

# Full Plate PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF

**FEEDING  
AMERICA**  
West Michigan

2018 Summer Newsletter

**1 in 6 children  
go hungry in our  
service area.  
Here's what we're  
doing to help.**

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# Big Hearts for Little Neighbors:

## YOUTH HUNGER AND WHAT FEEDING AMERICA WEST MICHIGAN IS DOING TO HELP

When hunger threatens the well-being of children, it threatens the future of families, communities, and society at large. 16 million children in the United States suffer from hunger, including one in six children in Feeding America West Michigan's 40-county service area that spans the western portion of the Lower Peninsula and the entire Upper Peninsula.

Households with children are at nearly double the risk for facing hunger (20%) than those without children (12%), and all communities throughout the nation are at risk. While the majority of children and families living with food insecurity live in urban areas, most of the counties with the highest rates of insecurity are in rural areas. Hunger truly does not discriminate, and permeates every community that Feeding America West Michigan serves. In Kent County, where the Feeding America West Michigan headquarters and warehouse are located, 14% of youth experience hunger. In our 40-county service area, there are 89,700 children experiencing hunger, and in some of our most rural counties in the Upper Peninsula, the hunger rate is as high as 27%.

Unfortunately, when finances are strained and hard choices must be made, buying nutritious food often falls to the wayside in favor of paying for more immediate needs such as housing, child care, or medical expenses. Due to this forced prioritization, the food that children and families are eating is dictated by what money is leftover when all other expenses have been paid. This frequently means that families will stretch foods to cover more meals, buy inexpensive, unhealthy foods rather than pricier produce or other fresh foods, or skip meals altogether. All of these compromises have detrimental effects on children's health, performance in school, and general wellbeing.

Poor or inadequate nutrition is detrimental to children's health, and can have adverse effects on the physical, cognitive, and behavioral development of a child. In addition, children who live in chronically food-insecure households are less able to focus in school, which affects academic performance. When performance in school is inhibited, a child's future is at risk. Studies show that children who experience food insecurity are less likely to be adequately prepared to enter a competitive workforce once they leave school.

While food insecurity is an ongoing, persistent threat to families' quality of life, it is especially harmful for children. Fortunately, there are countless organizations, including Feeding America West Michigan, that are working tirelessly toward eliminating child hunger. In 2016, nearly 20 million (44%) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients were children under 18. 12 million children are estimated to have been served by the Feeding America network, including the 89,700 food-insecure children living in the Feeding America West Michigan service area. While it is hard to imagine children going to sleep hungry, it is heartening to know that we, along with our community and national partners, are doing all we can to help.

*All statistics found through Feeding America's Child Hunger Fact Sheet*



# What is Feeding America West Michigan Doing to Help?

One in six children in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula are food-insecure. Feeding America West Michigan is continually asking the same question: how can we help? With current programming in place and

planning for a pilot youth hunger program, Eat Grow Learn, under way, Feeding America West Michigan is working hard to support one of the most vulnerable populations in our service area. Read on to learn how.

## Agency Partners

Feeding America West Michigan is fortunate to work with 900 partner agencies across a 40-county service area. Among these partner agencies are 171 organizations specifically focused on fighting hunger for those younger than 18 – one of the populations most vulnerable to hunger. These organizations provide a range of services to an estimated 27,000 children every year.

## Backpack Programs

Remaining fed outside of school hours is a unique challenge when it comes to youth hunger. Feeding America West Michigan works with roughly 100 partner agencies who facilitate backpack programs, which provide backpacks full of food to an estimated 9,500 students every week. This ensures the students and their families aren't forced to go without outside of school hours or during the summer. In 2017, Feeding America West Michigan introduced the Summer Backpack Program which, in partnership with Morgan Stanley, was able to provide 5,500 meals to local children to bridge the meal gap during summer vacation.

## School Mobile Pantries

Feeding America West Michigan's Mobile Pantry program delivers a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, protein, and baked goods to those in need, frequently on the same day that the food was donated. Many of these distributions take place on school campuses, which makes getting food easier and more accessible than ever for local students and families. In 2017, Feeding America West Michigan partnered with 32 agencies who provided more than 200 mobile pantry distribution sites located at schools, which served an average of 100 families per distribution.

## *Eat Grow Learn*

### On-site School Pantries

Eat Grow Learn will provide on-site school pantries in participating districts' middle or high schools. This will allow for older students to secure the food they need during the day, as well as ensuring that students have access to nutritious, shelf-stable food to take home to their families for after school or on the weekends.

