We all have our stories. Every colleague I have met in food banking has personal experiences that have reached inside, grabbed our hearts, and touched our souls. They are the stories that keep us striving to put an end to hunger. Here’s one of mine….

I was working to expand and improve our Backpacks. That’s the program targeted at the most in need children who are on the free and reduced lunch program. We pack up a couple breakfasts, lunches, and dinners and get that to the child’s school for them to take home and have food to eat on the weekends. It costs us $4.28 to feed a child for the weekend; $150 feeds them every weekend of the school year.

The goals were to make a better Backpack and expand the program. We want the food to be as nutritious as possible - but it is only nutritious if the child eats it. We eventually decided that we needed to talk to the kids.

We asked them all sorts of questions – what they liked about the program, what they didn’t like, their favorite food item, their least favorite, and what they did with it. A child who ate most of it on the way home didn’t really need it; a hungry child will make that food last all weekend. The process resulted in better items in the bag, more kid friendly, that they enjoy more and eat more consistently.

Then we spoke with a young boy in elementary school. We walked through the questions, ending with what he did with the Backpack. “We have this junky car up on blocks in our driveway at our house, and when I get off the bus, I put the bag of food underneath the car.”

“Ok…. Why do you do that?”

“Because that way, when my mom gets mad at me and my little brother…and she locks us out of the house over the weekend…we have food to eat.”

This newsletter focuses on childhood hunger and how you are helping River Bend Foodbank address it – with Backpacks, school pantries, summer feeding, after school meals, and federal nutrition programs. Most of the people we help are working families with dependents in their homes under 18 or seniors over 65. While there are stereotypes about adults in need – and I would take issue with those stereotypes - no one argues about whether we should feed the children.

I will never forget the young man who put his Backpack under the car in his driveway. These children are so resourceful. While this story is not typical – many parents I have met regularly give up their own food so their children can eat – I think of him every time I handle a Backpack. We are going to keep doing what we’re doing until he, his brother, and everyone like them is fed.

Thank you for helping us work toward that goal. Together we can solve hunger. ™

Michael P. Miller
President & CEO

When I get off the bus, I put the bag of food underneath the car. . . That way, when my mom locks me and my little brother out of the house over the weekend. . . we have food to eat.
**SUMMER FEEDING**

One of the great mysteries of hunger relief is where children go to eat in the summer. There are 50 summer feeding sites within 70 miles of River Bend Foodbank. Yet only 1/6 of the children on free and reduced lunch show up at summer feeding sites. Where do these children go to get fed?

The Illinois Lieutenant Governor set a goal of having a summer feeding site in every county in the state. Since there were five counties without sites in our service area, for the first time, River Bend Foodbank sponsored a summer feeding site in each of our counties that did not previously have one. Those sites served a total of 722 meals last summer to children who previously had no place to go. Our intentions are to continue scaling the program until it could eventually be made available to each of our counties that would like to participate.

**AFTER SCHOOL MEALS**

One of the area’s largest children’s feeding programs abruptly closed its doors in November. This organization provided thousands of meals for after-school feeding programs at dozens of sites in and beyond the Quad Cities.

Since Thanksgiving, River Bend Foodbank has been providing 270 meals each school day to local Boys & Girls Clubs and the Martin Luther King Center. Several other programs also became partner agencies. We anticipate providing over 20,000 meals until a long-term solution can be put in place later this spring.

“I am ecstatic about the collaboration between the school systems, non-profits, River Bend Foodbank, and community donors,” said Jenny Garlach, Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Valley. “I cannot thank you enough for your support. Without River Bend Foodbank, our kids would not have food right now.”

Many thanks to the John Deere Foundation and Community Foundation of the Great River Bend for making significant contributions toward this effort. We would welcome any other donations to help us cover these unplanned costs.

**FARM BILL NUTRITION PROGRAMS**

The Farm Bill comes up for reauthorization every five years, but few Americans realize how complex the legislation is. Most Federal Nutrition Programs – school lunches, breakfasts, after-school and summer feeding, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – are all in the Farm Bill.

These programs get a bad name when people start playing politics, but SNAP was a bipartisan initiative, originally co-sponsored by Bob Dole and George McGovern. SNAP has proven to be one of the most effective programs in helping people get out of poverty and food insecurity. Furthermore, one fifth of the food distributed by River Bend Foodbank is provided through the TEFAP program.

We are making tremendous strides toward our goal of ending hunger by 2025. But if some of the cuts that are being proposed became reality, it would set us so far behind that food banks would never catch up. We will always be friends with both sides of the aisle, but nutrition programs are the wrong places to make cuts if we ever want to solve hunger.

We would encourage everyone to contact your senators and representatives in support of a strong Farm Bill that strengthens the national commitment to reducing hunger.
April is Volunteer Appreciation Month!

During 2017, we had over 1,700 volunteers donate a total of 10,625 hours. River Bend Foodbank could not serve nearly as many people as we do without our volunteers, and we are so appreciative! Your donation of time and talent is vital to the Foodbank! We depend on your volunteer efforts to carry out our mission of feeding our hungry neighbors.

To learn how to get involved at River Bend Foodbank, visit riverbendfoodbank.org/donate-time.

During the month of February, area businesses and organizations collected funds and food for hungry people in our 23 counties. This year, the Community Hunger Drive included 51 businesses who held a variety of activities throughout the month, including cake contests, bake sales, change wars, and even making co-workers wear mustaches! The funds and food provided this year will provide 363,249 meals for the 1 in 8 people, including 1 in 5 children, who are missing meals not by choice in eastern Iowa and western Illinois. Thank you to all of the businesses and organizations who participated!

In addition to each business receiving a participation certificate, the following businesses received other awards for their exceptional work during the Community Hunger Drive:

- Greatest Leap from Food to Funds – BITCO Insurance Companies
- Most Creative Fundraising Event – SENB Bank
- Most Creative Marketing Materials – Quad-City Times
- Most Innovative Communication Use – Group O
- Fully Embraced Mission of River Bend Foodbank – Quad City Symphony Orchestra
- Fully Embraced Mission of River Bend Foodbank – Rhythm City Casino Resort

If your business or organization is interested in participating for 2019, please contact Leslie Corlett at lcorlett@riverbendfoodbank.org.

Join us for our 3rd annual Wine & Dine for a Cause fundraising event!

Thursday, September 13, 2018, 6 pm
JBar - Holiday Inn and Conference Center
(4215 Elmore Ave., Davenport)

Please contact Nancy Renkes at nrenkes@riverbendfoodbank.org for more information.