

September 21, 2020



Greetings;

I am not even sure where to begin this summary of the 2020 lunch program. All of our hearts are filled with gratitude as we have been amazed, speechless, overwhelmed, excited and marveled at this wonderful community we live in.

Children were excited to see our delivery drivers. Children said thank you, which is enough to make our drivers' hearts happy. But children did more than that, they made cards for the drivers, gave them flowers, drew chalk pictures and notes on the driveway and hung notes in the windows. One child even said to a driver, you really do care about us!

Parents shared with us often the peace of mind we were able to give them. For some families we solved the problem of how they were going to feed their children. For other families we gave them the mental stability of routine. And for one family, whose note I will attach at the end, "It has been giving a Childhood Cancer survivor the love of food and nutrition that he has not had. He has even gained weight! That is a priceless gift."

Strangers, who became our lunch family, showing up to make lunches for kids in a pandemic. Julie Sollars, LuAnn Burger, Tristyn Burger, Austin Burger, Matt Petersen, Missy Belle, Karen Holschuh, Linda Harris, Carol Thornton, and Jennifer Ambrose were the group that showed up on March 16th and were there until school resumed. Oh yes, there were more volunteers than this, but this group, they were the consistent core of our program. They would show up to prepare and package lunch, then they would deliver the lunches! How many lunches? 18,136 in twenty-five weeks!

Donors. People I've never met, organizations I have never heard of, opening up their wallets. People I do know, and organizations I have heard of not hesitating to give. Families and businesses were in the middle of uncertainty, but our program never would have known this by the \$56,318.94 we received in donations.

Claridon Community Helps is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization.
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In summer of 2019, Claridon Community Helps introduced a brand-new summer lunch program called “That’s What I’m Talking About!” Our lunch program is for **all** children in school and younger. We want all children to feel welcome. The only questions families have to answer when they register a child is their contact information, the child’s name, age and if the child has any food allergies.

In 2019, we served 2,849 lunches during the eleven weeks of summer break. We had 89 children registered. Lunches were delivered in the area covered by the Berkshire School District

In the beginning March 2020

On Thursday, March 12, Governor DeWine ordered schools to be closed for three weeks, beginning the following Monday. Within hours of his announcement, we had contacted Berkshire and Cardinal Schools to let them know that beginning Monday, March 16 we would be offering lunches to children, just like we did last summer. With this unexpected change away from in-person learning, we wanted to make sure children were able to have food consistently from the start.

On Friday morning, one of our volunteers from last summer who lives in Newbury let us know they were available to deliver lunches to children in that area, if needed. Newbury ranks number 3 in children receiving free/reduced lunch at 30%.

We contacted Newbury Schools to let them know about our program. In working together, they were able to get the information out to families about our program. In May we began delivering lunches to children who resided in Newbury.

On Friday afternoon, Josephine Culliton, Food Service Director of Chardon Schools, contacted us to see if we could help provide lunches for Chardon children as well. The answer was “Absolutely!”, with our only concern being the number of volunteers we would need to deliver the lunches.

By week two, we were also preparing lunches for students in the Chardon School District. Morning Star Church would pick up the lunches to distribute to children living in the southern part of Chardon School District. These children were not registered for our program and are not a part of the 239 registered children. We continued giving lunches to Morning Star Church through May. They then combined with Chardon Christian Fellowship Church.

Number of registered children:

On Monday, March 16th, the very first day children were home from school we began our 2020 lunch program with 51 children in the area covered by Berkshire and Cardinal School District. The number of children continued to grow over the next 3 months with the total registered children being 239 in the Berkshire, Cardinal, Newbury School District areas.

Number of lunches:

The highest number of lunches we prepared per day was 197. Families moved, not all children received lunch every day, and a few no longer wanted to receive lunches.

We floated right around the 200 lunches per day until school was out at the end of May. Then we averaged about 180 lunches per day as kids went to visit relatives, families returned to work and children returned to daycare.

