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Task Force, libraries distribute food for kids

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Key Points

- For the first time, these backpacks will be distributed to the Massillon Library's network of students in western Stark County this summer.

- From June 12 through Aug. 4, bookmobiles will have backpacks and learning kits at multiple Canton neighborhood locations

In partnership with The Repository, every Monday, Stark Community Foundation highlights positive happenings in our community. Here's to Good News Mondays!

The Stark County Hunger Task Force (SCHTF) is partnering with local libraries this summer to make food accessible to students through its Backpack for Kids program.

In collaboration with both the Massillon Library and Stark Library, thousands of food items for breakfasts, lunches and snacks will be packed into backpacks and distributed across Stark County to children in need.

The Backpack for Kids program launched in 2018 as a way to provide students with food for the weekend when they were not at school to receive nourishing meals. Made possible by various community partnerships and volunteers, the summer Backpack for Kids Program extends SCHTF's reach and distributes meals directly into high-need areas. Many of the summer distribution locations are near the schools it partners with during the school year.

"Nutrition is an important building block for a child's development, and summer hunger can lead to physical and mental health struggles," said Stephanie Sweany, Hunger Task Force executive director. "This can cause poor academic and behavioral performance when school begins. Our backpacks not only provide an essential need, they are helping to set up a child's success as they move into the their next school year."

For the first time, these backpacks will be distributed to the Massillon Library's network of students in western Stark County this summer. The Main Library location in Massillon along

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SCHTF and the Stark Library distribute backpacks each week at Stark Library's Main Library location and Madge Youtz Branch on Tuesdays, Sandy Valley Branch on Wednesdays and DeHoff Community Branch on Thursdays. This summer, backpacks will also be distributed at seven bookmobile locations through Stark Library's Summer Fun School program.

Stark Library's award-winning Summer Fun School is a literal vehicle for success for kids in Canton. SCHTF backpacks filled with food and learning kits full of reading, math and science activities are distributed as children and families visit the bookmobile.

From June 12 through Aug. 4, bookmobiles will have backpacks and learning kits at multiple Canton neighborhood locations each week:

- Schreiber Elementary – Monday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Linwood – Tuesday from Noon to 1 p.m.
- Creek's Crossing – Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Jackson Sherrick – Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Skyline Terrace – Thursday from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.
- Ellisdale Homes – Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Mahoning Manor – Friday from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Last summer, more than 1,350 backpacks of food were distributed through the Summer Fun School program — totaling 2,241 distributed through the Stark Library in 2022.

"If children are hungry, they have a hard time learning, so we are working with local organizations to provide that very basic need," said Marianna DiGiacomo, Stark Library's community services director. "By going straight into the neighborhoods, we remove the barrier of transportation to accessing these valuable resources. Our staff is right there with food and the learning tools they need at absolutely no charge to them. Kids walk with their families and friends and sometimes ride bikes to our convenient stops."

Learn more about the Stark County Hunger Task Force and its Backpack for Kids program at www.starkhunger.org.

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