



## MICAH'S BACKPACK PROGRAM

**—A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, THE FAITH COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING BAGS WITH NUTRITIOUS MEALS TO FEED HUNGRY STUDENTS OVER THE WEEKEND**

The Micah's Backpack program is designed to feed hungry students through a partnership between each school and one or more churches/organizations in its community. Brought to Washington County by Trinity Lutheran Church in 2010 from a model in Blacksburg, VA, the program now serves more than 1,000 students in 33 schools and involves partnerships with more than 50 churches and community organizations. More than 10,000 students in Washington County Public Schools receive free or reduced lunches and for many this lunch will be the last hot meal of the day. Children are especially hungry over the weekend when school is not in session.

### Vision, Mission, and Goal Statements

**Vision:** Micah's Backpack Program—ensuring hungry students are fed over the weekend.

**Mission:** Micah's Backpack provides food to hungry elementary students and homeless/transitional middle and high school students in Washington County Public Schools over the weekend through a partnership between the school and churches and organizations in its community.

**2021-2022 Goal:** Continue to provide the program in each elementary school in Washington County plus select middle and high schools with high homeless populations, and expand the number of bags of food provided to meet the needs of all hungry students over the weekend. Increase sustainability of the program through the addition of new sponsoring churches/organizations.

*Micah's Backpack addresses children's hunger issues by partnering with local schools to provide direct assistance to students and families who are identified as hungry or food insecure. Each week during the school year, the identified students receive a bag/backpack filled with enough food for the weekend. The bags include two dinners, two lunches, and two breakfasts. Volunteers pack the bags, and the partner schools distribute the bags to the students.*

### Partnership Procedures for Micah's Backpack Program

#### Church/Organization Responsibilities:

- Commit to the Micah's Backpack Program and mission for a complete school year.
- Designate a volunteer coordinator to coordinate efforts between the church/organization and school.
- Attend orientation session to learn about "getting-started" and subsequent meetings for sharing as needed.
- Communicate regularly with the school designee and with other sponsors at the same school, if applicable.
- Help determine number of filled bags to provide to the school each week during the school year.
- Collect/purchase food for the bags.
- Fill and deliver bags to school each week.
- Keep records on the Micah's Backpack Program and report changes, challenges, and successes as able.

#### School Responsibilities:

- Commit to the Micah's Backpack Program and mission for a complete school year.
- Designate school personnel, e.g. School Family Liaison, Social Worker, Guidance Counselor to coordinate efforts between the church/organization and the school.
- Communicate regularly with the church/organization designee(s), including special needs such as allergies.
- Identify which students will receive the bags.
- Orient parents to the program and collect signed permission slips (e.g. permission slip is included).
- Distribute and collect bags for identified students each week.
- Keep records on Micah's Backpack Program and report changes, challenges, and successes as able.
- Send out and collect annual evaluations to determine the success of the program (e.g. annual evaluation included).

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(Continued)

### **How Micah's Backpack Works**

Each Friday afternoon identified elementary school children receive a bag or backpack of healthy food and snacks. The filled bag may include the following individual serving-size items: cereal, oatmeal, juice, tuna, peanut butter, crackers, macaroni and cheese, soup, applesauce, fruit cups, spaghetti, ravioli, beef stew, canned vegetables, and other nutritious food.

### **Who Can Participate?**

Eligible students are identified by the school principal and a designated school staff member such as the counselor, social worker, or community liaison. Confidentiality of program participants is maintained by the school. A permission form is provided for the parent/guardian of each eligible student by the designated school staff member and must be signed by a parent or guardian and returned to the school before a child may participate. Middle and High schools are not required to obtain permission slips as they have the flexibility to give bags to the homeless students who need the bags most each week, reflecting changing needs and transient students.

### **Sponsors and Partners**

This growing outreach program is sponsored by numerous churches/organizations in Washington County, MD who donate food, pack the bags, and deliver them to schools each week. Program partners serve as secondary sources of food or bags, as follows:

- Maryland Food Bank, Western Branch helps to provide food in bulk at low cost.
- Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC) writes for grants to provide food and manages donated funds.
- Grant funding was secured to support some of the food costs for the 2021-22 school year from: Maryland Food Bank, Einbinder Foundation, Nora Roberts Foundation, Fletcher Foundation, First Energy Foundation, United Way of Wash. Co., HARC Hike for Hunger & Hope, and Matthias Washington County Trust.

### **Steering Committee**

A Steering Committee of 6-9 members organizes, keeps structure, provides guidance, and helps to meet the mission of the program. Members include one leader each from Washington County Public Schools (WCPS), Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC), and Maryland Food Bank, Western Branch, as well as representatives from sponsoring churches and organizations.

#### **Functions of the Steering Committee**

- Strive for equitable distribution of food to schools so all students' needs are met.
- Approve all publicity and publications going to the general public.
- Decide how grants and donations are used to purchase food and equitably distribute to sponsors.
- Seek new sponsors and match sponsors with appropriate schools for sustainability and growth of the program.
- Train and support sponsors and ensure basic standards are met.
- Coordinate changes in the program as needed, such as new distribution processes during the pandemic.

#### **Current Goal(s) of the Steering Committee**

- Maintain Micah's Backpack Program in all elementary and select middle and high schools for the 2021-22 school year.
- Ensure the full need is being met in each participating school and that the highest-need students are served first.
- Ensure the program is sustainable by spreading out the burden and supporting sponsors.

### **How Can I Help?**

Financial donations may be denoted for "Micah's Backpack" and sent to Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC), P.O. Box 1158, Hagerstown, MD 21741-1158, or to a sponsoring church/organization for the purchase of specific food items that are placed in the backpacks. Food collections area also welcome. Churches/organizations wishing to become sponsors or partners should contact Kathy Powderly, Executive Director, Hagerstown Area Religious Council at [director@harccoalition.org](mailto:director@harccoalition.org). Volunteers can help with our mass food distribution, which occurs 3 times per year.