



CARING Connections

April 2024

2023 Was an Incredible Year!

Friends,

In 2023 thanks to incredible YOU, we reached **42% of the 950 Emmet County children ages 11 to 18 who deal with hunger.**

Our first eight students in 2016 have grown to **400+ children who realize their school-based youth pantry is a valuable resource for food.** It's also a safe place where they won't be judged for dirty hair or clothes. One young boy told another boy, **"Stop being mean; this is a kind room."**

When they walk into the room, our caring volunteers call them by name and remind them of something special about them. They feel acknowledged and incredible! Some share their stories slowly about the chaos in their young lives. When a volunteer hears a "red flag," the story is shared with a counselor. **We believe that they matter.** All this is done in 10 – 15 minutes, which is incredible.

We will always focus on food, for they come for it first, but more is needed to help a child leave the hopelessness of poverty. This can only occur if a person, young or old, **believes hope exists.** We know this is true from the students writing a brighter life story because of our encounters with them. You will meet one of our first eight students on the next page, and she is proof that -

FOOD + MENTORING + LEARNING = A BRIGHTER FUTURE.

Please continue with us on this journey so you can watch more youth navigate their life with skills in dealing with difficult situations. We are grateful for your continued belief in our small 97% volunteer charity with a huge mission. **Your kindness and concern for these children are incredible!**

Executive Director (100% Volunteer)

According to the 2023-2024 Fall Data MISchoolData.org

Alanson 5th – 12th grade

95 Deal with Hunger/
127 Total Students =
75% Disadvantaged

Concord 5th – 12th grade

40 Deal with Hunger/
67 Total Students =
60% Disadvantaged

Harbor Springs 5th -12th

103 Deal with Hunger/
418 Total Students =
25% Disadvantaged

Pellston 6th – 12th grade

151 Deal with Hunger/
257 Total Students =
60% Disadvantaged

Petoskey 6th – 12th grade

530 Deal with Hunger/
1452 Total Students =
37% Disadvantaged

Northmen Den Youth Pantries & Services is a 501(C)3 not-for-profit.
EIN: 86-2073121

kathy@northmendens.org
231-489-8114
www.northmendens.org

422 E. Mitchell Street, Suite 4
P.O. Box 2085
Petoskey, Michigan 49770

From hungry student to thriving employee

Since sharing her story in 2022, our community has fallen in love with Maddie, a hungry 7th grader who came to Northmen Den looking for help. Through love and support of our volunteers, Maddie overcame the consequences of poverty. With her perseverance and support of those who cared, she became the first person in her family to graduate from high school.

Today, we are excited to reveal that Maddie is our Briannaca, Northmen Den's first employee. Briannaca has been such a bright light for our organization, and it has been such a joy to see her thrive in helping students who are in a place she once experienced.

Briannaca was one of eight students chosen by her principal to visit Northmen Den's first pantry when it opened its doors.

"I later found out he had chosen 8 kids that he thought were leaders," she said. "I could not believe that it was free, it was crazy. As soon as I left, I went to the lunch room and told all my friends about it and then I went there weekly."

"They remembered my name, asked me about my family, and eventually they became my second family, my second support system, and just a hug if I needed one."



Bri was working at Pellston's 2023 Summer Food Program as an Intern

Briannaca grew up with her grandparents, who are biologically her half-brother's grandparents but always and forever truly her own family, too. When she was 7, her parents got a divorce and her dad left. Her mom needed to work, and living with her grandparents made that possible. Her mom would visit every other night, and otherwise she was raised by her grandparents.

"It was hard growing up without a dad, because you'd hear kids celebrating time with their dads and I didn't have that," Briannaca said. "But, my current family is very close knit. I've always told people that my grandma is my second mom. When you need it, she's there."

**13,250+ Students
Visited Their School's Youth Pantries in 2023!**

It truly is a community that rallied around Briannaca and fueled her success. She has a large family composed of half or step siblings and stand-in parents. “When my dad left, my half-brother’s dad stepped up for me,” she said. Plus, the community she found at school and within Northmen Den.



Full-time employee! Bri manages All Youth Pantries, Food Drives, Inventory Warehouse, and 422 Office

“Each week I started going back not only for the food, but for the love and kindness all the volunteers gave,” Briannaca said, recalling her visits to the pantry during high school. “They remembered my name, asked me about my family, and eventually they became my second family, my second support system, and just a hug if I needed one.”

Briannaca said she was a very guarded person because of traumas she experienced in her childhood - something her grandma helped her work through in order to let herself truly shine as an individual. Her grandma never really let on that the family was financially struggling, but Briannaca always knew it was a lot - to take care of 11 people under one roof -and Northmen Den offered a safeguard.



It helps when no food is at home.” 9th Grader

“I would still always go back there to tell them about my successes. I would take my lunches and eat them with the volunteers. I asked my teacher if I could come down and help out,” she said. “It made me feel really good because somebody was paying attention.”

Briannaca is proud to continue providing that experience to more students who will benefit from the extended support system, saying:

“We strive to make all our youth pantries kind, warm, and a safe space for every child that walks through our doors.”

2023 INCREDIBLE IMPACT:

375-400+
students served weekly by our 14 youth pantries.

13,250+
students visited our Pantries

\$162,000
worth of groceries for hungry children!

65
Volunteers Gave
10,900
Hours

Four Facts About Teen Hunger

August 24, 2021, by A. Slupski for FeedAmerica.org

Millions of teens don't have reliable access to food. That's why Feeding America partnered with Urban Institute to learn more about teen hunger." Here are four facts about the hidden epidemic of teen hunger.



1. **Teen hunger is a problem.** The number of teens facing hunger is unknown because national data doesn't separate elementary children and teens.

2. **Teenagers feel responsible for putting food on the table.** When their families can't afford food, teens help. They'll get jobs to add another paycheck to the family. They'll skip meals so their younger siblings can eat. When jobs are hard to come by or don't earn enough money, they make difficult choices like shoplifting food, eating unhealthy options, or dating in exchange for food or money.

3. **Hunger can hold teens back from reaching their full potential.** Hunger affects concentration, energy, and mental health issues like anxiety and depression. These side effects of hunger lead to kids falling behind in school. Teens who experience hunger are more likely to drop out of high school.

4. **Anti-hunger programs are letting teens down.** When school pantry programs are available, teens might not participate because they're embarrassed or worried about bullying from other students." www.feedingamerica.org/teenhunger - April 2021 .

HELP US REACH MORE EMMET COUNTY TEENS, ages 11 to 18 in 2024!

If there is bullying or embarrassment in being seen shopping at one of our pantries, help us find other ways to reach our teens!

- We need your help if you have experience in writing surveys! We need to compile student data to learn eating habits, the number of people they shop for, and ideas to serve them better.
- Volunteer next fall to open our pantries before & after school hours when the hallways are empty!



Sue Droste, Volunteer – Shopping for High School Northmen Den

Email kathy@northmendens.org or call 231-622-8044 if you want to help!

Thanks to all our Donors for your Heartfelt 2023 Donations!

Please help us raise \$2,500 for Summer School Breakfast & Lunches at Our Youth Pantries During Summer School! Visit www.northmendens.org/donations online or send a check to Northmen Dens, PO Box Petoskey, Michigan 49770