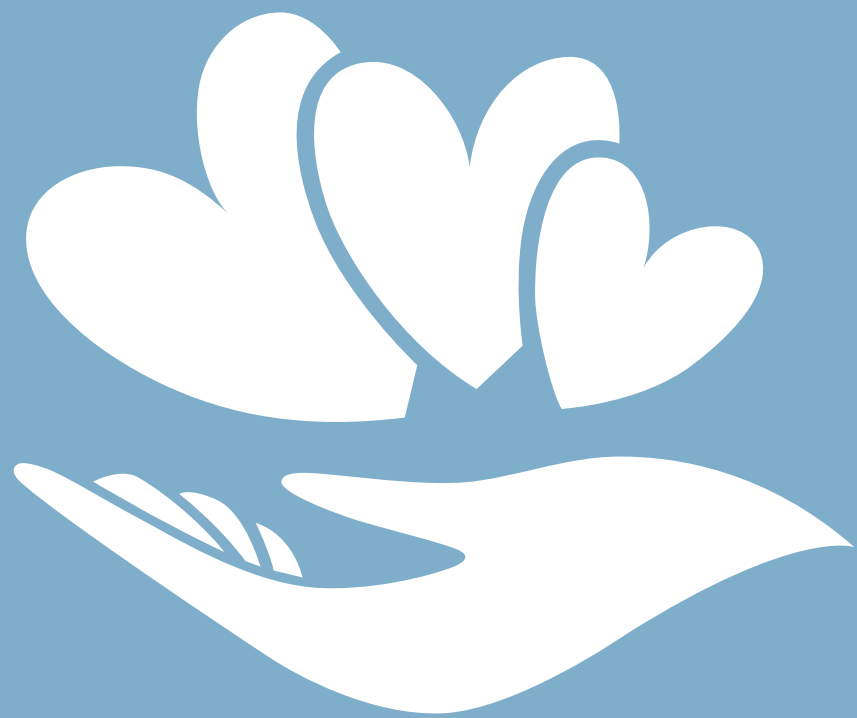


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/'karita:s/ (noun) love of humankind, charity

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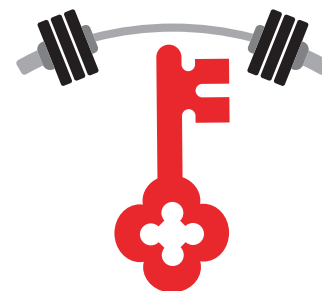
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Girls on the Run serves 1,600 girls a year in 10 counties and 150 schools around the state. Girls participate in an eight-week curriculum that covers self-confidence, teamwork and community service. Girls also participate in a physical training program that culminates in a 5K celebration run. Photo courtesy Girls on the Run Utah.



Girls on the Run's Utah chapter serves 1,600 girls annually with lessons about self-confidence, teamwork and community service

On a cold, sunny Saturday in November, Grady Mock is gathered with his family at Sugarhouse Park in Salt Lake City. They are there to cheer on his stepdaughter Ashton, a fourth-grader, who is running her first 5K.

Ashton had never been interested in running before, Mock said, until she and her friends signed up for the Girls on the Run program at their elementary school.

“They weren’t really sure what they were getting into, but she ended up finding a real passion for it,” Mock said. “And it wasn’t just the running. There’s a lot of team-building and pushing each other to go farther and farther.”

Girls on the Run is an international nonprofit with chapters across the United States. The Utah chapter operates in 10 counties and 150 schools across the state, serving 1,600 girls a year.

Girls in third through sixth grades participate in an eight-week curricu-

lum that includes lessons about self-confidence, teamwork and community service. Clubs also complete a physical training program that culminates in a 5K celebration run.

Mock said he and his wife worried Ashton might not stick with the program through to the end, but the social interaction and team mentality she learned really drew her in.