### Bi-Monthly School Mobile Pantries

The Eat Grow Learn program will also provide bi-monthly mobile pantries at participating schools, which will be open to the families of students attending the school as well as the community at large. The mobile pantries will feature fresh, nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables and dairy, and will ensure that students and their families are receiving food on a regular basis throughout the year.

### Nutrition Education

In addition to providing food resources, the Eat Grow Learn initiative will provide students and families with educational materials focusing on the importance of nutrition and the many ways that eating a balanced diet contribute to lasting good health.

# One Elementary School, Transforming a Community

Children shouldn't have to wonder where their next meal will come from. This is why schools like Parkview, an elementary school in Grand Rapids, strive to provide as many resources as they can for their students. At Parkview, the need for this is extensive. Nearly 90% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Sadly, this is not an uncommon rate of necessity in lower income neighborhoods. Parkview's principal, Katie Jobson, said "we want to make sure that those food needs are satisfied so we've done a few things to try to ensure that it is not an obstacle for kids. If they're focused on food, they're probably not focused on learning."

Upon arrival each morning, students find breakfast awaiting them. Teresa Dood, Parkview's Kent School Services Network community school coordinator, said, "they really can't engage until that initial need has been met." Imagine how difficult it would be to concentrate on learning with an empty stomach. Most students are then provided with free or reduced lunch. Parkview's after-school program also opens the cafeteria to prepare dinner for students who attend. Additionally, the school ensures that there are always healthy snacks at the students' disposal throughout the day.

There are also community organizations that have made it their mission to reduce the risk of these children going hungry. Parkview qualifies for Kids' Food Basket's services. This means that children are not only fed at school, but many of them are sent home with a sack supper each evening. Additionally, Beverly Reformed, a nearby church, sends nonperishable

food home with particularly at-risk students each weekend to ensure that they don't have to go without while they are away from school.

Parkview realizes that youth hunger doesn't stop when school does. This is why the school has become a Meet Up and Eat Up site when school is not in session. Alongside their summer school program, breakfast and lunch is provided for anyone in the community under the age of 18. Kids' Food Basket provides a sack supper as well. What all of this boils down to is that these children who would otherwise wonder where their next meal would come from are fed three meals a day, five days a week, for the entirety of the year. Jobson spoke about how this accomplishment has been a collective effort. "Having more resources in the community is an asset. Without community partners, it would be a really overwhelming challenge."

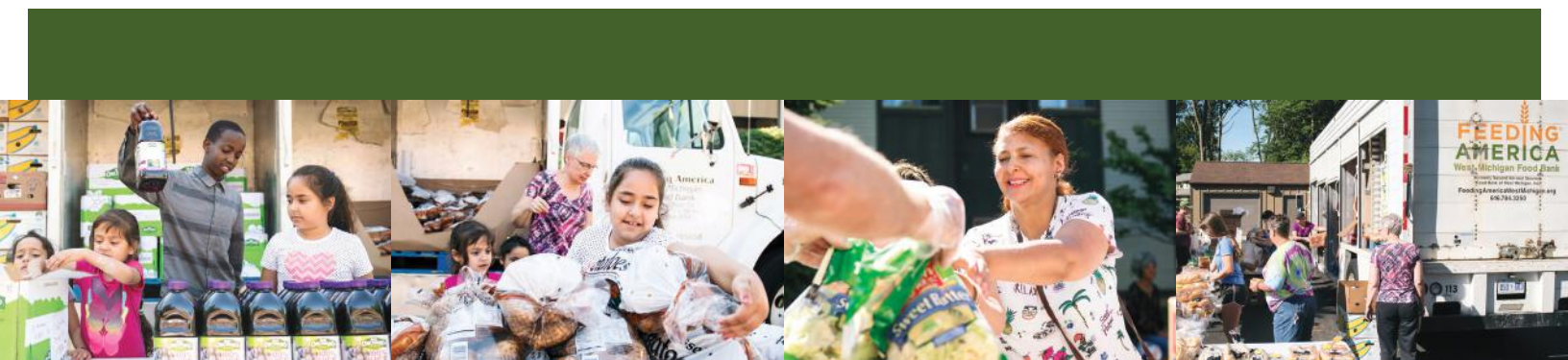
Feeding America West Michigan has also been an essential resource for Parkview students, families and the surrounding community since February of 2014. Each month, Parkview hosts a mobile pantry for anyone who may be struggling. Beverly Reformed also hosts a mobile pantry that is open to the community each month. Dood said, "we've purposefully staggered them in the month so that families could attend both and balance that time out." When children are going hungry, their parents are likely struggling to nourish themselves as well. Having these resources in place allows families to come together and gives them a chance to thrive. "If we can stabilize families, we hope that that can help our kids be better learners," Jobson said. We all know it's hard to be a good student when

you're hungry, but it's also hard to be a good parent. Dood mentioned that "it's a boost to our families to be able to say 'hey, we're invested in you. We get that life is hard and we want to support you wherever you're at.'"

