



GREAT FALLS COMMUNITY
**FOOD
BANK**

"Gathering together to nourish our community."

Food for Thought



GFPS Transition Program Giving Homeless Children a Path to Learn



Imagine struggling to get through high school – with the usual academic and social pressures that can be daunting for any teen – when you're sleeping under a bridge or in your family car. Imagine trying to break

the chains of poverty through education by attending class, completing homework and studying for exams when you aren't even sure where your next meal is coming from.

Darreck Hale and Lee Houle, who oversee Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) Transition Program witness firsthand dozens of Great Falls children fighting this fight on a daily basis – balancing schoolwork with part-time jobs; erratic and/or missing parents; and no roof over their heads. What the pair has seen both inspires and worries them.

"It can get emotional," says Hale. "It can keep you up at nights for sure," Houle added. "But when you see kids living in poverty trying so hard to break the chain, you think the least I can do is try to help them."

Houle and Hale can be seen shopping the Food Bank warehouse 2-3 times a week or more trying to keep homeless families fed so they can attend school or look for jobs to get housing for their children. It usually starts with a call from a concerned school teacher or counselor.

"Rather than just let the kid fall through the cracks, the schools will call us and say 'Hey something is not right with these kids. Can you see if you can help?'" The pair will then do a home visit to see if their aid will include food, a place to stay, help with jobs – whatever it takes to get them one step closer to self-sustaining, comfortable living, and most importantly for the program – make sure their kids have a chance to succeed in school.

"We connect them with all the resources in town and try to get them what they really need – for work, for food, bus passes, for housing – maybe even a reference to a mechanic who can help them get their older car fixed to get to work and take the kids to school – whatever they need to help their children succeed," Hale said. "We have to try to ensure our students aren't at just the very bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs."

Houle has been with the program for seven years and has seen his share of homeless students both succeeding and failing to make it through high school.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm a lawyer fighting for a kid on death row. It's just that important."

– Lee Houle, GFPS Transition Program

"You can't help everyone but you have to try," he says. "Fortunately we aren't in this alone. There are a lot of other agencies helping out too. This town has a lot of people caring for other people and that makes Great Falls special, I think."

Houle immediately mentioned GFPS teachers and administrators as people who go beyond their job descriptions to help students who have poor home situations. "I've seen a lot of teachers and counselors take money out of their own pockets to help these kids and they never say a word."

Houle and Hale said they have seen many success stories over the years – families that are now completely self-sustaining after being literally helpless. A recent case that comes to Hale's mind was a single-parent family of four that came to Great Falls seeking shelter after escaping an abusive situation.

"They were living out of their car," Hale said. "We got them fed and into a shelter. Helped the kids get to school until they could ride the bus. Helped the mom get a full-time job. We worked with them for a year

- continued on page 2

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Julie Wall, President
Shawn Hill,
Vice President
Josh Tierney, Treasurer
Becky Bruns, Secretary
Tom Hazen
Dustin Hogan
Corri Smith
Lael Humble
Justin Grohs
Ashley Forde
Ryann Poppa
Sharon Virgin

STAFF

Shaun M. Tatarka,
Executive Director
Doug Perrien,
Warehouse Manager
Beth McKinney,
Fund Development
Coordinator
Keith Stoyk

Board President's Message



Julie Wall is Vice President of Quality & Safety at Benefis Health System

As President of the Board of Directors at the Great Falls Community Food Bank since January of 2018, I have seen first-hand the ongoing dedication and hard work of our staff, volunteers, community agencies, and my fellow Food Bank board members. I am pleased to report that your donation dollars are being utilized with the utmost care, and with a firm commitment to our mission of feeding the hungry in Cascade County. The board is composed of 12 community members including educators, accountants and business leaders, who have dedicated themselves to our mission and to assisting and supporting our staff to do all they can to nourish the less fortunate. We know we are lucky to call Great Falls our home and we all feel a deep calling to care for our fellow Cascade County residents.

We also know that as a donor, you expect to see ongoing results, including growth in services and financial viability. Please take a few minutes to read more about our excellent programs and fundraising activities highlighted in this newsletter. We are especially pleased this year to have added the remaining four Great Falls public elementary schools to our Backpacks4Kid program. Feeding under-privileged children on holidays and weekends during the school year makes for a better learning experience for all of the children in our community, and gives many of them a fighting chance against the cycle of poverty.

