

Donation enables Wayland students to meet community needs

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PLAINVIEW—When [Wayland Baptist University](#) students received a \$7,500 gift from an anonymous donor to buy food, they saw it as a blessing from God.

The gift enabled students involved in Wayland’s Diakonia group to implement a backpack program to provide food for low-income students at Plainview’s Thunderbird Elementary School.



Wayland sophomore Nicole Adams from Amarillo anchors the assembly line of students who gathered at Northside Baptist Church to put together backpacks of food for students at Thunderbird Elementary School as part of Wayland's Diakonia service program. The church donated one of its rooms for the students to store food and use as work space.

The idea for the Diakonia program—based on a Greek word meaning “service” or “ministry”—grew out of a Bible study and was inspired by the New Testament passage in Matthew 25 where Jesus described the criteria for approval on Judgment Day: “I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

“We wanted to be able to connect students at Wayland with the community,” said sophomore Nicole Adams, a psychology student from Amarillo.

Rick Shaw, director of the Wayland Mission Center, led the Bible study that sparked the Diakonia program. As students began to express an interest in serving, Shaw sent them into the community to visit with agencies that serve the needy, particularly people experiencing hunger.

Parents work on weekends

As the Wayland students considered the results of their canvass of the community, they realized in many instances children live in homes where parents work on weekends. In particular, that was true in the area near Thunderbird Elementary. Principal Andrew Hannon noted more than 90 percent of the school's 470 students are in the free-lunch and reduced-lunch program.

Adams visited with administrators at the school and learned firsthand

about the need to help students in the Thunderbird neighborhood. Students proposed assembling small backpacks filled with nutritious food that could be prepared by a child without adult supervision. The packs contain cereal, fruit wraps, nonperishable milk and canned stew with pull-up tops, among other items. Once assembled, the packs would be given to students on Friday to take home for the weekend. If parents were away from home working, the children would be able to prepare their own meals.

Student Rachel Bartel already was familiar with a similar program in her hometown, Pampa. She and Adams took the lead roles in launching the project.

Once the plan was developed, school administrators sent notes home to parents encouraging them to allow their children to participate in the backpack program, Hannon explained. He pointed out that backpacks only would be sent with children whose parents approved, and initially a few responses began to trickle in.

Unexpected layoffs

Then the unexpected happened. A local company, Cargill Meat Solutions, announced it was going to close its facility, throwing more than 2,000 employees out of work. When Adams met with her fellow students the week after the announcement to prepare the bags, she told them requests for backpacks had jumped from around 20 the week before to more than 80.

The program has been well received, Hannon said, and he is glad the Wayland students chose to partner with his campus.

“You can see it in the way the kids are responding to it. They enjoy the food,” he said.

Once word spread about what the Diakonia group wanted to do, others in the community stepped up to make it happen, Adams noted.

“Nancy Keith at Wayland Housing heard about it, and she used the money from the fines from the students in the dorms” to purchase backpacks for the project, she said.

Northside Baptist Church, located across the street from Thunderbird Elementary, donated a room for the students to use to store the food and prepare the backpacks.

Unexpected donation

Then the monetary donation arrived.

“For me, (\$7,500) is a lot of money. That’s more money than I can imagine,” Adams said. “It’s a breath of fresh air to find someone who has that kind of a heart, and to do it anonymously proves they’re not just doing it to get recognition for themselves. It lets me know that they believe in our cause and that there is a big God backing our cause.”

Zaca Wilson, a freshman religion major from Fritch, is helping Adams on the project. He sees it as a way to open the door for a greater relationship with the families in the Thunderbird neighborhood.

“I’m praying that when the kids see this, they will see Jesus behind it. I’m also praying that it will spread to the families, not just the kids. I’m hoping that the relationships we start will extend beyond the school,” he said.