Jobson spoke about how she believes the mobile pantries "break down some different barriers in ways that you wouldn't even expect. The food is a part of it but it's also a place to bring people together and have conversations and feel like we're all in this together."

Providing Parkview students with access to adequate food has proven to be crucial to their academic success and an integral part of their overall health. Jobson continued, "Our test scores, if you compare them to other schools that would have the same number of free and reduced lunch kids, the same kind of racial/cultural makeup, our scores have actually been really good." She attributes the students' success to the many community efforts focused on curbing hunger. "We're really fortunate that there are supports for kids that would otherwise be hungry," Jobson stated. Now instead of seeing students seeking or hoarding food, she sees students who have been given a chance to flourish.

Parkview showcases what can be done when community organizations and schools come together to reduce youth hunger. The collective effort can make an immense impact on the well-being of their students and families. Parkview sets a great example and will hopefully pave the way for other schools to follow in their footsteps.



# Client Spotlight:

## GUADOLUPE

One of many food insecure families that benefit from Feeding America West Michigan's services is Guadalupe Ferrer, 49, and her seven children. She is a hardworking and loving mother who has done her best to provide for her children but has hit some bumps along the way, like many families do. She is sharing her story to demonstrate how Feeding America West Michigan has been instrumental in allowing her family to thrive.

Guadalupe is a Mexican native who came to America at 17 hoping to create a better life for herself. At the age of seven, she began working on her father's farm. She took care of animals and harvested fruit, until the age of 12 when she got a job at a sewing factory. After three years, she went back to work on her father's farm until he sold it. Afterwards, she worked various jobs as a cook and a salesperson.

Guadalupe was only able to attend school through the fifth grade, and the majority of the money she earned as a child went towards her brothers' education. Guadalupe realized early in life that she couldn't live out her life's full potential in Mexico. She could never support herself on such meager wages, and she resolved to remove herself from the abusive home her parents created.

When she arrived in the United States, Guadalupe lived in Chicago until she met and soon married another Mexican native who came from similar circumstances. Together, they moved to Michigan and started their lives. While working as a fruit harvester at the age of 24, Guadalupe had her first baby boy, Christian. Their other two sons, Edgar and Jaycee, followed in 1995 and 1997, respectively.

At first, it was a happy marriage; but things soon changed. Guadalupe found herself as the sole provider for the boys, and soon their home became dangerous. She yet again found herself a target of domestic abuse. In the face of unspeakable trauma, Guadalupe persevered once again by fleeing from her husband and home in order to protect her children. From that point on, she worked hard to provide for her three young boys but was, once again, faced with hardships along the way.

Two years later, Guadalupe met and fell in love with another man. They married soon after and had their first son in 2002. She then welcomed her last boy in 2004, followed by her only little girl in 2008. Her second husband was from Guatemala but had been in America for many years. In 2008, after a 10-year relationship, he



told her he was going home to visit his family, and never returned. Their children were still very young; she tried to reach him but quickly learned that he was not coming back.

After having to run from her first husband and being abandoned by her second, Guadalupe had six children to provide for on her own. Since that time, she has also adopted her nephew that needed a home.

Although the odds were against her, she refused to give up. Guadalupe worked hard through various jobs over the course of the next 10 years to provide for all seven of her children. She said, "I've been working two jobs all my life." At one point, she was working 80 hours each week. After that, she consistently put in 12 hour days, six days a week, until medical issues recently rendered her unable to work.

Although Guadalupe did everything she could to provide for her children's needs, it wasn't always enough. When it wasn't, her community had resources available to fill the void. One resource that has made a difference in their lives are Feeding America West Michigan mobile pantries. Guadalupe spoke about how there has always been a mobile pantry distribution close by when she needed it. Recently, she has been attending the monthly mobile pantry at Parkview Elementary with her daughter, Amy, who attends the school. Guadalupe expressed how big of a difference it makes for them. She talked about how without Feeding America West Michigan as a resource, there would be times they would struggle to find food.

The close-knit family of eight live together to this day. With medical issues standing in her way of her working, Guadalupe's eldest sons work hard to keep up with the family's bills. They saw how hard she worked over the years to provide for them, so they took over and began caring for the family just as she has always done. Guadalupe said that her children will often tell her, "you're my mom and my father, forever." Each year they celebrate her on Mother's and Father's Day. These celebrations are a meaningful tribute to her resiliency, which reminds her that the strength and determination to persevere comes from within.