Our program delivered a hot meal on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. On Monday and Wednesday, we gave each child a bag lunch for Tuesday and Thursday. On Monday we prepared a hot meal AND a bag lunch. When I said our highest number was 197 lunches per day, that means we would make 197 hot lunches and 197 bag lunches in one day. Just shy of 400 lunches would be prepared, packaged, bagged and out the door in 2 ½ hours by 12 to 15 volunteers on Monday and Wednesday. We considered Friday an easy day when we only had to make 200 lunches.

Cardinal School District opened their buildings on Monday, August 24. Chardon Schools opened Monday, August 31. And West Geauga and Berkshire Schools opened their doors on Tuesday, September 8. Our lunch program concluded for 2020 on Friday, September 4th, twenty-five weeks after it began, having served 18,136 lunches.

Available Food

During the summer of 2019, it was easy to go to the store and purchase food in bulk for the lunches we were preparing. In March, purchasing food was not easy let alone purchasing food in bulk. Fortunately, Claridon Community Helps had meat in the freezer that we had purchased for our monthly community dinners. We also had canned chicken that New Mercies Community Church had given us. The Rotary Club of Burton – Middlefield gave us the milk and orange juice they had purchased for pancake breakfasts which were now cancelled. Berkshire Schools gave us their milk and fresh produce that would expire before school was scheduled to resume in three weeks. Finding enough bread, eggs and vegetables was challenging those first few weeks, but we made it through!

In the first month, a friend of the family is the manager of Dave's Markets in Cleveland. We were able to order most of the food we needed through them. This was a huge relief in a time when the store shelves were empty.

Dave's Market got us over the initial hump. We then worked with Save A Lot in Middlefield for our food order each week. This kept our shopping local, and cut down on the amount of time needed for shopping.

Meat, lunchmeat and cheese were ordered and purchased weekly at Heritage Meats in Middlefield. Milk was purchased from Rowdy Cow Creamery at Hastings Dairy in Claridon. Great Lakes Growers of Burton provided fresh lettuce to us each week free of charge.

One of the beauties of shopping local is multiple trips were made to and from Middlefield every Tuesday. Thankfully it was close. The other beautiful thing is when I would need to go back later in the week to pick up the rest of our order, it was so close to home!

What did the week look like?

The kitchen at the church has one double door commercial refrigerator, one small kitchen refrigerator, and one single door non-commercial refrigerator. It also has the small freezer above the refrigerator, a single door non-commercial freezer and a single door commercial freezer. This may seem like a large amount of space, but when feeding 200 children a day it is not.

Food orders were thought out with the amount of refrigerator and freezer space available. Brown bag lunches consisted of a meat and cheese sandwich, yogurt, fresh fruit or vegetable, granola bar and milk. We made two brown bag lunches a week. Each week we needed 65 pounds of lunch and 25 pounds of cheese for the sandwiches. We also needed 400 pieces of fruit in which we would choose items that didn't need refrigerated. Each child received yogurt in their brown bag lunch, we went through 400 individual containers each week. Milk at Rowdy Cow Creamery comes in pint containers which are considered two servings. Each child received milk on Monday for Monday and Tuesday and another on Wednesday for Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday they received individual serving so juice that did not need refrigeration.

On the weekend, 10 crates of milk would be picked up at Rowdy Cow Creamery for Monday's lunch. To make room for the milk and everything else to fit in the refrigerator, the milk had to be taken out of the crates and placed upon the shelf to take up less room. Then on Tuesday, a return trip would be made to pick up 200 more bottles of milk for Wednesday.

Most of the time everything fit in the refrigerator, but there were times it did not. When these times occurred, only 200 of the yogurts were picked up on Tuesday. Save A Lot was kind enough to store the rest of them in their refrigerator until I returned later in the week for them.

Janis, the nutrition director of Cardinal Schools received information about the milk program and passed it along to me. Horizons Christian Assembly Church in Burton worked with Bordon milk company on a grant to receive milk during this pandemic. Horizons worked with us and other local organizations in getting milk to families.

