

AIO's Weekend Backpack Program Expands for Year Two

It's still true that almost half the children in Knox County live with food insecurity, as their families struggle to provide all they need. In some schools that number rises to above 80%. The federal school lunch and breakfast program feeds these kids on school days, but that stops on weekends. Teachers and school nurses see the difference on Mondays. Hungry bodies don't develop as they should and are frequently sick. Hungry children cannot concentrate in school and are more frequently absent. Hunger is often invisible -- or looks like lethargy, inattention, or disruptive behavior.

It's a serious problem, potentially life-changing for the children. Last school year, Area Interfaith Outreach (AIO) food pantry and emergency assistance began to try to fix this. Setting the ambitious goal of sending home weekend food with 200 children that first year, AIO began with two Rockland schools in September, and by Christmas had invited ten more Knox County schools, from Thomaston to Washington to Tenants Harbor, from Warren to Union to Camden, and just over the line in Waldoboro. "We were so pleased by the community's response," said Sherry Cobb, AIO board president. "People were very generous so we were confident we could reach our goal. And when we needed troops for packing food bags and getting them to the schools every week, that was easy, too. We had at least two dozen willing workers on the assembly line every Thursday." The children's parents have been grateful. One wrote: "My kids are happy to get the food and we eat all of it. The bag helps with food that I do not need to get on the weeks that I don't get paid." Another said, "Very hard to find enough every day to feed all six of us. I'm raising my three grands and they really look forward to these bags every week."

Now comes Year Two. AIO hopes that more parents from the current twelve schools who need this help will sign a permission form so their children can participate. And they hope to add two more elementary schools. If the Adopt-a-Backpack-Feed-a-Child campaign meets its goal this summer, AIO will be able to send weekend food home with an additional 50 children next year. The cost set by Good Shepherd Food Bank for purchasing the food is still \$225 per child per school year, so the 2016-17 goal will be \$56,250. "That's a lot," Sherry Cobb said, "but people care about children. I think this will happen."

More information is on two websites: www.knoxadoptbackpack.org and www.aiofoodpantry.org, as well as AIO's Facebook page. Checks can be made out to Area Interfaith Outreach and designated for the Backpack Program. The address: AIO, P.O. Box 113, Rockland, ME 04841.

Weekend Backpack Program Permission Slip for School Year 2016 - 2017

As parent or guardian of _____ who attends
Student's name (for additional children, please use an additional form)

South School, **Yes, I give permission for my child to receive Weekend Backpack food each Friday during the school year.** **No, we don't need this.** *Please check one.*

I understand that a teacher or other adult will deliver the food to my child's backpack when all children are out of the room. I also understand that all costs have been covered and my family will incur no expense.

Please print your name: _____

Relationship to child: _____ **Your signature** _____

Date signed: _____

P.S. – Whether your child receives the weekend food or not, would you like to volunteer to pack food bags on Thursday mornings, or drive your truck or car to deliver them to school? Please circle one: YES NO

If yes, how would you like to help? _____

Please supply your phone number _____
and email address. _____