“Watching the progress of her not being a runner at all, seeing the confidence being built that she went from nothing to being able to do it, she takes a lot of pride from it,” Mock said.

Heidi Moreton was introduced to the program as the Utah chapter was forming 15 years ago. She was in the middle of a divorce and other personal challenges, and the mission of Girls on the Run to empower girls and fill them with confidence really made an impact on her.

“We really help girls find their voices,” said Moreton, who now

serves as executive director of Girls on the Run Utah. “As women in general, we can forget to use our voices even when we are 50. So I was immediately hooked.”

To get a Girls on the Run club in a school, someone just has to ask for it, Moreton said. Most often, it is a parent who first reaches out. Each club needs to be approved by the principal and every club needs at least one coach.

“The majority of our coaches are teachers because they see the need for this age group and these girls,” Moreton said. If there is no coach available at the school, Girls on the Run will recruit a volunteer coach from somewhere else.

Coaches attend a day-long training, put on by Girls on the Run, to learn about the curriculum and how to execute the program successfully. The Girls on the Run curriculum comes from the international organization and includes three units.

The first unit is focused on helping girls identify their personal strengths or “star power.”

“We have them take a look at themselves and find what makes them special,” Moreton said.

The second unit focuses on teamwork and how to encourage and build up the people around you. In the third unit, clubs complete a community service project.

“A lot of our Title I schools and our underserved schools are often the recipient of service projects and I think there is a lot of power in experiencing giving back,” Moreton said.

All the clubs across the state come together for the culminating 5K. There is one race held in the fall and one in the spring. Moreton said the Utah chapter floated the idea of holding multiple smaller races in dif-

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Each girl participating in the celebration 5K runs with a buddy, usually a family member. That means the program benefits not only the girls participating, but the community as a whole. Photo courtesy Girls on the Run Utah.

FROM page 3

ferent locations so teams didn't have to travel so far, but it never caught on.

"The teams love everyone coming together at the same big event," she said. "The race shows these girls

how many of them there really are."

Hannah Jerozal, a school counselor who serves as the Girls on the Run coach at her elementary school, was at the November race cheering on her 12 runners and their buddies. Several other teachers from her school and even the principal were there, too.

"This program in particular I

love because its social, emotional and physical activity," she said. "They build confidence, they build relationships. It's really awesome to see them building friendships with these girls they normally wouldn't be able to."

Those benefits ripple out to the whole school, Jerozal said.

"As a group they take what they learn and bring those skills to their friends and their peers," she said. When the club has to train indoors during bad weather, teachers and students line the hall to cheer them on. "They're all there to support each other. The energy is so high and everyone is so positive and excited."

There is no cost to schools to host a Girls on the Run club, and schools can even host more than one club, depending on how many participants they have. There is a participation fee of \$195 per girl, usually paid by the family, with income-based scholarships available. In some cases, schools cover the participant fees. Girls on the Run Utah distributes \$150,000 in scholarship money every year.

"Our goal is not to turn anyone away for inability to pay," Moreton said.

The participant fees represent approximately a third of the chapter's \$700,000 annual budget. Another third comes from sponsors and donors, Moreton said, while the final third comes from grants.

The budget covers salaries for four full-time employees, as well as curriculum materials for every school, including the coach training, activity packets and workbooks, a guide for each family, a journal for each girl, T-shirts, water bottles and automatic entry into the 5K.

Each girl participating in the 5K runs with a buddy, who pays a small fee to participate. The fees help offset the cost of putting on the large event. The November 5K had a total of 900 runners.

One of them was Haddie B., a third-grader who was running her first 5K with Girls on the Run. She and her running buddy, her aunt, Chrise Eady, were first across the finish line.

Haddie said the Girls on the Run club at her school helped her get ready for the race by having her do warm-ups and running laps. But her favorite part was talking with other girls while they trained and did other



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Heidi Moreton, Executive Director

"I love how Girls on the Run encourages girls to love themselves just the way they are!"