I would like to personally thank you for contributing to the Great Falls Community Food Bank's continued success. There are many excellent service organizations

in our community, and we are honored that you have confidence in the Food Bank, its mission, and ability to make a difference. We do not receive any government funding and rely solely on donors such as you to feed the hungry in our community. Please know that both the board members and staff are inspired by your confidence in us to produce meaningful results. Whether we are helping a bread-winner look for work on a full stomach; a child in school who struggles to learn when hungry; or a senior who sometimes has to choose between food and medicine, our goal of nourishing our community is vital. With your ongoing support we will continue to work diligently to offer a hand up to those in need.

Thank you again for supporting the Great Falls Community Food Bank and our mission to feed the hungry in our community.

Executive Director's Message



*Shaun M. Tatarka, Executive Director
Great Falls Community Food Bank*

As I begin my fourth year serving as the executive director of the Great Falls Community Food Bank, I am humbled by the generosity of the residents of Great Falls. Thanks to the amazing kindness of so many, we have been able to accomplish some great things in our determined pursuit of fulfilling our mission.

Perhaps our biggest recent achievement is the extension of our Backpacks4Kids program, which now serves all 15 elementary schools in Great Falls. This means approximately 650-700 school children now take home a pack of food on Friday afternoons and before holidays to get them through the weekend. We know education is the best chance for many of these kids to break the cycle of poverty. We also know that a weekend pack of food allows a child in need to show up Monday mornings ready to learn. That helps every child and teacher in every classroom.

We know hunger exists everywhere and we are thrilled that thanks to you, our generous donors, we were able to reach this longtime goal.

One of the main reasons we have been able to expand our program is the success of our CANTastic event in March. This popular community event has grown from a \$10,000 fundraiser in 2013 to a \$60,000 fundraiser in 2019. Again, this is all thanks to our awesome donors.

In January of last year, the Food Bank proudly received our Gold Seal of transparency from GuideStar, the charity watchdog group. We firmly believe every charity has a responsibility to its donors to have complete access to our financial status -- our GuideStar designation proves that. And though we fully understand that overhead should never be the only or even the main way to judge a charitable organization, we are proud that overhead is normally in the 14-16% range, which is considered excellent by industry standards.

You will notice in this newsletter a story on the Great Falls Public School's Transition program. This outstanding program might be the best example of how your food bank donation is making a positive difference in our community. Administrators of this vital program can share many stories of homeless teens turning their lives around because they managed to get through high school in very difficult situations. These same administrators will tell you they simply could not have helped most of these children without the support you provided via the food bank.

Finally, I would like to thank the people who run and work at all of our local charities who directly feed the hungry in Great Falls. Many of these folks work tirelessly on a volunteer or very low-pay basis. Thank you to all of you for making our home a better place. Please know you are backed by a generous and caring community.

- continued from page 1

and the last time we checked up on them, they needed nothing from us."

And while the Transition Program has seen plenty of similar success stories, the program can't save all the students from "falling through the cracks."

"We had a young man a few years ago who was sleeping under the 10th Avenue bridge who had a 4.0 GPA at CMR," Houle said. "We thought he had a bright future but it just became too much for him and had to drop out and now he's a father working minimum wage jobs with no diploma. He just couldn't keep up that pace of living under the bridge with no family support."

These sad situations don't deter the program's administrators. "I'll never give up," Houle said. "Sometimes I feel like I'm a lawyer fighting for a kid on death row -- it's just that important."

The Transition Program feeds anywhere from 20-45 children a month. Hale says without the assistance of the Food Bank, "we wouldn't be able to feed most of these families, no way. If we're feeding a family of five, we might need \$120 or more at a grocery store but we can get the same amount of food at the Food Bank for \$12 or less. And for the people we help, that \$12 might as well be a million as they have nothing, but with our support and the work of the Food Bank we can feed a lot of people for very little."