Each Tuesday, sometime between 9:30 and 1:30, the Bordon truck would pull into the church to unload 228 gallons of milk. When the truck arrived, they would contact all of us to let us know the truck was there, to come and pick up our milk. I would pick up 54 (because at the time we started the program that is how many families we had) gallons of milk and take them to the church. On Wednesday, in addition to the lunches they would deliver they would also load up crates of milk to give a gallon of milk to each family. As our number of families grew, we rotated each week which route received lunches.

With a collaboration between the Cleveland Food Bank, Geauga Hunger Task Force and Geauga United Way, produce and dairy boxes were offered each week at a drive thru service at the fairground each Wednesday in June and July. We were marked down for 10 boxes each week. That means 10 boxes of produce and 10 boxes of dairy. Each Wednesday evening, we would go to the fairground and pick up whatever was left at the end of the evening. Sometimes we received 10 boxes, sometimes more and sometimes less. We would take these back to the church where the dairy boxes would be opened, sorted and put into the refrigerator. The produce boxes would be sorted. Items that didn't have to be refrigerated were always a blessing as space was limited.

When we received the dairy boxes, the families who did not receive gallons of milk on Wednesday received milk from this distribution with their meal on Friday.

Some of the produce we received went in the kids bagged lunches. Some of it was cooked up in their hot meal. Other times we shared our abundance with our families. This was a wonderful blessing! Though it did make it difficult to know how much food to order each week, as we were never certain of how much we would be receiving from the food distribution.

We didn't just provide lunch, we also tried to provide fun!

When we received a donation of celery, peanut butter and raisins the only thing missing was directions for the kids to make their own "Ants on a Log". Cinco de Mayo, of course we served tacos, but we also shared a little history on the paper

flower in a kit to make their own paper flower. Word search puzzles, crafts, peanut butter play dough, notes, surprises were added in during the 25 weeks.

As the new school year became close every child received a bag of basic school supplies. We received these supplies courtesy of Operation Homefront and Chardon VFW Post 6519. It wasn't everything a child needed, but it certainly did reduce the amount of items families needed to purchase

Other Blessings:

In the middle of May, Geauga Faith Rescue Mission (a homeless shelter here in Geauga County) secured a grant to receive produce and dairy boxes. We needed to call in extra drivers that day, but in addition to lunch each of our families received a box of fresh produce and a dairy box.

Gauga Hunger Task Force Burton Food Pantry was a source we collaborated with often. In the early months, they had a huge cheese donation from a local cheese company. They in turn shared this donation with us. This was a huge savings on our part as I only needed to buy cheese for sandwiches a few of the weeks. We also received enough cheese to incorporate into many of our hot meals.

The Burton Food Pantry didn't just provide cheese to us. They also provided us with cases of meat as they didn't have room in their freezer. There were a few weeks we did not need to purchase meat because of this donation.

Sometimes the Burton Food Pantry received more perishable items than they had families to share them with. When this happened, we incorporated the items into our menu for the week.

Last, but certainly not least, we were able to work with the school to receive government commodities. These items consisted of peanut butter, blueberries, canned apples and hamburgers.

A Few Funding Highlights:

When people ask me how we are funded, I always smile and say people just give us money! This is the truth. I have asked less than a half dozen people/companies for money. Yet here we are, sending out over 200 year-end summaries to those who donated.

First, we were blessed to have a carryover funds from last year to start this year with. Second, we had donations submitted through the PayPal link on our website beginning the day after the Governor's announcement. Checks started arriving in the mail the following week. Some families donated multiple times over the twenty-five weeks.

On Monday March 16th, the very first day of our program, Katie with “Believe in Dreams” had contacted Mr. Stoddard at Berkshire Schools who pointed her in our direction. They had a \$1,500 check for us.

Karolyn Squire of “Hope for Kids, Geauga” contacts me at the beginning of April. She had been following our Facebook posts and saw we were in need of a new, energy efficient refrigerator. She thought Hope for Kids could help, and they did!

