



FY 2023 BACKPACK PROGRAM REPORT

JULY 1, 2022–JUNE 30, 2023



Grateful for You

Food Bank for the Heartland is grateful for the outpouring of support from our community to combat childhood hunger. It is only through this compassion that our BackPack Program delivered 1,270,264 meals to at-risk children in Nebraska and western Iowa during the '22-'23 school year. On behalf of our team and the children we serve, thank you! We could not do this life changing work without you.

Program History

For nearly 18 years, Food Bank for the Heartland has partnered with dedicated educators in schools across Nebraska and western Iowa to provide children with nutritious food throughout the academic school year. The BackPack Program launched in 2006 with just three schools. Thanks to the investment of our community, 252 schools in 112 districts participated in FY 2023, distributing more than 1.2 million meals to children struggling with food insecurity.

Each pack contains four meals, consisting of easy-to-prepare or ready-to-eat food. A typical pack includes two breakfast items like cereal or oatmeal, two entrees, a fruit pouch, one juice, and two milk cartons. These items help nourish children over the weekend and enable them to thrive in school and better reach developmental milestones.

The BackPack Program is one of the many programs the Food Bank supports to fight childhood hunger. It is designed to provide weekend meals for children with limited or no parental supervision. In portions of the Food Bank's rural service area, the BackPack Program is the only food assistance option to which families have access.



This program helps a student remove the concern of worrying if they'll have food over the weekend to eat. A student that knows they will go home with extra food provided by this program will be a more focused student in the classroom.

—Teacher with Ponca Public Schools

Making a Direct Impact

1 IN 9 CHILDREN

IN OUR SERVICE AREA IS FACING FOOD INSECURITY. THAT'S 55,480 CHILDREN.

8,357 CHILDREN

RECEIVED BACKPACKS WEEKLY DURING THE 2022–2023 SCHOOL YEAR.

1,270,264 MEALS

DISTRIBUTED TO CHILDREN DURING THE 2022–2023 SCHOOL YEAR.

252 SCHOOLS

IN 112 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVED.

62 COUNTIES

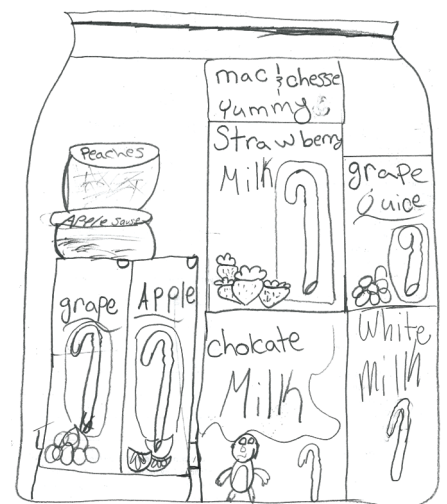
THROUGHOUT NEBRASKA AND WESTERN IOWA PARTICIPATE IN THE BACKPACK PROGRAM.

\$164

THE COST TO SPONSOR ONE CHILD FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR.

\$1,126,889

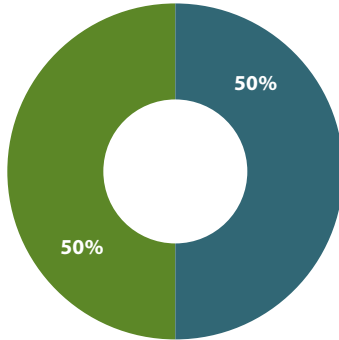
TOTAL COST OF THE PROGRAM IN FY 2023.



