Odom Blvd., Akron. At the beginning of the school year, 338 bags were prepared for HACLC and 50 for ADA. By school-year's end the number had increased to 350 at HACLC. Each week a team member delivered the food to ADA on Friday morning to its location at 335 South Main Street, Akron.

VOLUNTEERS

Four teams of dedicated and conscientious volunteers rotate duties to pick up, deliver and pack the 400 bags of food each week. Visiting volunteers who contacted BiB with interest in helping.. Throughout the year we welcomed visiting volunteers to assist. Children accompanied by parents, business and collegiate volunteers are often seen in the production line. No fewer than 10 volunteers participated at packing sessions. From start to finish, the packing sessions are no more than one hour.

FUNDRAISING

Our fundraising efforts began in August when BiB volunteers wrote personal hand-written appeals to previous donors, families and friends. St. Hilary's Church has been a generous source of gifts as the congregation reads about BiB's efforts in its bulletin. Along with a successful individual donor campaign, we also received very generous corporate gifts.

A large anonymous pledge was made in January, one that will broaden our reach to support many more children. The donor's request is that the gift be used to expand the program to include another inner city school. It will support approximately 400 more children.

Included in our successful fundraising events included a Fall Mum Sale (second annual), Breakfast with Santa (second annual), and donations made from two CaBi Clothing Shows. For the first time we held a holiday ornament sale that was extremely successful. Local renowned artist Don Drumm created an ornament for BiB to sell as a fundraiser. The response was overwhelming as we sold 900 ornaments. Plans are underway to repeat the ornament sale in the fall of 2013 with intentions of expanding our reach to increase sales.

Local foundations and organizations have generously answered our appeal requests. The Howland Memorial Trust, Millennium Fund, Tuscora Park Health and Wellness Foundation and The Vernon Odom Fund made gifts to BiB during the 2012-13 school year.

The following local organizations/businesses made gifts to support BiB efforts: WITAN, Ethos Partners, Bath Volunteers for Service, Christ Child Society and Leadership Akron Class XXIX.

FOOD and FOOD COLLECTIONS

Our grocery list is big! Each week the order includes oatmeal, granola bars, ramen noodles, applesauce, pudding and cheese crackers, to name a few of the easily prepared foods. Each bag contains nine to ten items. We stay within our budget of \$32,000 or \$80/child/school year.

Individuals and organizations offer assistance by holding food collections for BiB. This past year three small food drives were held assisting to decrease our food bill. The organizations interested are given a list of the food in order to keep the items in each bag consistent.

Volunteers save plastic grocery bags to use for packing along with bags donated by Giant Eagle when needed.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In January 2013 an Executive Committee was formed. The committee meets monthly to plan and organize events, fundraising and volunteer needs for the chapter. The officers are: Viki Henschen, Director, Debbie Pianalto, Treasurer, Jill Eicher, Volunteer Director and Kelley Beherns, Events Coordinator. There are plans to expand the number of members during the 2013-14 school year.

FUTURE

With the generous anonymous gift we are excited to expand BiB next school year to include all the children at McEbright Community Learning Center as well as 50 children each at Crouse Community Learning Center and Schumacher Community Learning Center. Four new volunteer teams are currently being formed to pack at McEbright. Approximately 800 children will be supported by BiB in the 2013-14 school year.

Research is underway to learn about suppliers of fresh produce as we will be adding vegetables and fruit in the bags each week. Adding fresh produce to the bags was made possible with a generous grant awarded by the Tuscora Park Health and Wellness Foundation.

TESTIMONIAL OF SUPPORT

LaMonica Davis, Principal at HACLC offered the following information about how the BiB has impacted the children at her school.

Before we had our "Blessings," our attendance on Mondays was very low. We would have about 10% of our population absent on Mondays. Since the program has blossomed, we have around 98% of students in school on Mondays. At the end of the school year, our ADM for the year was 97.85%. This was the 2nd largest of all of the elementary buildings (King School being #1).

Having food to eat over the weekend, sustained the children enough so that they were well nourished and able to come to school ready to learn on Monday.

When the 2011-2012 school year began, Helen Arnold received an Academic rating of "Academic Watch" from the Ohio Department of Education. Our Performance Index was 73.7%. If we went any lower this school year, (69.9%) we would fall into "Academic Emergency". It is very easy for scores to decline when students are not coming to school prepared, coming late, and even coming hungry. Because of your program, we started the 2012-2013 school year with the state rating of 80.3% which makes us "Continuous Improvement". In addition, we also moved into "ABOVE" status on the state's Value Added score. This means that we made MORE than 1 year's growth in our scores.

We are truly grateful to Blessings in a Backpack for providing "BLESSINGS" to our students each week. You should see their faces when the bags are delivered to the classrooms on Fridays. It is like a kiddo receiving a large bag of candy. I never knew how much pudding, crackers, and oatmeal, just to name a few items, could make such a huge difference in the lives of our children.