

Kids helping kids eat:

Youth volunteers learn the satisfaction of giving back

Fifteen-year-old Roger Chesley Jr. spent two Saturdays last month at the Foodbank bagging potatoes, sorting canned goods and stocking shelves, and he didn't earn a dime.

The paycheck he earned was the satisfaction of helping others.

"It was fun to do, and it felt nice to help others," he says. "I'd like to do it again."

Roger says the idea for volunteering at the Foodbank was his mom's. In fact, his parents and two younger sisters, ages 14 and 12, also volunteer at the Foodbank, making it a family affair.

While the 10th grader at Bishop Sullivan Catholic High School is required to complete 100 hours of volunteering to graduate, he says he would do it regardless of the requirement. He has also racked up hours at other organizations, including the Habitat for Humanity Thrift Shop and his church, St. Mark's Catholic.

Roger says he thinks the experience he has gained as a volunteer will motivate him to continue volunteering as an adult. "Everybody should do it," he says. "You can find places to volunteer by looking on line or in the phone book."

Volunteers including Roger have made a huge difference to the Foodbank. Volunteers account for more than 1,600 man-hours per month, the equivalent of 10 full-time employees. At minimum wage, our volunteers contribute nearly \$100,000-worth of time annually.

Between 30 and 40 percent of the volunteers at the Foodbank are children and teens, says Barbara Mann, volunteer coordinator. "We love families! Families that volunteer together will be stronger families."

Ms. Mann says children as young as 3 and 4 have volunteered with their families. She recalls one 3-year-old boy who served as the "box stomper" as older members of the family unloaded boxes of food. "The younger you start your child volunteering, the better citizen that child will become," she says.

From 10 to 15 families per month volunteer at the Foodbank, as well as "tons" of church groups -- from 50 to 75 groups of junior and senior highs per year. And five days a week, a group of physically and/or mentally impaired children from the TRAC program work two hours per day sorting and stocking food as part of their training before going to school.

Ms. Mann has volunteer sessions organized into three- to four-hour blocks in the mornings and afternoons through the week and in the morning on Saturdays. Volunteers are also sometimes needed on Sundays to work at special events.

The Foodbank needs you and your family to help with the following:

- Inspect, clean and sort donated products by category;
- Pack USDA boxes or supplemental bags according to specific listed items;
- Palletize and label items for delivery or distribution;
- Assist with pulling orders;
- Clean and organize warehouse as needed;
- Assist agencies with orders and select and weigh produce, bread and other products offered during distribution hours;

- Provide office assistance such as answering phones, filing, data entry, assisting with mailings and other general office tasks to support the management team and programs of the Foodbank.