Ivy Denihan, Program Director

"I am so blessed to be a part of an organization that believes in the power of strong girls. I believe that there are NO limits to what a girl with confidence can achieve, and Girls on the Run speaks to that by allowing girls to discover they are powerful, brave and limitless."

Kayla Watanabe, Marketing and Communications

"The confidence, empowerment and love we teach our girls becomes more instilled in me every single day. Girls on the Run inspires me just as much as the girls!"

Allison Leishman, Development

"I love Girls on the Run because it teaches girls of all ages to be strong, confident, and kind. It also helps them love themselves inside and out!"

Claire Shaffer, Program and Volunteer Coordinator

"I love how Girls on the Run encourages girls to have confidence, be active, and to be themselves in an empowering, encouraging and fun environment!"

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activities together.

“It’s fun, and you make lots of new friends,” Haddie said.

Eady, a triathlete, was impressed with the physicality and athleticism that Haddie gained in such a short time. She estimated Haddie finished the race in under 25 minutes and Eady had to chase her across the finish line. But it was worth it.

“I was smiling through the whole thing, every time someone was cheering us on,” she said.

Perhaps the most important skill Haddie gained, though, was learning to encourage other people and build them up, Eady said. Those lessons are a service, not just to the girls participating in Girls on the Run, but to the community as a whole.

“Whether it’s because of society or people close by you, sometimes girls and women feel they can’t do certain things and it’s important for us to support each other and tell each other ‘You can do it!’ even if you are the first one in your family or your group to try,” Moreton said.

The positive energy of the program goes a long way in attracting participants, but it also key to attracting sponsors and donors as well.

Bethany Beatty recently relocated to Utah as a talent acquisition manager for Enterprise Rent-A-Car and was tasked with identifying community organizations the company could support. Girls on the Run was her first choice. Beatty and a group of Enterprise volunteers were at the November 5K handing out snacks and water.

“The best part is the finish line of the race,” Beatty said. “To see the happiness and excitement on the girls’ faces as they cross that finish line — I always get emotional.”

Enterprise also provides funding to support the overarching program, Beatty said. The mission of Girls on the Run aligns well with Enterprise’s own goals of focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion.

“Young women need to see that running a 5K isn’t something that just boys can do,” Beatty said. “This program gives them that confidence at an early age. And by supporting this program, we are able to spread

our reach and expand the number of young women we can help.”

Though the COVID-19 pandemic caused some clubs to shut down because there was no in-person school, Girls on the Run Utah continues to experience steady growth, Moreton said. Some clubs that could no longer meet at schools moved to parks or rec centers, for example, and Girls on the Run Utah continues to find creative solutions to move the program forward.

“We want it to be for all girls and we are doing everything we can to make sure every girl who wants to participate can,” Moreton said. “It’s an extra layer of protection that I think girls really need. Sometimes people say this is just a ‘feel-good’ program, but I don’t believe that. We are filling a need. It’s out there. We are doing a lot of good in the community.”



The Girls on the Run curriculum is about a lot more than running. Girls build self-confidence and learn how to encourage one another and work together as a team. “It’s an extra layer of support that I think girls really need,” said executive director Heidi Moreton. Photo courtesy Girls on the Run Utah.



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WHAT GIRLS LEARN

Confidence. Lessons are designed to build girls’ self-worth and help them feel greater confidence in who they are. Activities help girls recognize their personal strengths and teach them how to stand up for themselves and others.

Character. By gaining awareness of the power they possess to make intentional decisions, girls learn to choose positive actions, which demonstrate respect and responsibility toward themselves and others.

Care. Throughout each season, girls learn to respond to others and themselves with care and compassion. Lessons and activities further develop their abilities to sympathize and empathize both within and beyond their social groups.

Connections. Girls on the Run lessons focus on cooperative skills and team-building through a positive group setting. Girls learn firsthand how to create positive connections with parents and caregivers, teachers, peers and their communities.

