

EIGHTEEN NONPROFITS AND THE GOOD THEY DO FOR OTHERS

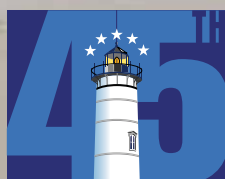
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The Mighty Cranberry

LIFE'S CANVAS
Painter Steven Allrich



FOOD FROM THE HEART

Every parent, and most compassionate adults, viscerally understand the heartbreaking realities that sometimes interrupt what should be the carefree and joyful experience of childhood. When the harsh necessities of daily life, find their way into a child's world, where the responsibilities normally assigned to adults, become an itinerary of priorities for someone so young, it is simply soul crushing to witness. That was the reaction, to unexpected childhood hunger that led Pastor David Johnson and David Byrnes of Grace Church in East Dennis, to initiate incontrovertible action and start Cape Kid Meals.

In 2014, the Pastor's wife was working at one of the schools in Dennis learned of children who were coming to school hungry on Monday morning after the weekend and not having enough to eat. As soon awareness of the need was evident, Pastor Johnson and David Byrnes enlisted other congregants of Grace Church to create a weekend backpack program where volunteers purchased food and packed food bags in the church basement that were then distributed to children at the end of the school week. In 2016, Barnstable resident Tammy Leone, heard about the program and immediately wanted to volunteer. Today, she is in her third year as the executive director of Cape Kid Meals and says the program has three key initiatives at the core of its mission. "To support children who are facing hunger, we

have a weekend bag program with easy-to-prepare shelf-stable food, which we pack in our packing center, and deliver to our participating schools. The schools discreetly distribute them to the children they have identified as having need. Our second initiative is the School Snack program, in which we supply snacks for the schools to distribute. Many students are not able to bring in snacks from home and to prevent them from feeling left out, while their peers would have something, many teachers were buying snacks with their own funds. The schools make the snacks available in creative ways, ensuring they are available without drawing attention to who might need them."

Leone explains the third initiative, the School Pantry Program, which addresses hunger faced by older students by establishing pantries in the high schools. The pantries are located in discreet areas, allowing students to access them for a snack or to take something home for dinner and/or breakfast."

For many, the spring and summer of 2020, the dawning realization of how local children were suffering from food insecurity since the schools where they had previously received sometimes their only meals of the day, were now closed, illuminated the need that had been growing beneath the surface. Leone says that understanding led to changes in the Cape Kid Meals as well as they found themselves supplying summer meal programs and coming up with solutions for extended support during school vacations.

In the 10 years since the start of the program, where two elementary schools in Dennis received the benefits, today Cape Kid Meals serves 44 schools across the region including Wareham. Leone and Merry James, a part-time program coordinator are the only two paid employees and each week over 40 volunteers perform countless tasks which through the three initiatives support 1,700 children, including almost 1,000 through the weekend food bag program. Melanie Howell, Director of Marketing and Community Connection at First Citizens' says the decision to align with Cape Kid Meals was an easy one. "We have a youth saving program that not only teaches children to save and learn about money. It also include a component that teaches them to give. Since the kids, along with an adult get to choose which nonprofit they want to give to, Cape Kid Meals was a perfect partner."

In addition to being an appropriate recipient of the financial organization's charitable efforts, including employees across all of their offices and branches dedicated time and effort to stuffing bags and creating holiday boxes, Howell says she has never seen a group so small do so much for so many.

There are so many ways to support this worthy organization. Monetary donations are always gratefully accepted—\$200 can feed one child for a year. Perhaps your book club is looking to do good, volunteering to stuff bags and witness the dizzying brevity and organization the weekly process of preparing the bags will give you an experience to share for months on end. Leone says when she started as a volunteer, her task of delivering the bags to the schools was always greeted with the happy smiling faces of the children who instinctively understand the power of good will. As the warmer seasons of our seasonal sand bar wane, families find fewer opportunities to provide for their families in the ways they wish they could. Ensuring our Cape kids get meals is the least we can do.

FEED THE CAPE'S FUTURE



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To learn more, volunteer,
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"The food
you give me
helps me eat
on the weekend."
2nd grader



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