Artwork drawn by a student who receives BackPack meals

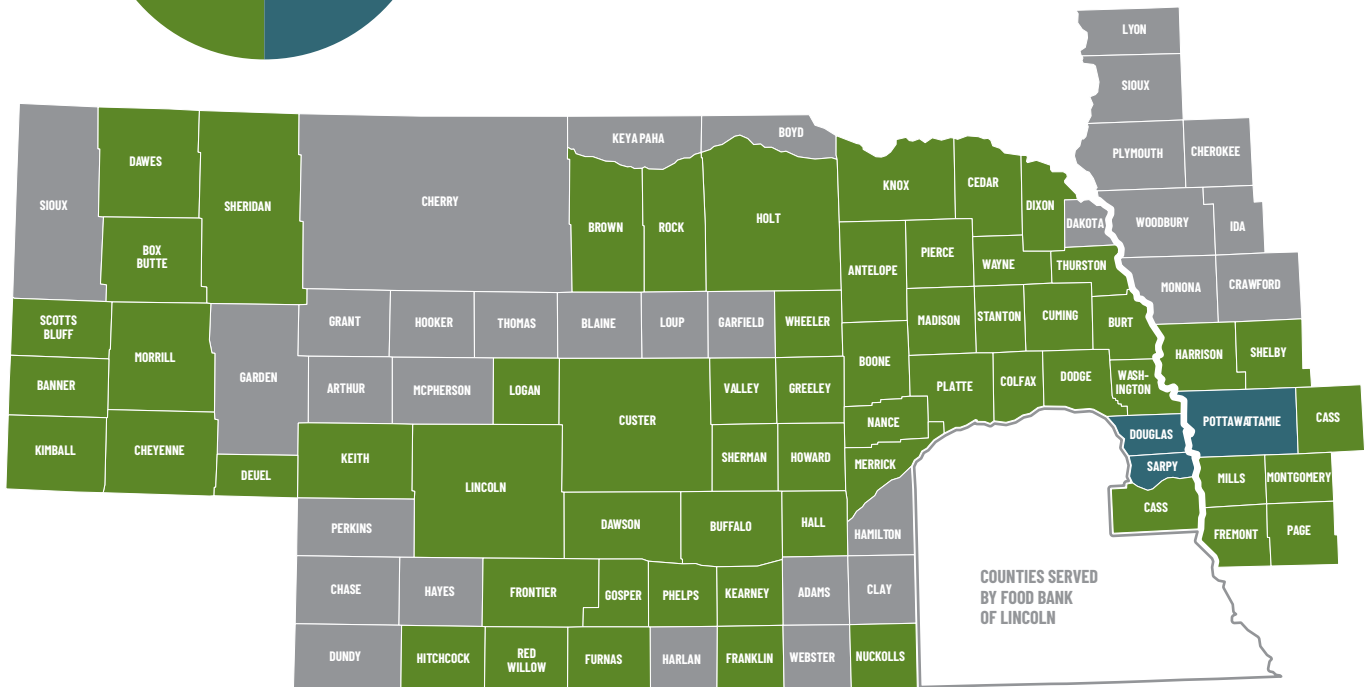
How the Program Works

More than 8,300 elementary children facing food insecurity in 62 counties take nutritious food home each weekend throughout the school year. The Food Bank staff works with each school district to determine the number of Backpacks they need. Based on which students are receiving free or reduced-priced breakfast and lunch, school staff determine which children need assistance through weekend Backpack meals. The program is designed to be respectful for distribution—the food packs are discreetly placed into students’ backpacks on a designated day while students are in class.



BACKPACK DISTRIBUTION

- BackPacks distributed across the Omaha metro (Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie counties)
- BackPacks distributed across greater Nebraska and western Iowa



The Impact of Food Insecurity on Children

Providing consistent access to nutritious food is vital for children’s well-being. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, hunger’s effect on the body directly impacts school performance. Research shows children from families who are not sure where their next meal is coming from are more likely to have lower math scores and repeat a grade, among other challenges.

According to the USDA, there is also a strong connection between hunger and chronic diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. The more meals children miss, the more severe hunger affects their minds and bodies. Through your support, the Food Bank remains committed to providing healthy meals to at-risk children across the Heartland so they can focus on what matters most—learning, growing, and having fun.



We all know that it is hard for children to learn and grow when they are hungry. Because of this, I see the academic growth of these students daily. So, with thankful hearts as teachers and students, we thank the supporters of Food Bank for the Heartland.