Competence. Our program provides skill-building experiences to nurture girls’ physical, social and emotional competencies that they apply in other areas of their lives such as home, school and in the neighborhood. Completing a 5K at the end of the season gives them a tangible opportunity to apply all that they have learned.



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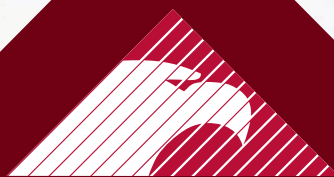
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Not only to feed children, but to give them hope

Growing up with a single mom in a precarious financial situation, Minda Zoloth didn't always know how her family would get the things they needed. But she did know, from an early age, that when she grew up, she wanted to help people experiencing the kind of hardship she had.

In 2016 she founded For The Kids, a food program for food-insecure kids and families, to make good on that dream. But the seeds were planted several years before.

In her day job, Zoloth worked in the hospitality industry as a general manager of several hotels. She often organized fundraisers and drives through her work, but it never felt like enough.

"I was doing all this work fundraising and just handing the money over and it didn't feel very satisfying to me," Zoloth said.

In 2012, she read an article about a national nonprofit organization that put together food bags for children on the federal Free Lunch program to take home so they had food over the weekend. She immediately reached out and signed on as a program coordinator for the state of Utah, with a commitment to

provide 50 bags of food a week.

Within a short amount of time, she was up to 350 bags of food a week — plus full Thanksgiving dinners and more — all out of a closet at her hotel. The more need she saw, Zoloth said, the more she wanted to do, and forming her own nonprofit was the best way to do it.

"My goal is to feed children, but more than that it's to give them hope because hope is bigger than food," she said. "If kids know they are cared for, they have hope and hope can change a life."

For The Kids started by partnering with two Title I schools in the Salt Lake Valley. The organization provided 350 bags a week with enough food for food-insecure kids through the weekend — two breakfasts, two lunches and two dinners. The organization also provided bulk bags for school holidays and 600 full Thanksgiving meals every year.

Then COVID hit and the need skyrocketed.

Food bag deliveries increased

to 600 a week, funded by donations from pro golfer Tony Finau, a Utah native, and Jazz player Rudy Gobert. In 2020, For The Kids provided 910 full Thanksgiving meals among five schools, Zoloth said. In 2021, they distributed 1,200 Thanksgiving dinners.

"Even in the time when everyone was staying home, we never stopped," Zoloth said. "We doubled what we were doing."

With some schools closed entirely, and others not letting people other than students and staff inside, distribution shifted to a drive-through model on a first-come, first-served basis.

Volunteers scheduled individual times

to come to the For The Kids space in North Salt Lake to pack bags.

One of those volunteers was Anne-Marie Bishop, who has been working with For The Kids since the organization was headquartered in a hotel closet. As soon as she found out about the work For The Kids was doing, she wanted to be involved.

"Just the thought of kids not having enough to eat is something I can't comprehend," Bishop said. "My fam-



"You just have to hope you've touched even one life and that one kid is going to grow up and break that cycle," For The Kids founder Minda Zoloth said. "Even a little bit can make a big impact." Photo courtesy of For The Kids.

CONTINUED on next page





FOR THE KIDS

Bulk Bag Sample Menu

Breakfast:

- Cereal
- Pancake mix and syrup
- Microwave breakfast cups
- Oatmeal
- Breakfast bars
- Muffin mix

Snacks:

- Crackers
- Fruit snacks
- Granola bars

Lunch and Dinner:

- Mac and cheese
- Ramen
- Canned soups and stews
- Peanut butter and jelly
- Pasta and sauce
- Canned meat
- Rice and beans
- Tortillas

FROM previous page

ily has had its ups and downs and our own challenges, but we've always had enough."

