



Fall 2020

FEEDING *the* HUNGRY

Letter from the CEO

Fall has always been my favorite season. Thinking about fall conjures images of cooler weather, sweaters, changing leaves, harvest time, bonfires, and Thanksgiving. All of these images are familiar and comforting. But then I stop and realize that this is 2020, and our communities are still struggling with COVID. Many of our normal fall activities will look much different due to COVID, including Thanksgiving.

That's why we need your help now more than ever. High unemployment rates mean that families are still struggling. Our food pantry network will be responding to the COVID crisis for months to come as families pick up the pieces from lost jobs or reduced hours. Your support will bless others and ensure that struggling families have food for the table.

And did you know that for the remainder of this year, even if you don't itemize deductions on your taxes, you can still qualify for a tax deduction under the CARES Act when you donate to the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas?

In spite of COVID, I have much to be thankful for. The team at the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas is working harder than ever delivering more food through drive through mobile pantries throughout Northeast Arkansas. We have been given permission to hold the Fill the Food Bank event on November 13. We were able to honor an amazing group of volunteers during Hunger Action Month—the Valley View Blazer SPARKS. **And, through the generosity of others, the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas will continue to provide hope to people facing hunger.**

Happy Fall!



With Gratitude,

Christie Jordan

Christie Jordan

"Your support will bless others and ensure that struggling families have food for the table."



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visit our website at
FoodBankofNEA.org
We're very social!
Join us on:



@FoodBankofNEA

Valley View Blazer SPARKS

"What do you get when you cross a drumstick with a centipede? Chicken legs for everyone!" – Jesse, 11th grade



Jesse, a member of the Valley View Blazer SPARKS group, smiles after telling a joke. Jesse has volunteered with the group for more than two years.

This is just one of many jokes Jesse brings when he and his classmates volunteer at the Food Bank. Since 2015, students from Valley View's Special Education Department (also called the Blazer SPARKS) have volunteered regularly at the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas amassing more than 300 volunteer hours over five years.

It all started in August 2015. Kelly Greene and Tina Golden were brainstorming how they could help their students develop life skills and transition from school life to adult life.

"We thought volunteering would be the best way that we could do that," said Kelly Greene, Self-Contained



Valley View Blazer SPARKS students pose with orange spoons in honor of Hunger Action Month during their first visit to the Food Bank in September 2015.

Special Education Teacher at Valley View High School. "The community is always there to help us and so giving back to the community is the best thing we can teach our students to do."

Since August 2019, the students have packed 29,465 meals – enough food to feed 1,403 people three meals a day for an entire week. Because of the impact made by the Blazer SPARKS in the fight against hunger, the Food Bank chose to nominate the group for an Acting Out Against Hunger Award. Each year during Hunger Action Month, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance recognizes those who "have gone above and beyond the call to feed the hungry in Arkansas."



Allysa's Story

"I know what it's like to go hungry and fall on hard times even when you're trying and doing work and still not being able to make ends meet."

Allysa is a 32-year-old woman living in a small, rural town in Northeast Arkansas. Previously addicts, Allysa and her fiancé, John, have turned their lives around with the help of Mission Outreach in Paragould.

Last October, the couple moved into Mission Outreach when work dried up for John.

"We didn't have anywhere else to go and we've always known this place whenever they feed the public," said Allysa. After two to three months, Allysa and John were able to move out and into their own apartment. John found employment, but it would be two weeks before he could get his first paycheck.

"We were totally broke," Allysa said. "So I came to Mr. Jackie's office one day and I said, 'Mr. Jackie' – and I almost just wanted to cry – 'I am so embarrassed to even ask you this but [we're] out of deodorant right now.' We didn't even have deodorant or the money to get any." Mission Outreach, where Mr. Jackie (Jack Ross) works, was able to help Allysa with personal care items.

Now Allysa volunteers at Mission Outreach regularly. She and John plan to get married at the courthouse soon and have a small church wedding later.

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Valley View Blazer SPARKS students proudly display how many meals they packed in February 2020.

In addition to packing boxes at the Food Bank, the Blazer SPARKS have also helped at our annual Fill the Food Bank event; volunteered at our partner agency, Helping Neighbors Food Pantry; and provided food to help fill one of the blessing boxes in Jonesboro.

"The reason I think it is important to volunteer at the Food Bank is so people will have the food they need. I like to help people," said Paige, a student in the Blazer SPARKS group.

"They are truly an incredible group of kids," said Jennifer Hannah, Outreach Coordinator for the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas. "We look forward to the day they volunteer every month because they not only help us with projects, but they do it with the most beautiful smiles. Spending five minutes with them, will brighten your entire week."

Allysa's Story (continued)

"I know what it's like to go hungry and fall on hard times even when you're trying and doing work and still not being able to make ends meet."
- Allysa

When asked why she felt the need to give back, Allysa said, "I know what it's like to be out there on the streets. I know what it's like to be hungry. I know what it's like to live in your own home [and be] hungry. I remember this one particular meal. We had a little bit of rice in a bag from the food bank and there was a packet of beef-flavored ramen noodle seasoning. No noodles. For some reason we just had a seasoning pack. [We had] maybe two or three very small potatoes the size of a tennis ball and a little bit of butter. And I remember that being, to this day, the best meal that I have ever had."



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

To purchase your steak dinner, shirt & hat combo,
or become a sponsor visit

www.FoodBankofNEA.org/acre-hope

For more information, contact Sarah Tipton at
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