

POVERTY: FAN, individuals stepping up to help

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1,100, 19 students is a large number. But, to the best of their ability, some are quietly doing something about it.

"I was in the cafeteria at Sisters Middle School on a Friday, two years ago," says a school employee. "I overheard a fifth-grader being encouraged to finish his food because recess time was starting. The child was crying — he didn't want to throw away his unfinished food and said 'this is the only food I'll have all weekend.' I knew I had to do something."

This led to a grassroots effort to get food into hungry kids' hands every Friday. That anonymous school employee who overheard the crying young man has provided backpacks of food for hungry students. Students in need of weekend food pick up a backpack full of nutritious food on Friday from the school office and return the emptied backpack on Monday morning.

"I can't stand the idea of kids being without food," says local volunteer Deri Frazee. "I budget \$10 every time I go shopping and pick up snacks and other food to send home with kids through the backpack program."

This story of kindness, and of action, is one of many being told in our schools and community.

"Our families are

struggling daily to make ends meet," says Cooper. "Many people call the FAN office and offer to help, especially during the holidays — but the need is year-round."

Sisters, on the outside, appears to be an affluent community. Oftentimes, the most discussed topics are those that focus on projects which, to some, are perceived luxuries — like paved trails and food carts. While there is value to those assets, there are basic-needs issues in the community that do not garner as much attention.

A school district that has "only 32 percent" free and reduced lunch makes it hard to be eligible for programs and grants that are available for more severely poverty-stricken areas. Thirty-two percent is still a large number. It's not just people that are homeless and living on the streets or in their cars — it is our neighbors, our children's friends, and community members.

This past August, Sisters School District staff and administration participated in a community-action poverty simulation through CoActive Connections out of Salem. This training, provided by the Sisters School District, shared tools with participants to help them better understand the realities of poverty. During the two-hour simulation participants role-played whether to use their limited income to feed their kids, pay their rent or make choices that would help bring them out of poverty.

"This simulation was an impactful program that made a difference in the way we communicate with all of our parents and students," says Becky Stoughton, principal at Sisters Elementary School. "The training has helped our staff identify poverty awareness gaps and strengths here at our school, and given all of our staff an opportunity to look for ways to make an impact."

There are agencies in Sisters that help with food and other basic needs — in addition many individuals, clubs, volunteer organizations and churches have stepped up to help those less fortunate in the community.

The Sisters Kiwanis Food Bank serves over 100 families each month, representing more than 300 individuals. Throughout 2014, staffed only by volunteers, the Kiwanis Food Bank provided over 3,000 volunteer hours and distributed over 85,000 pounds of food to individuals in Sisters.

The Sisters office of the Family Access Network provided assistance to 819 individuals during the 2014-2015 school year.

FAN offers assistance in the community in a variety of ways, including basic needs like free and reduced lunch application assistance; clothing; limited rent subsidies; and helping clients connect to NeighborImpact for energy assistance. They also provide referral services such as medical, dental, and vision help or assisting with the

Oregon Health Plan insurance program.

Other services of the local FAN office include providing school supplies, positive youth development with limited after-school activity scholarships for students.

A highly used service through the FAN office is the distribution of hygiene supplies — supporting youth and families with things like laundry detergent, toilet paper, feminine-hygiene items and other supplies.

"Our hygiene products are some of the most widely requested items we distribute," says FAN advocate Theresa Slavkovsky. "We had a donor several years ago ask how she could help. Feminine-hygiene items I told her, they're expensive and not too many people think to donate them. The next week the donor brought in over \$100 worth of products. This year, we received grants from The Roundhouse Foundation and Sisters Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration to help support our hygiene product distribution in Sisters."

Many people are doing something, what they can,

quietly, to support people that may have fallen on hard times in Sisters.

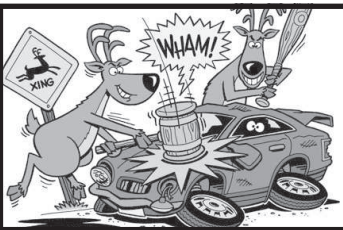
The community can support the Sisters FAN program on Tuesday, November 3, 6 p.m. at Sisters High School by attending the Empty Bowls Fundraiser. Both the Family Access Network and the Sisters Kiwanis Food Bank accept donations.

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— Becky Stoughton

Contact their offices directly to see a current needs list. Sisters FAN, 541-549-0155 or dawn.cooper@sisters.k12.or.us; Kiwanis, info@sisterskiwanis.org.

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