Why Power Packs?

In 2017, the food insecurity rate for Pierce County was 13.2% overall, with a rate nearly **19% for children** at risk of food insecurity (*Feeding America, 2017*). Nearly half of all students enrolled in Pierce County schools accessed free and reduced-price (FRL) school meals, **amounting to 56,710 children** (*Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2016-17*). Keeping in mind that free and reduced-price lunch enrollment is based on federal income standards that do not take into account the rapidly rising cost of living in the Puget Sound Region, it is estimated that the overall FRL numbers do not accurately convey the level of food insecurity for struggling families. In some districts, the average free and reduced price lunch enrollment is more than **70% of district students**. Many of these same students are at risk of hunger outside of school time when the foundational nutrition from USDA school meals program is not available. Hungry children suffer from health problems, are more likely to be ill and absent from school, and have difficulty concentrating while they are in class. The Power Pack project aligns with United Way's goal of helping to lift 15,000 households out of poverty by 2028 by helping children succeed in school and to stabilize families in need.

Positive changes and outcomes across the backpack feeding system include improved student attendance and improved academic success which teachers attribute in part to increased access to food. The Power Pack providers work with schools to provide this weekly supplement to children in need. Power Packs are distributed by school counselors and nurses to students they know are most at-risk of going hungry as identified by USDA school meal enrollment forms, students experiencing behavior and academic performance issues attributed to hunger, and self-identification by students and/or parents.

United Way of Pierce County provides a unified brand for the Power Pack partners for the purpose of raising awareness about childhood hunger and engaging the community in helping to meet this critical need. Our relationships with a wide array of businesses, communities of faith, service groups, labor groups, and others offer many opportunities to engage the community through volunteering, raising food resources through donation drives, and giving monetary donations to support children in need.
Results of Power Pack Partnership

For the 2018-19 school year, the Power Pack partners served provided **2,500 weekly food backpacks** for struggling students (and some programs include additional food for the family) which provided **598,560 meals**. This number includes additional days of food for school breaks (‘break bags’). We currently have partners serving **12 of the highest need districts out of the 13 school districts** in Pierce County. Feedback from school staff and Power Pack recipients reflects the important impact on children and their families:

The Power Pack partners meet with nutrition education staff and emergency food distributors about ways to improve nutrition of Power Packs while keeping the weight of the food packs down. The challenge to provide healthy, nutritious food that children will actually eat is ongoing. Several partners have developed surveys for the counselor or nurse to complete with the student. Surveys ask about what foods they like best and least, and if they prepare the food themselves or with a parent’s help.

For the 2018-19 school year, our goal is to help maintain current service levels while exploring other options to increase access to healthy food for these families. The Power Pack model is a more expensive access channel because of the need to have single serving sizes and easy to prepare items. If a child is at risk of going hungry over the weekend and during school breaks, it makes sense that the entire family - including any pre-school age children in the home - are also food insecure. It has also been determined that for middle school and high school students, the premade food pack option does not work for this demographic, so partners are working to meet the unique needs of older students by providing Food Pantries (or ‘Care Closets’) at schools with food and hygiene items. Power Pack partners will participate in discussions with the larger community of food providers to explore other options for access to healthy food for families in hard to reach areas.

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2,500 students served each week  
598,560 meals during the school year
Success Stories & Insights

From St Leo Food Connection...
One school counselor reports, “These food bags have a great impact on our families. More specifically for our families experiencing homelessness, where food and shelter are an uncertainty, these food bags are a reliable food source for kids during that hardship.”

From Food Backpacks 4 Kids...
A student from the alternative high school takes her backpack into the onsite food pantry to fill it with food for herself and her younger sibling. Her mom struggles with addiction, so the student cooks a meal for both herself and her sibling most nights. She uses the food pantry several times a week.