These days her whole family is in on the act. Just last month Bishop and her 13-year-old son helped hand out Thanksgiving dinners. He was bored

and complaining at first, she said, but by the end of the day he said it had been worth the time and effort.

"Sometimes you think you have to go far away to find a need, but it's important to see that in your own community there are people who need help," Bishop said. "There are needs right here."

Barbara Jensen found herself in need after a difficult family separation knocked her and her daughter off their feet. The counselor at her daughter Racheal Thomas' elementary school

referred them to For The Kids.

"We were in such bad shape when we first started out," Jensen said. "I didn't know how or why we got on the list, but I was so grateful."

Every Friday, Racheal brought home a bag of food that they could stretch through the weekend and sometimes even into the next week. They also received a Thanksgiving dinner and presents for Christmas.

"I didn't have anything at all for Christmas," Jensen said. "There are no words that can say what that meant. It was like an angel had come to us."

Today Racheal is a junior in high school, but For The Kids is still looking out for her, Jensen said. The mother-daughter duo still gets a Thanksgiving and Christmas meal every year — and other groceries and gifts when they need them.

"They have never once forgotten

about us, not one single year," Jensen said.

The result for Jensen and her daughter has been the hope that Zoloth talks about.

"For The Kids has changed our lives," Jensen said. "Every year things get a little bit better. We are not as hungry as we used to be."

For The Kids delivers food and hope with a budget of approximately \$425,000 a year. The money comes from a combination of grants, corporate sponsors and individual donors. Twelve percent goes to overhead, including three staff members, and almost half goes to purchasing food. For The Kids also accepts any and all in-kind donations of non-perishable food.

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The mission of For The Kids is to feed hungry kids, but for founder Minda Zoloth, the real goal is to give kids hope. "If kids know they are cared for, they have hope and hope can change a life," she said. Photo courtesy of For The Kids.

FROM page 9

With COVID restrictions complicating deliveries, the organization has now shifted to delivering bulk bags of food to partner elementary schools once a month. The upside is that, rather than individual servings that only keep the kids fed, they are able to provide larger portions that can feed the whole family.

“It makes my heart feel better,” Zoloth said.

For Amanda Millerberg and her family, serving others has always been the fastest way to a happy heart. When she and her husband were looking for an organization to support with their family giving fund, they were imme-

diately drawn to For The Kids and Zoloth’s own passion for helping kids and families in need.

“I love that she’s helping people here in our own community, in our own backyard, with those day-to-day things that can really make an impact on their lives,” Millerberg said.

And that impact is a two-way street, Millerberg said. Her family is supporting For The Kids with financial contributions and volunteer hours, but they are also getting a chance to learn about and serve their neighbors.

“People are watching the news and seeing the things going on in the world — the inequalities and the wars — there are a lot of sad things going on,” Millerberg said. “I started feeling sort of hopeless and overwhelmed. I wondered, ‘How can I help?’ and ‘Does what I do even matter?’”

Turning back to her own community gave Millerberg a sense of hope and purpose, a way to make a tangible impact.

“For The Kids provides an avenue to serve for people who want to serve,” she said. “It helps you recognize there is a need in your community and gives you a way to help meet it.”

Volunteers are the lifeblood of For The Kids, Zoloth said. It takes thousands of them every year to collect food, pack bags and deliver them. And there is always more work for volunteers to do. In 2022, for example, For The Kids plans to expand to a third school. For The Kids also recruits volunteers to act as mentors and to coach a baseball team — the Rose Park

Panthers — sponsored by the organization.

But no matter how many schools For The Kids supports, or how many activities they sponsor, the mission is always the same.

“The whole goal is to feed more kids in more schools,” Zoloth said. “You just have to hope you’ve touched even one life and that one kid is going to grow up and break that cycle. Even a little bit can make a big impact.”



“Sometimes you think you have to go far away to find a need, but it’s important to see that in your own community there are people who need help,” said For The Kids volunteer Anne-Marie Bishop. “There are needs right here.” Photo courtesy of For The Kids.



