

Backpack ministry shows Midland children: â€œCrestview Caresâ€

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MIDLAND—[Crestview Baptist Church](#), through a community collaboration with Buckner International, has adopted Jane Long Elementary School for a new feeding program it calls “Crestview Cares.”

“Teachers were noticing that on Monday mornings, some students would eat their school breakfast, but the next day they would stick it in their clothes or backpack,” said Nita Capell, volunteer coordinator for Crestview Cares.

During the first week of the feeding program, 60 of Crestview Baptist’s first- through sixth-grade students worked to fill bags. Volunteers worked quickly by forming an assembly line to fill bags with enough food to last food-insecure elementary students through the weekend.

“The teachers told them: ‘No, you can’t do that. You have to eat it at school.’ Students would explain, ‘I’m going to take it to my brother, because he doesn’t have anything to eat.’”

Capell buys food from the [West Texas Food Bank in Odessa](#) and grocery stores using funds collected from local organizations and individuals. Church members fill bags with food every-other week. On Fridays during recess, teachers discreetly put them in students’ backpacks.

"I was shocked to find out that there are food-insecure kids in Midland," said Byron Smith, director of community ministries for Buckner and missions pastor at Crestview.

Smith observed a backpack feeding program started by the Odessa Junior League last year and applied that knowledge at Jane Long Elementary.

"I wanted to get a model to present to the other churches here in Midland, so that they can take on an elementary school themselves," Smith said.

The program is having the domino effect he hoped it would. One month after Crestview Cares launched, First United Methodist started its own feeding program at another elementary school.

Crestview's program kicked off last September. They currently feed 118 students, up from 71 the first week. Smith said the children love to get ravioli, spaghetti and miniature boxes of cereal.



Volunteers at Crestview Baptist Church in Midland spend every other Wednesday night filling sacks with food to drop off at Jane Long Elementary.

"Everything that we give them is something they can open up and eat immediately," Smith said. "The food does not require heat or any cooking, because we realize that some of these children go home to a house without

electricity or gas or any way to cook."

"We try to give them two things for breakfast, two for lunch and two things for supper. It's not a large amount, but it's something that can tide them over until they get back to school on Monday and have breakfast and lunch."

Teachers have shared students' feedback with volunteer staff. One student said: "I can't wait till Friday to get my food. It feels good to get food every day."

Another said he liked the food and wished he had more to share with his brothers and sisters. One teacher reported three of her four students who receive bags of food already have shown improvement in the classroom.

"We just try to take care of our own," Capell said. "The Lord just put us there where we could be used, and that's what it's all about."

To learn more about Crestview Cares, contact Byron Smith at (432) 681-8200. To help support feeding programs for children through Buckner, call [Buckner Foundation](#) at (214) 758-8050.