

Abstract

One in four children in Spokane County lives in a household that struggles with hunger and food insecurity, according to Feeding Americas annual "Map the Meal Gap" research. That is approximately 23,930 children facing chronic food shortages at home. Research has shown that children suffering from food insecurity have increased trouble focusing in school, score lower on standardized exams, are more likely to be absent from school, have delayed social skills and display behavioral problems. Childhood hunger also heightens the risk of making impulsive decisions that can lead to early pregnancy, incarceration and other life-altering events. Many times, the only consistent meals children have are those provided at school. These children depend on subsidized school meals to make it through the week, but on weekends, they often go hungry. Second Harvest provides the Bite2Go weekend food program to fill the weekend meal gap for high-need children during the school year.

Project Proposal

Second Harvest was founded in 1971 as a central warehouse for a handful of emergency food pantries in Spokane. Today, distribution centers in Spokane and Pasco, Wash., partner with 250 neighborhood food banks, meal centers and other hunger-relief programs to feed more than 55,000 hungry people each week. Second Harvest provides more than 2.3 million pounds of food at no cost each month to fill nutritional gaps for people in poverty, the working poor, elderly and disabled people on very low fixed incomes, homeless people, and children and families in temporary crisis.

Second Harvest gets food to where it's needed most in 21 counties in Eastern Washington and five counties in North Idaho – a service territory that spans more than 51,000 square miles. Over the past 46 years, Second Harvest has provided more than 360 million pounds of food to households and communities struggling with hunger. In 2013, Second Harvest introduced a new program called Bite2Go. The program is used to fill the nutritional gaps for children in need in the region during the school year. Bite2Go provides school children with food for the weekend. The Bite2Go kits include a healthy selection of food that is kid-friendly and nonperishable. Shelf-stable milk, juice, cereal, fruit cups, beef lasagna and mixed dried fruit are just a few examples of the nutritious foods children will find in their Bite2Go kits. Second Harvest has a registered dietitian on staff who reviews and confirms the kit's nutritional value. Each week, a staff member at participating schools will discreetly provide the Bite2Go food to students in need. Bite2Go stabilizes and improves the lives of children in need. Bite2Go supplies food that gives hungry students necessary nutrients over the weekend so they can arrive to school on Monday focused and ready to learn. Second Harvest purchases the food and packing materials which costs an average of \$4 per kit. In order to sustain the program, operating dollars are used to cover costs and generous churches, businesses and other organizations have come on board as adoptive organizations to sponsor Bite2Go at local schools.

Bite2Go directly benefits more than 3,000 children each week at 64 schools in Spokane County, and recently the Bite2Go program has been expanding to include middle and high school students. It is anticipated in the upcoming year that the number of children served will increase to at least 3,500 in Spokane County alone. As the program expands, Second Harvest works closely with local schools to find ways to get increased information out about Bite2Go, and help as many children and families as possible.

Second Harvest has welcomed many partner organizations to assist with sponsoring the cost of the kits and volunteers. Currently, St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Spokane sponsors 53 students for Bite2Go at Franklin Elementary School. A \$3,000 grant from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – the equivalent of 750 Bite2Go kits – will support the work that's been so generously embraced by the St. Mark's Lutheran Church congregation to help children in need in their neighborhood. New support for Bite2Go from ELCA will give children in need a better chance at excelling in the classroom and growing into healthy adults who will succeed in the workplace and give back to their communities. A grant of any sum will make this program stronger and assist with Second Harvest in keeping pace with the rapid expansion of the Bite2Go program.