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It takes thousands of volunteers every year to help For The Kids run. Volunteers donate food, pack bags, and make regular deliveries to schools. In addition to monthly bulk food bags, For The Kids also provides hundreds of Thanksgiving meals and other in-demand items. Photo courtesy of For The Kids.

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Free Community Meal is committed to treating everyone who participates in every event with compassion and dignity. “We want them to feel really special,” said board member Jennifer Elwell. For the most recent event, she added a red rose to every resource bag herself. Photo courtesy of Free Community Meal.



Gather Share Support

The Free Community Meal and Resource Fair began in 2011 as the project of one person at one church who wanted to bring together the Ogden community to share a meal and hospitality

It all started with a letter.

In 2011, the national office of the United Church of Christ sent a note to all of its congregations, encouraging them to provide a simple meal to people in need. The congregation in Ogden took that idea and ran with it.

Instead of keeping the project to itself, the congregation reached out to other churches and organizations in the community to join them. They bought pounds of pasta and gallons of sauce. They covered tables with butcher paper and set out crayons for kids to color with. They spread the word about a free community meal. And then they waited.

Three hundred people came.

“It was way more than we expect-

ed,” said Jennifer Elwell, who was involved in planning the 2011 meal. “There were emergency runs to Costco to get more food.”

When the evening was wrapping up, one of the attendees found the organizers and asked if they could host a meal like that every Saturday. Once a week was a bit too much, but the organizers decided once a year would be more than doable. And so, the Free Community Meal and Resource Fair was born.

Ten years later, the event looks a little different than that first evening. For starters, there are now two free community meals a year, with food donated or sold at a discount by local restaurants. The evening also includes

more family activities, such as face painting, crafts and a Drum Bus where kids can try out different musical instruments.

Attendees also walk away with more than just full bellies. After achieving nonprofit status in 2017, Free Community Meal received grant money to purchase items for a coat drive. Volunteers assemble and hand out hygiene kits. There are free haircuts. Every meal also includes a resource fair where attendees can get more information about support services in their community. But the purpose of Free Community Meal remains the same.

“From that first event we learned that when people from diverse back-

grounds get together, good things happen,” Elwell said. “Talking face-to-face can help all of us clear up misconceptions and misunderstandings.”

Cathy Cottrell first heard about Free Community Meal when she was approached by local leadership from her congregation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to help put together hygiene kits and gather coats for an upcoming free meal.

When the night of the meal came, she decided to go herself and see what it was all about.

CONTINUED on page 14





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FROM page 12

“I like to describe it as a church dinner on steroids,” Cottrell said. “Being there was like meeting with old friends.”

What stood out to Cottrell the most was the great effort spent on making the evening meaningful for both the people who were being served and the people who were doing the serving.

“If you can take a minute and to sit and talk with somebody, differences start fading away and you see strangers as people,” she said. “In a religious sense, they become your brothers and sisters.”

Those are bonds and impacts that last, even with only two meals a year. Elwell said she met a father and son who came to help serve food at a meal a few years ago. When she asked how they heard about the event, the father said they had attended a meal several years previously, when they were experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. Now they were back on their feet and ready to give back.

“We try not to have a dividing line,” said Elwell. “We all sit down together and eat together. It’s really stuck with me, this idea that at any point in our life it’s important to take these opportunities to serve other people.”

Taking opportunities to serve is what has driven the growth of the Free Community Meal program, said Marlene Waters. She was asked one year to collect brochures from local support organizations to hand out at the meal. The next year, she upped her game and asked a few representatives from a few organizations to come to the meal and talk about their services.

Now every community meal includes a resource fair with information tables from the Center for Grieving Children, the Health Department, the public library system, Catholic Community Services, Head Start and more.

“The resource fair is really important,” Elwell said. “We really thought about what we could do that was more lasting, and this is what we came up with.”