We received a donation from Kiwanis Club of East Geauga. We also received recognition in receiving the *Adams - Hunter Community Service Award 2020*, which I accepted on behalf of all of those you have given their time and money to make sure children were fed.

This is just a little sample of the overflow of blessings we received this summer. I would be remiss though if I didn't tell you about a huge blessing we received from the Chardon Rotary Foundation.

Last year, my very first presentation on this brand-new program (at the time hadn't even started yet) was to the Chardon Rotary Foundation. Over the past year I have kept members of their board up to date on how 2019 finished and what we planned to do for 2020. As all of us know, 2020 has not gone as we had thought.

At the beginning of May, Chardon Rotary Foundation created a Geauga Pandemic Relief fundraiser to benefit our lunch program. Just taking the burden off of our very small organization to raise money for the lunches was a weight off of our shoulders. But they didn't stop there. The Chardon Rotary Foundation matched the first \$10,000 donated!!! In the end we received \$29,098.88. This would not have been possible without your support. Thank you!

In conclusion, food for the children this year was about more than physical nutrition. One day they are in school, the next day there is a pandemic and they don't know when they will be going back to school. The same could also be said about those of us who volunteered.

With all of the uncertainty, one of the things that was consistent was our lunches. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday a child either went to pick up lunch or lunch was delivered to their home. The only uncertain thing was what was going to be for lunch as everyday was a surprise for them. I'm sure sometimes they loved it and other times they didn't. Honestly though, I think they looked forward to the surprise. But more importantly, they looked forward to seeing their delivery driver continuously show up. And we looked forward to seeing them!

I had a good cry this week. I can't thank you all enough for being so amazing. The baby food, milk, and huge boxes of produce today. I'm absolutely floored at the kindness. I'm so grateful. This has helped my family tremendously at an unsure point in life. Thank you to everyone who makes this possible and contributes, you all are angels. – *Priscilla*

We are so thankful and truly blessed for the meals and goodies we have received. Looking forward to next year already! Blessings to everyone that helps and donates! – *Jennifer*

I want to explain why the meals have done so much more than just feed my family: My youngest son was born with bilateral Neuroblastoma, a Pediatric Cancer of the adrenal glands. Some of the hurdles from it have been failure to thrive, oral aversion and malformation of the teeth and jaw. We spent about 6 months force feeding him breast milk out of a straw amounting to 2 ounces a day. We watched our big fat healthy newborn lose weight week after week and go from 95th% to fall backwards under 0% off the growth chart. When began eating solids the only way we could get him to eat was to put him in front of the TV and very fast feed him 1 container of baby food with olive oil, calorie powder, formula and vitamin drops. That was all he had twice a day. Many times he would refuse that. Years later he began to enjoy food but his teeth and jaw didn't allow him to bite or chew adequately. So he would give up. I think for children it's easier to say no when Mom offers them new things. So, when we started getting the lunches, I would tell him people that live by us love you. So slowly he would start trying new things. Fast forward to now he is our child that is asking his siblings for their peppers, cucumbers, olives and beans. He learned to ball up lettuce and put it in the backside of his mouth to eat. He doesn't hesitate to try his food. He eats what is given and is excited about it. I often cry happy tears watching him eat his lunch because where he came from to now, I wasn't sure we would get there. But, he is here. He sometimes will say look, they made this because they love me. That love I feel is what made the difference in him. Watching your infant starve and to be helpless to it is not something I can really explain. To watch him 4 years later clapping about vegetables and eating a whole hamburger is to me God working in our lives through you. So, for us it hasn't been just meals. It has been giving a Childhood Cancer survivor the love of food and nutrition that he has not had. He has even gained weight! That is a priceless gift. Thank you with my whole heart, *Melissa*

First and foremost, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping feed my family over this summer. You and everyone who's put forth so much effort, time, dedication, and love are so appreciated. Everything you all have done for so many families has impacted many lives, the humanity shown is like no other I've ever known. Thank You !!!!! Love you all!!!! - *Jackie*