# Partner Spotlight

## THE MITTEN FOUNDATION



The Mitten Brewing Company is one of many Grand Rapids breweries that arose during the boom of craft beer. Giving back to their community is a part of their core values and, through their foundation, they have joined forces with Feeding America West Michigan in the ranks

against youth hunger. They became aware that their neighbors were struggling with food insecurity and knew something needed to be done to combat it. Because Mitten Brewing has been committed to giving back to their community since their origination in 2012, they decided to step up to the plate, and fill some empty ones.

The Mitten is on the west side of Grand Rapids, which is home to many food insecure families. According to the census tract, the median household income in this area is substantially lower than other areas around the city of Grand Rapids. Since The Mitten is situated in the heart of the west side, the familiar faces have become like family. "We pass by our neighbors every single day; their kids drive their tricycles into the doors during the summer. You can't remove the neighbors and the human aspect from the business," said the President of the Mitten Foundation, Dana Dones. "It's your job to help your neighbor, always," she continued.

The Mitten Foundation learned about the prominence of food insecurity in their neighborhood while providing uniforms at Harrison Park Elementary, a local low-income school, for students whose parents couldn't afford them. Board members of the foundation realized that if students didn't have access to something as simple as school uniforms, they may also have limited access to even more basic necessities. After their suspicions were verified, the Mitten Foundation became one of Feeding America West Michigan's partner agencies. Board members (made up of local residents) chose to focus their efforts on surrounding schools with an evident need.

When developing a fundraising event, they decided to host a sponsored golf outing. Through their inaugural golf outing in September 2017, the foundation hoped to raise enough funds to provide mobile pantries for three nearby elementary schools:

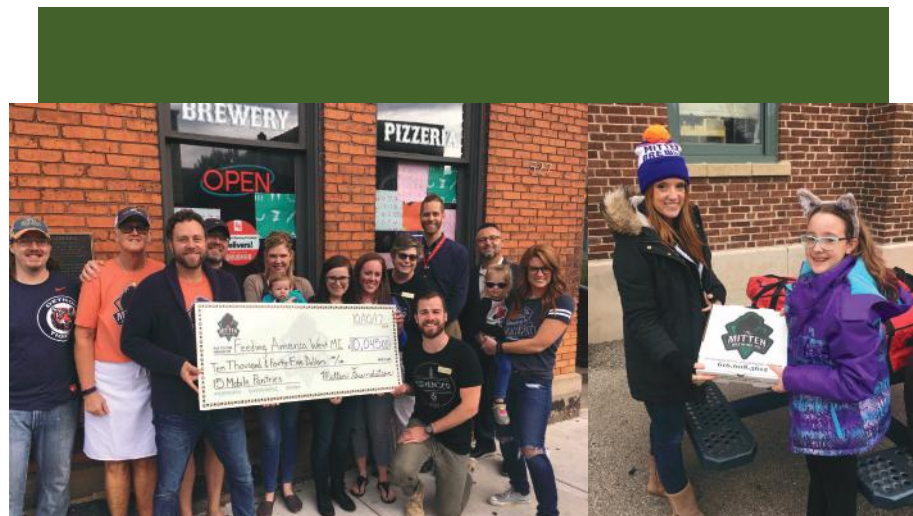
Stocking, Sibley, and Harrison Park. Many local businesses jumped on board as sponsors. The event raised \$10,000 which was enough to sponsor monthly mobile pantries at all three schools for the entire year with money left over. With the excess, they were able to provide one year of mobile pantries at Union, a local high school.

Over 85% of the students at all four schools qualify for free or reduced lunch. Without the mobile pantries, many of these students would struggle to silence their growling stomachs before and after school each day and during the weekend. Because of the Mitten Foundation, they can satisfy their stomachs and focus on growing and learning.

The community surrounding each school also benefits from the food they provide. Since these mobile pantries are open to the public, the entire west side of Grand Rapids is being fed because of the Mitten Foundation's contributions and steadfast dedication to their community.

In addition, the Mitten Foundation provides pizza, fresh from the brewery's kitchen, while they wait in line. To fund this initiative, servers at The Mitten sold paper pizza slices that are hung in the brewery showcasing the generosity of their patrons – every \$1 paper pizza slice that a customer purchases provides one slice of pizza at a mobile pantry distribution. They have sold enough to provide pizza for each mobile pantry they have sponsored throughout the year.

Dana spoke about how local businesses such as theirs have a responsibility to care for those in their community who are struggling. "How can you step over somebody instead of grabbing their hand and helping them up?" she said. The Mitten Foundation wants to continue supporting those around them through their partnership with Feeding America West Michigan in the coming years. Being a small local business hasn't stopped them from making a difference. The brewery can only seat a hundred people, but they are feeding so many more.



