

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Sept. 3, 2014

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BACKPACK PROGRAM MOVES TO NEW WAREHOUSE

HICKORY -- Catawba County's Backpack Program, which provides extra food for local school children facing food insecurity, has moved to a new warehouse facility, which is operated by the Hickory Soup Kitchen.

“We are appreciative of the Hickory Soup Kitchen allowing us to use their warehouse, and for their partnership and support,” said John Eller, director of Catawba County Social Services. The Backpack Program is led by volunteers and coordinated by Catawba County Social Services. It relies primarily on donations from local groups and individuals. In the 2013-2014 school year, the program provided over 273,000 meals to more than 1,200 children. More than 400 volunteers donated over 6,000 hours to make it happen, and more than 900 donors contributed \$99,000.

The Backpack Program works with the three public school systems in Catawba County.

School social workers identify children who are in need of the program. Food is purchased at wholesale prices, or is collected by local churches, businesses and civic groups. Community volunteers pack the food, which is sent home with the children each weekend during the school year.

The most recent (2012) American Community Survey of the U.S. Census estimates that 33.5 percent of all Catawba County children age 18 or younger are living in poverty. Other food assistance programs -- such as local food pantries and Social Services' Food and Nutrition Services (Food Stamps) -- do not provide for all of a family's food needs. Research has shown that children who receive adequate nutrition are able to learn better in school.



Amanda Freeland, coordinator of the Catawba County Backpack Program, stands in the warehouse where volunteers pack food for Catawba County children facing food insecurity. More volunteers and donations are needed.

Additional volunteers and donations are needed for the 2014-2015 school year. If you would like to volunteer with the Backpack Program, donate food, or host a fundraiser, contact Amanda Freeland of Catawba County Social Services at 828-695-5648 or at afreeland@catawbacountync.gov. You may donate securely online at <https://www.velocitypayment.com/client/catawba/socialservices/index.htm>. To donate by check, make out your check to Catawba County Social Services and write "Backpack Program" in the memo line. Mail your donation to: Catawba County Social Services, P.O. Box 669, Newton, NC 28658.

For a list of the best food items to donate, and for other details about the program, go to <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/backpack>.

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