

serving HOPE

SUMMER 2021

ARKANSAS
FOOD BANK

Each month, Willie gladly drives 20+ miles each way to pick up food for his wife and grandkids.



Worth Every Single Mile

The last Tuesday of every month, Willie and his three friends load up into a car in the early morning hours. Their destination is always the same: a 45-mile round trip to the food distribution at the Arkansas Foodbank's Delta Branch.

Willie and his neighbors arrive around 1 a.m. This ensures they can get a good spot to be ready for the 8:30 a.m. start — near the front of the long line of cars that stretches out for blocks and blocks.

"I love everything I get — the beans, the rice and vegetables," he says with a quiet smile. "My wife and grandkids love it all too."

It's been tough for Willie and his wife, trying to raise two of their grandkids. Especially since they are living on a fixed income that doesn't stretch very far. By visiting the food distribution, Willie gets nourishing food while managing to

save up a few dollars here and there to buy new shoes or other items the kids need.

He remembers one month when his family would have suffered had it not been for the Foodbank. Their gas bill was particularly high, and it took all their resources to pay for it.

"If not for the Foodbank, we wouldn't have had groceries that month. Medicare doesn't always pay for all your medicine ... or you have a co-pay at the doctor. This helps us be able to pay for things like that. I am proud and glad to get [the food]. I'd drive 50 miles if I had to!"

With many of our neighbors struggling to put food on the table, your incredible generosity ensures they can feed their families. Thank you for providing meals that nourish bodies and raise spirits during these challenging times.



“Your kindness provides the nourishing meals that growing boys and girls need this summer.”

What a Year it Has Been!

School is out for the summer. And while many kids may be rejoicing over their months of freedom, others are worried about how they will eat without school-provided breakfasts and lunches. **That's where YOU come in...**

Your kindness provides the nourishing meals that growing boys and girls need this summer. You ensure that food is distributed to our hardworking partner agencies around the state, who are on the front lines working at local pantries and handing out food boxes to local families. You help us provide summer feeding programs where kids can get a healthy lunch (or breakfast) to help sustain them through the day.

Your caring support during this ongoing pandemic has enabled us to not only partner with new agencies but help them build their capacity so they can be open more often to hand out more food. The dedication of our volunteers is also critical to ensure we are reaching underserved areas and getting food to those who need it most.

We are also grateful for the support of friends and community partners, who are working right now to make our Summer Cereal Drive a success. Amazing people like Kari and her team at the Arkansas Electric Cooperative (opposite page), who recognize the struggle kids face during the summer months and help in a real, impactful way.

We've been through a full year of COVID-19 now, and have taken time to sit down and think retrospectively about what we've seen and done. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to our staff who placed themselves at risk every day to come to work. To those who helped us at 600 mobile distributions last year. Our partner agencies who agreed to do more than they'd ever done before. The volunteers who were courageous enough to come out and do the work that needed to be done.

Words just can't express what you did. While it's been overwhelming at times, it is a time to celebrate what we were able to accomplish and let you know none of this would've happened without you. You are a key part of the work we do, and we appreciate you tremendously.

In gratitude,

Rhonda Sanders

Rhonda Sanders
CEO

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This is just one of the many community partners who make our Summer Cereal Drive a success! Thank you to all our friends throughout central and southern Arkansas who are leading the fight against hunger by helping our neighbors.

What Do a Co-Op and Cereal Have in Common? **They're Both Feeding Hungry Kids!**

Kari Pope loves working at the Arkansas Electric Cooperative. "We service a lot of rural Arkansas, providing electricity to the disadvantaged. Our mission is supplying reliable, affordable power responsibly," she says, with pride in her voice.

So when she joined the company in 2014 and was asked to help coordinate their annual Summer Cereal Drive to benefit the Arkansas Foodbank, she eagerly agreed. Every year, they choose a fun theme for the event to engage and motivate their employees across the state.

"We have the best bunch of employees. They really care about each other and their communities and want to help. They're all very spirited and engaged. Lots of creativity flowing among the team members. We used to have a friendly competition among the different divisions until it got a little too heated, and we backed off," she says chuckling.

The co-op works hard to raise money — educating employees on how one dollar equals one box of cereal so they can easily see the impact they are making. They also learn that the dollars they raise stay in their own communities, helping hungry people in their neighborhoods.

"The Foodbank works with us to ensure whatever money is raised by the co-op goes directly back to that community ... so we're really having a direct impact."

Their biggest fundraiser is a silent auction, which is only possible thanks to the generosity of businesses and community partners throughout the state. Last year, they hosted a walkathon where everyone walked and set up their own fundraising page, allowing people to be active and participate safely.

When asked why their Summer Cereal Drive continues to be such a success — providing a record-breaking 27,091 boxes of cereal last year alone, and a total of 134,358 boxes since the partnership began in 2012 — Kari says:

"We're both trying to help disadvantaged areas. We provide affordable electricity and the Foodbank provides meals to people that otherwise go hungry, so it's near and dear to all our hearts. When kids are out of school for the summer, they don't get meals and go hungry. Cereal meets minimum requirements for vitamin and minerals, it's affordable, has a long shelf-life and kids will eat it."

She continues, "It's humbling and awe-inspiring to be able to help this cause!"



Smiling Through It All

Kellie and her family had a harder year than most in 2020. In addition to the pandemic and all the challenges that brought, her home was destroyed by a tornado in June of last year.

But you would never know the struggles she's faced when you see her in person. When we met her at a recent mobile distribution, she admitted it was only her second time coming for food assistance. But despite the challenges she faces, Kellie had a huge smile on her face and made it a point to thank every volunteer who helped that day.

She says, "We've fallen on hard times, and you just don't know what this food means to us. We're trying to get back on our feet but it's tough. You all are such a blessing!"

When their home in Forest City was destroyed, Kellie and her younger daughter, who has cerebral palsy, moved to Lexa to be closer to the rest of their family. Today, Kellie lives across the street from her older daughter and three grandkids, so they can all look out for one another, and this food makes a difference in all their lives.

When asked about what she received at her first visit, Kellie couldn't contain her enthusiasm. "The milk! Last month we got milk, oh my goodness. It had been months since my grandbabies had milk," she says. "The Foodbank is a blessing to Phillips County. THANK YOU!"

Want to Help?

If you've been wanting to help your hungry neighbors but weren't sure how, we'd love to have you join us as a volunteer! As vaccines are becoming more widely available and restrictions are lessening, we are able to open up our Foodbank building to more volunteers again.

We need you! To learn more about upcoming volunteer opportunities, as well as the safety precautions in place, visit arkansasfoodbank.org/volunteer today. Thank you.

What to Expect When Volunteering



Online Pre-Registration



Social Distancing



Required Face Masks



Temperature Checks Upon Arrival



Enhanced Sanitation



Hand Wash & Hand Sanitizer Stations

Your health & safety are a top priority!