# Meet a Food Banker

## JERRY

### What brought you to Feeding America West Michigan and how long have you worked here?

While working for the General Motors Corporation, I first became familiar with Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan (now Feeding America West Michigan). John Arnold, the then CEO of the food bank, came to the plant to talk to the Manager's Staff about hunger in our area. Several food drives and fundraisers later, John was coming to our plant quarterly to thank us and receive our donation of funds raised through an event called Blue Jean Fridays. John was aware of my background in workplace organization and lean manufacturing principals, thus I consulted with him after retiring from G.M. to increase storage. I was seduced by the glamour of food banking when John offered me a job on a warm summer day in June of 2006.

### What is your current role?

I currently work on the Acquisitions Team, the "A Team". I am the Purchase and Commodities Product Analyst. In 2017, we distributed 26.7 million pounds of food. Fresh fruits and vegetables accounted for roughly a third of the food we distributed. My position is to purchase shelf stable, current production food for agencies to distribute to their clients. I also consult with the Inventory Team when ordering and reporting United States Department of Agriculture products (USDA). I am in contact with the Agency Relations Team relative to agency requests for products from backpack programs in our 40 county service area. It is clear that it is The Team, The Team, and The Team that allows us to do what we do here at the food bank.

### What challenges do you encounter in your position?

In 2016, food prices rose 3.1% with meat prices increasing 4.1%. It becomes very challenging to find products at a competitive price and continued good quality. At times, it is necessary to purchase products by the full semi-truck load to pass the savings on to the agencies. I have great vendors to work with from California stretching throughout the Midwest. It is all about relationship building and the vendors knowing what we are looking for regarding product profile.

### What is Feeding America West Michigan's role when it comes to Youth Hunger?

Food insecurity affects 1 in 8 people in our region. The young are particularly vulnerable with 1 in 6 children at risk of hunger. Each year we serve an estimated 492,100 people, including 46,773 seniors and 89,700 children. It is the children who cannot get a job, make money and feed themselves. Our Youth Hunger Program is focusing on those children. We currently are distributing to 30 schools through our Mobile Food Pantry Program. We are seeking funding to establish in-school food pantries in schools. Continued collaboration with organization to make available summer backpack programs when the children are not in school is of paramount importance.



### Where do you hope to see Feeding America West Michigan's Youth Hunger Program in the future?

The residents of West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula are very generous with their time and money. Every dollar donated to Feeding America West Michigan funds the distribution of 4 meals. In one hour of service, a volunteer can provide 200 meals. Through these acts of kindness, we are looking forward to establishing school food pantries in Elementary, Middle and High Schools and increasing school mobile food pantries and nutritional education.

### If there is one thing you could educate the community about Feeding America West Michigan, what would that be?

During the week prior to Thanksgiving and Christmas, there are a lot of food drives and volunteerism. Probably the single most outpouring of generosity we see all year. But, what are they going to eat the next week? That is why we are here, to ensure the food will be there all year.

### What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

I never have to go to work, I really enjoy what I do. I have a job that at the end of the day, we have put food in our neighbors' tummies and food in their cupboards. We are Feeding America West Michigan, You are Feeding America West Michigan.



# Get Involved



## \$1 = 4 MEALS

Donations are put directly into the hands of families in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula!



## ADVOCATE

Have a way with words? Help spread our mission by letting people in your community know about our services, or contact your local lawmakers to advocate on behalf of life-saving hunger relief legislature!



## 1 VOLUNTEER HOUR = 200 MEALS

Repack food in our warehouse, glean produce at a local farm, or volunteer to assist setup, distribution, and tear down at a local mobile pantry.



## 89,700

Number of hungry children in Feeding America West Michigan's service area.



**MOLLY KOOI, Communications Specialist**  
Find her stories on pages 4, 5 and 6.



**LAUREN SPANGLER, Communications Manager**  
Find her stories on pages 2, 3 and 7.



864 West River Center Drive NE  
Comstock Park, MI 49321  
616.784.3250  
FeedWM.org

We gather and distribute food to relieve hunger and improve food security in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. By working with more than 900 local hunger-relief agencies, we are able to serve half a million people in need each year.

Call us at 616.784.3250 or learn more at [FeedWM.org](http://FeedWM.org).

Feeding America West Michigan is a member of Feeding America, The United Way, and The Food Bank Council of Michigan.



### You Can Feed West Michigan

To give online please visit us at [FeedWM.org](http://FeedWM.org)