For anyone who wants to help students in the Transition Program, you can contact the Food Bank to contribute to the program's Food Bank account or make a donation to the Great Falls Public School Foundation, requesting funds be earmarked for students in the program. ❖

CANtastic Success Solidifies Backpacks4Kids Expansion



Great Falls High School Key Club

continued and increasing support of our community, the Backpacks4Kids program was able to expand in April. We are pleased to now be serving all fifteen GFPS elementary schools.

CANtastic 2019 was once again a major success as local teams and sponsors helped the Food Bank raise more than 8,000 pounds of food and more than \$60,000.

The annual event was held March 16 at the Holiday Village Mall and featured eight local teams that, with the help of volunteer architects, built structures using canned and boxed foods. CANtastic also included an elementary school art gallery with hunger as the theme. The top four students were awarded Scheels Gift Cards. All of the nearly 100 works of art were given to sponsors of our important and popular Backpacks4Kids Program which feeds elementary school children on weekends and holidays throughout the school year. **Thanks to the**



Pepsi



Credit Union



Loenbro

The Food Bank would especially like to thank the generous companies who return each and every year to help make this such an amazing and vital community event. Subway treated the teams to dinner during Thursday night's build. On Saturday, mall visitors were able to pay to vote on their favorite sculpture. The money raised, along with sponsorships from D.A. Davidson Companies, Walmart and Scheels cover the \$700 rent the Food Bank paid for the space over the weekend as well as Food Bank overhead.

WINNERS - Great Falls High School Key Club won the coveted People's Choice award. The Judge's Favorite was Giant Springs Chapter of Credit Unions, while Food Bank Favorite and Best Meal went to Pepsi of Great Falls and Loenbro, respectively. Downtown Chicks, Great Falls Edward Jones Branches, CMR Key Club and GF Central Catholic Key Club all earned Honorable Mentions.

New CANtastic team member Libbey Winderl of Edward Jones said her team thoroughly enjoyed the event. "CANtastic 2019 was such a memorable event for all of us. This was the first year we participated as a group and we are already looking forward to next year's event! I encourage any local groups, clubs, or businesses to register next year," Winderl said.

Each of the eight teams raised their own funds to purchase the food to build the structures. Local grocery stores offered many of the teams reduced prices, making CANtastic a genuine community event. ❖



Edward Jones



Downtown Chicks



CMR Key Club



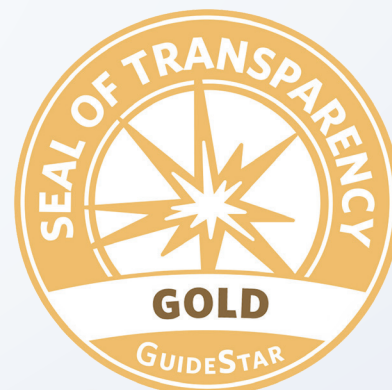
GF Central Key Club

Great Falls Community Food Bank
1620 12th Ave. N.
Great Falls, MT 59401
(406) 452-9029

NON PROFIT
ORG
U.S. Postage
PAID
Great Falls, MT
Permit No. 79



GREAT FALLS COMMUNITY
**FOOD
BANK**



“Gathering together to nourish our community.”



gffoodbank

Tax Advantages of Planned Giving

Please remember to include the Food Bank in your will or estate plan. You can also help feed the hungry in Great Falls with charitable gift annuities or stock gifts. Our tax ID number is 36-3540471. Call Shaun for more information on endowment giving, info on the Montana tax credit or any other planned giving strategies. We're happy to work with your advisor or attorney.

What is the Insert?

Included in this newsletter is a pre-printed insert for the 25th annual Montana Shares raffle. This is your chance to support the Food Bank and become eligible for great prizes. Montana Shares is a partnership of non-profit organizations working to build better communities across Montana. Contributions to member groups are made through Montana Shares each year during statewide workplace giving campaigns. All donations to the raffle support Montana Shares in its efforts to help the Food Bank and other nonprofits diversify fundraising and raise public awareness.

We urge you to make your donation today and help support this great organization. Through Montana Shares, the Food Bank is able to raise additional funds through workplace giving.

If you would like to donate to Montana Shares, please be sure to fill out the form(s) and send to Montana Shares. Please make your check out to: Montana Shares.