From Bethel School District...
A parent of a student from a high-need elementary school told the counselor that were it not for the Power Packs, her family could not have made it. Power Packs help keep the other parts of her financial life afloat. She said that it was as much the fact that she felt supported as it was the financial relief.

From Mt. View Community Center...
Participating school staff feel strongly about Power Packs. “Families living in motels who typically only have a microwave at best are thankful to have the breakfast food, snack food and easy to make items that can be microwaved over the weekend. We are so thankful for the faithfulness of the program for our families.”

From Eatonville Family Agency...
Tracy, a struggling mom of four, works and homeschools her children with special needs. She reached out to us to see if we could help feed her children through Power Packs. We were able to help ease her financial burden, and Tracy reports doing much better without the constant worry of where her next meal would come from.

From Our Savior Lutheran Church...
A middle school student who has a large family reported that he likes sharing his food pack with his family members, especially sharing the fruit cups with his grandfather. His grandmother told the school social worker that the weekly food packs help supplement the food needed to feed their big family.

Another middle school student whose family is currently homeless shared how much he appreciates the food packs and that they really help his whole family out.
Power Packs Impact
(Results from the January 2019 Point-In-Time Power Pack survey of recipients)

Do you use the Power Pack food to feed others in the household?

- Yes
- No

Would it be difficult to feed your household without Power Packs?

- Yes
- No
The Crock Pot Project

Many of the children served through the Power Pack Partnership live in situations where their families may not have access to a working oven or stovetop, with some families trying to make due with a microwave, toaster oven and/or hot plate. Some families lack pots, pans and utensils, which limits their ability to create healthy meals at home. To help address these needs, United Way of Pierce County and the Power Pack partners have joined forces for the Crock Pot Project, which gives families – with limited tools, time and resources – the ability to prepare hot, home-cooked and nutritious meals by providing slow cookers and soup kits.

*A family forced to stay in a motel when they were evicted from their apartment received a crock pot and soup kits enabling them to make hot meals in their motel room which they said made it feel “a little more like home.”*

Since the project began, United Way has distributed 1,356 slow cookers and 10,081 soup kits to families in need, providing over 40,324 home-cooked meals. Additionally, hundreds of volunteers have helped this project come to life. We want to thank our corporate partners – BNY Mellon, Cole Graphics, Mutual of Enumclaw, Comprehensive Life Resources, Sound Physicians, Harborstone Credit Union, City of Dupont, NuStar Energy, Regence/Cambia Health, McGranahan Architects – as well as the dozens of individuals and families who have collected Crock Pots and made soup kits. And as always, we appreciate our Power Pack Provider Network who distribute these soup kits and slow cookers to families in need!

1,356 families received slow cookers
10,081 soup kits distributed
40,324 meals served
## Power Pack Partnership

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<tr>
<th>District:</th>
<th>Served By:</th>
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| Bethel School District     | Bethel School District*+  
|                            |    Parkway Community Services*+  
|                            |    Harvest House*+  |
| Clover Park School District | St. Leo’s Food Connection*+  |
| Eatonville School District  | Eatonville Family Agency*+  |
| Fife School District       | Mt. View Community Center*  |
| Franklin Pierce School District | Our Savior Lutheran Church*+  |
| Orting School District     | Orting Food Bank+  |
| Peninsula School District  | Food Backpacks 4 Kids*+  |
| Puyallup School District   | Mt. View Community Center*  
|                            |    Backpack Kids  
|                            |    Communities in Schools of Puyallup  |
| Sumner School District     | Bonney Lake Food Bank  
|                            |    Sumner Food Bank  
|                            |    Backpack Kids  |
| Tacoma School District     | St. Leo’s Food Connection*+  |
| University Place School District | Families Unlimited Network+  |
| White River School District | Bonney Lake Food Bank+  |

* 2018-19 Power Pack mini-grant recipients
+ Crock Pot Project distribution sites
Thank you to our 2018-19 Power Pack Supporters:

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The Norcliffe Foundation