

From the Outreach Committee

Focus on Bright Futures

In March, the Outreach Committee is focused on Bright Futures and our ministry with them. Bright Futures – Frederick/Winchester is a non-profit organization that works to bring together the community to focus on the success of children. The organization acts as a framework to engage local businesses, human services agencies, faith-based organizations, and parent groups in our community to meet the needs of children in school in Frederick County and Winchester.



Bright Futures has several important programs, but the one that Christ Church regularly supports is the Food Pack Program. The number of students in Winchester and Frederick County who experience poverty and hunger at home continues to rise each week. The Food Pack program currently serves more than 1200 children, at all of the schools in both school districts, with a weekly pack containing two breakfasts, two lunches, a vegetable, a fruit and a snack. These are distributed at schools on Fridays.

Other programs at Bright Futures include the annual “Stuff the Bus,” where school supplies are collected to share with students and teachers; a summer food assistance program, where a school bus delivers family-sized food boxes from the Blue Ridge Area Food Pantry to several locations in the area for students and their families to pick up; and a holiday assistance program, where, in 2022, just under 1000 kids were sponsored by individuals in the community and given gifts.

And, aside from the established programs, Bright Futures answers any calls from school guidance counselors asking for assistance for students and their families – from providing an emergency bag of clothes to a family-sized food box to sending several inflatable mattresses for a family staying with friends when they are suddenly homeless.

The Outreach Committee at Christ Church began a program called "Panda Pantry" in 2014 as a response to the need we saw in the community to help feed children. We began packing backpacks with food for children at a neighborhood elementary school to take home on weekends. It began with about 30 bags of food packed each week in the Baden Center and continued to grow each year.



Bright Futures was established several years later and, working with them instead of an individual school, the program at Christ Church has evolved. Now, we have a team of parishioners that visits the Bright Futures warehouse once or twice a month to stuff bags. And, Christ Church currently purchases and donates the cereal that is used in the food packs. We make this cereal purchase once a month to supply Bright Futures. The money spent monthly used to provide four weeks of cereal, but due to rising costs, is now about three weeks-worth.

The packing team is a small group that just spends about an hour packing bags each visit. Sometimes, they get 500 bags packed in one visit! Amelia Wheeler has been involved since the start and says, “Now we are part of a more community-wide effort but the fellowship with other Christ Church members and the sense of helping children and families in the

From the Outreach Committee

community is the same. The name may change but the benefits to me, as a volunteer, and to the community are the same.”

Pat Shaner adds, “I stay involved because it is a way to help without a large time commitment, and I enjoy the fellowship.” Apparently, there is a lot of fun conversation along the packing line!

Elise Stine-Dolinar, Program Coordinator at Bright Futures, says, “We have great packers – from Shenandoah University, corporate groups, civic groups, church groups – but getting the food is our biggest challenge every week.” If donations of food don’t come in, Elise and Administrative Assistant, Cheryl Maggard, have to make more calls or shop using money from donations to bridge the gap. This is why it’s important to Bright Futures that they know they can rely on Christ Church for a regular, monthly delivery of cereal.

“We are constantly fundraising and asking for donations,” says Elise. They’re working with Martin’s Grocery stores right now, collecting “round-up” donations, and just did a fundraiser with Chipotle.

The Outreach Committee uses money in the operating budget to help fund our ministry with Bright Futures, but that’s not enough to cover the expenses, especially as food prices continue to rise. The Marie Cooper Fund at Christ Church also helps supports the ministry. This spring, Christ Church will use the proceeds of ticket sales for the Apple Blossom parades to support the ministry, as well. Hoping to return to pre-Covid attendance at the parades, that should provide \$2500 or more to continue our work with Bright Futures.

As we collect trail mix in March and you see the donated boxes add up, think about what a drop in the bucket those packets of trail mix are. If we collect 100 boxes of 24 trail mixes, that only covers the snack in the bags for just two weeks. The need is great! You can visit the Bright Futures website or Facebook page to learn more about their programs and needs.

In March, we are collecting BOXES of snack packs of trail mix for the food bags given by **Bright Futures** to local school kids. You can find these boxes of 24/28 at Walmart or Costco, & other stores.

Drop off in church on Sundays or at the Church Office on Wednesdays from 10-2.

