

## Helping the hungry

Written by Elizabeth Barrett  
Thursday, 26 December 2013 15:28 -

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Community Backpack Program going strong.

On Fridays, 28 kids at Dudley Elementary pick up a backpack full of food before heading home for the weekend.

Spaghetti, boxes of macawroni and cheese, pancake mix and vouchers for milk and eggs at the grocery store are just a few items in the packs.

This past week, Gothenburg's FFA organization slipped in fresh fruit and movie passes for family members as a holiday gift.

"The movie passes are intended to bring family members together to do something together," said FFA'er Carson Messersmith, noting that although members need community service hours, they also like to give back to the community.

Although coordinator Kendra Boyd and her husband, Shawn, started a Backpack Program in Gothenburg in 2012, it became better coordinated in mid November with a better list of families needing food, she said.

Dudley principal Jim Widdifield, who coordinates the program for the school, said it's become more convenient for the kids.

Volunteers, like Boyd and Wenda Keiser, now ready the items at the American Lutheran Church where the food pantry is located.

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They then take the non-perishables to Dudley Elementary where the bags are packed by FFA officers and other volunteers and picked up by students.



Each family receives one breakfast and two lunch or dinner meals according to the number of people in the family.

For some kids, Boyd said school breakfast and/or lunch may be the only meal they eat during the day.

The Boyds were involved in a Backpack Program when they lived in Lincoln.

After moving to Gothenburg, Boyd said she discovered that about 30% of District 20 students receive free- or reduced-price meals.

She also noticed hungry children at an after-school church program for elementary kids and the number of people needing food from the community pantry.

Widdifield said school officials initially let parents know about the program through the Dudley Elementary Bulletin.

With little response, officials then sent letters to all parents and guardians grades K-6.

Response was better.

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Since Nov. 15, backpacks full of food have been going home regularly. Students return empty packs on Mondays.

After one bag was returned, Boyd said a note was included: "Thank you for the food, we very much appreciate it."

Any family who would like to receive food should contact Dudley secretary Lori Kolbo at 537-3651.

Contact Boyd at 529-1048 to donate a backpack.

[ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com](mailto:ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com)

308-537-3636