

BackPack Program

The BackPack Program provides needy children with nutritious, child-friendly food when other resources, such as school lunches and after-school meals or snacks, are not available. Backpacks are discreetly distributed to participating children at schools on Fridays. Some sites operate during the school year; others operate year-round. This program helps provide the proper nutrition necessary for overall growth, physical and cognitive development and satisfactory performance in school.

Second Harvest selects and obtains the food for our sites, and our volunteers assemble individual bags for distribution. The food is nonperishable, vitamin fortified, and easy to prepare and consume. Some of the types of items that might be included are juice, soup, nutritious snack bars and crackers with peanut butter. Children might also share the food with younger siblings at home.

The BackPack Program was designed by Feeding America, the food bank network that Second Harvest belongs to. The idea originated in Little Rock, Arkansas, after a school nurse asked the local food bank for help because hungry children were coming to her with stomachaches and dizziness. The children's symptoms of hunger brought home the growing need for food assistance among children in our land of plenty. Children comprise 30 percent of the individuals Second Harvest serves.

Second Harvest operates 19 of the more than 2,200 Backpack sites throughout the United States. Second Harvest's locations are as follows:

- 12 Elementary Schools in the City of Erie School District
- Erie RISE Leadership Academy, Erie
- R. Benjamin Wiley Charter School, Erie
- Sarah A. Reed Children's Center, Erie
- Ridgefield Elementary School, Millcreek
- Springfield Elementary School, East Springfield
- West Forest Elementary School, Tionesta
- Family Service & Children's Aid Society, Oil City

If you have questions about the program, please contact: Cindy Plymyer at 814-459-3663, ext. 103, or cplymyer@eriefoodbank.org.

How can you help?

We are working on expanding the program at additional sites and will be grateful for food or monetary donations to help the program grow in northwest Pennsylvania.