—Jane Lewis, Madison Elementary School

Woodhouse Drives Backpack Program Forward

Woodhouse Auto Family has partnered with Food Bank for the Heartland for the last 13 years to fight childhood hunger. Their partnership has been instrumental to the success of the Backpack Program. Through their commitment, Woodhouse is helping thousands of children across the Heartland access healthy food.



Examples of items found in a typical Backpack



At Woodhouse, we are honored to continue the tradition as a grateful partner of the Backpack Program... and also humbled to see, hear, and know the impact it makes, and has made, to thousands of children and their families each and every year across our communities.

— Jason Kruse, Chief Financial Officer at Woodhouse Auto Family

How Your Support Makes a Difference

It costs \$164 to sponsor a child and provide him or her with Backpack meals throughout the academic year. There are no expenses for schools or families to participate. To ensure quality, consistency and safety, 100% of the food for the Backpack Program is purchased by Food Bank for the Heartland. While the program receives support from a broad base of individuals, corporations, and foundations each year, it is the most expensive program at the Food Bank. The ready-to-eat nature of the food provided in each Backpack contributes to the cost of the program, which was \$1,126,889 in FY 2023.

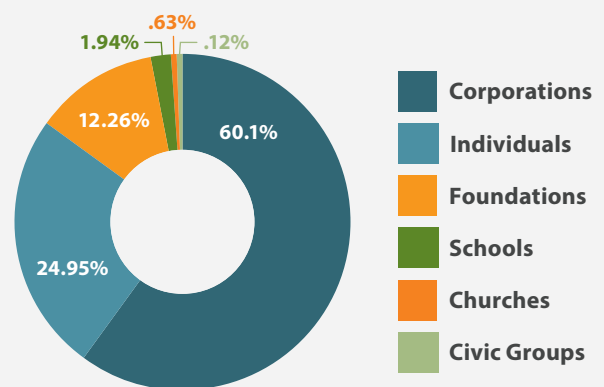


My favorite food are the fruit cups.



Artwork drawn by students who receive Backpack meals

BACKPACK PROGRAM FY 2023 FINANCIAL SOURCES



The backpacks help me get more healthy, and my family too. Thank you.

— 3rd grader at Jefferson North Platte



It helps me because when I get hungry, I have something to snack on rather than going without.

— 6th grader at Elkhorn Middle School



Students helping Students Overcome Food Insecurity

In May 2023, 13-year-old Sophia Franzluebbbers—a student at Elkhorn Valley Middle School—was determined to help make a difference in the lives of children by supporting the Food Bank’s Backpack Program. With the help of her Principal, Chad Soupir, Sophia kicked off a week-long fundraiser with all five Elkhorn middle schools. With Sophia’s help, students from all schools rallied together to raise more than \$26,000 for the Backpack program and 652 pounds of food for the Food Bank.

A Helping Hand

Food Bank for the Heartland volunteers play a critical role in the Backpack Program, preparing each bag for distribution to participating schools. In FY 2023, individuals, corporations, and civic groups packed nearly 250,000 bags in our Volunteer Center for the Backpack Program.

BackPack meals are also prepared through the Transportation, Distribution, & Logistics Academy at Bryan High School. For some of these students, the Backpack program comes full circle, as they received Backpack meals at a younger age.

We are beyond grateful to everyone for their ongoing support in the fight against childhood hunger.

“
I have two kids of my own. I’ve seen the Backpack Program at work in their schools, and it’s invaluable.
— Jenifer, Food Bank Volunteer



Food Bank volunteers assemble Backpack meals



Students prepare Backpack meals at Bryan High School

Conclusion

Thanks to you, the Backpack Program meets an important need across Food Bank for the Heartland’s 93-county service area. 1 in 9 children across the Food Bank’s two-state service area may not know where their next meal is coming from. These children represent the future and—with support from our community—we’re making progress in improving the mental and physical health of Heartland children.

“
This program has helped us when we were struggling to make it through, living paycheck to paycheck. There have been times that we would not have been able to eat anything if it was not for this program.
— Parent of a child recipient of the Backpack Program