

Healthy Bodies, STRONG MINDS

By giving food and books to children in need throughout the summer, Suzy Herrmann is changing lives in her community.

For lots of kids, summer break means pool days, ice pops and the absence of homework. But for many of the 15.3 million food-insecure children across America, no school also means fewer meals. Those struggling with hunger rely almost solely on the subsidized lunches they receive when class is in session. “They’re malnourished when they come back in the fall,” says Suzy Herrmann, a special-education teacher from Mansfield, TX. “They’re not ready to learn, and they fall further behind in class.”

In 2007, Suzy was volunteering for a nonprofit called Common Ground Network when it was tapped to tackle the problem. She helped brainstorm the idea for Feed the Kids for Summer, a program that strives to fill the hunger void created when the school year ends.

Putting in the work

One day a week throughout the summer, Suzy, her cochair Phil Stover and her team of volunteers fill bags with oatmeal, fruit cups, cans of tuna and other goods that children can easily make on their own while their parents are at

work. Each bag includes seven breakfasts, seven lunches and seven snacks, which local food pantries distribute to needy families. When the program began, they fed 2,000 children. Now, it’s up to 10,000. Sometimes funding is tight, but Suzy does whatever she can to spread the word. “I’m a big talker, so I tell everyone I know, apply for grants and send out donation requests to local organizations, parent-teacher associations and churches,” she says.

Encouraging reading

One day in 2011, local teachers approached Suzy with another problem: After a summer with little mental stimulation, many of their students returned to school unprepared and unfocused. Suzy took her mission a step further and

started a summer reading program. She collects books and brings them to the food pantries so kids can take a couple home with their groceries. “Several families have said to us, ‘We’ve never had a book in our house, and now we have a whole library!’” Suzy says. The group also gives incentives for reading, such as tickets to a local water park.

Teachers have noticed a marked difference. “Their students are staying at the same level or growing, so it’s working!” says Suzy. “When I see how excited kids are once they receive the books and food, it goes right to my heart. It has been such a gratifying experience.”

Visit commongroundmansfield.org to donate to Feed the Kids for Summer.



Suzy relies entirely on donations to purchase enough food.



Woman’s Day and Feeding America have joined forces to fight hunger across the United States. To donate and learn more about Feeding America’s summer backpack and pantry programs, check out feedingamerica.org/womansday.