The coat drive came about in much the same way. The first few years, volunteers collected gently used coats to hand out to meal attendees but everyone agreed that brand-new coats would be much nicer. The organization got

a grant from United Way of Northern Utah to purchase new coats for the coat drive. Then they started looking for deals.

Patrick McCrary, the general manager of Recreation Outlet, an outdoor

retailer with locations in Salt Lake City, American Fork and Ogden, got a call from one of his store managers that there was a man in the store looking to buy a lot of coats, beanies and gloves to donate to people in need, and he was wondering about a discount.

“We are heavy into the discount market and I had a lot of older stock that was less expensive,” McCrary said. “I started walking the aisles, grabbing what I thought would fit his needs and that was the end of it.”

That is, until the next year, when the same scene played out again. By

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George Washington High School in Ogden hosts the bi-annual Free Community Meal events free of charge, and teachers and students often join the event as volunteers. In addition to a free meal, the events include kids’ activities, a resource fair, a coat drive sponsored by United Way, and even free haircuts. Photo courtesy of Free Community Meal.



Unable to gather in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Free Community Meal boxed up hundreds of dinners and handed them out curbside. Whether in-person or remote there are no eligibility requirements to enjoy a Free Community Meal. “The only criteria is to show up,” said board member Jennifer Elwell.

Free Community Meal and Resource Fair

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the third year, McCrary suggested his stores partner officially with Free Community Meal and plan ahead to make sure the group got exactly what they were looking for at a price they could afford.

These days Free Community Meal provides a list ahead of time of all the items they hope to collect and McCrary shops for them at trade shows throughout the year. The organization gives him a budget to spend, McCrary said, and then he donates another 25 percent of the total.

“These guys, from the get-go, I could just tell they were just a group of people who care about their community, and they are always so grateful,” he said. “They know I am going to give them the best deal I can, and they are super-easy to work with.”

Donations and community support are literally what keep Free Community Meal running, Elwell said. The organization has a budget of \$20,000 a year, all of which goes to putting on the bi-annual meals. There are no paid staff or overhead office expenses.

Since achieving nonprofit status, Free Community Meal has distributed 3,365 hygiene kits, 2,790 free books and 7,920 coats and hosted two meals a year for an estimated 800 people every time. Nearly 1,000 volunteers have come together to make it all happen.

“It’s not just a community meal, it’s a community effort,” Cottrell said. “You get to rub shoulders with all kinds of people who are coming together not just to eat, but to share a meal.”

Even the COVID-19 pandemic didn’t slow the Free Community Meal program down. Unable to meet in-person, volunteers packed to-go containers and distributed them curbside. Every family also got a resource bag with brochures from support organizations, face masks, take-home crafts and a book. At the last minute, Elwell ran to the store and bought red roses to add as well.

“We’re learning new ways to reach out, but we miss meeting in person,” she said.

The work of Free Community Meal also continues between the meals themselves, however they are served. The organization partners with local schools to distribute masks, hand sanitizer, coats and books all year long — whenever and wherever they are needed.

“However we can do it, it’s giving back to the community that’s most important,” Waters said. “That’s what makes us feel good.”



When COVID prevented gathering in-person Free Community Meal took their event curbside, handing out to-go meals and resource bags with brochures from local support organizations, take home crafts, and a book of essays written by young adults from diverse backgrounds. Photo courtesy of Free Community Meal.



Free Community Meal and Resource Fair

Community Partners

- Marshall White Community Center**
- Weber State University**
- George Washington High School**
- United Way of Northern Utah**
- Weber County Library**

To get involved as a volunteer or a donor, visit:
<https://freecommunitymeal.org/donate>
 or email:
ogdencommunitymeal@gmail.com.



The first Free Community Meal was pasta and sauce from Costco. Today, food for the meals is donated by local restaurants or sold at a steep discount. “It’s really a community effort,” said board member Cathy Cottrell.

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