



Back Pack Meals Program

The Billings Public Schools BackPack Meals Program was launched in fall 2009 as an emergency measure to provide food on weekends and school holidays to very low income students in Title 1 schools who would otherwise go hungry. Improvements in school behavior and stress level were seen within the first month of the program. The BackPack Meals Program has become part of the coordinated local efforts to significantly reduce hunger and poverty by 2015. The Billings BackPack Meals Program has thrived due to the in-kind donations from the Montana Food Bank Network and community support. In particular, generous backing by the Billings Soroptimist Bright Eyes program, which has funded thousands of BackPack Meals since September 2009 and whose ongoing support has given the BackPack Meal Program coordinators confidence they can provide for children this school year despite significant legislative cuts to safety-net services such as food banks and food stamps.

The BackPack Meals Program has two main goals:

- * Keep children fed and fit so they are ready to learn and can grow to be adults who are ready to earn.
- * Connect the families of children in need of BackPack Meals with local safety-net service providers who can help the family move out of poverty.

Since its inception, the BackPack Meals Program has provided meals for more than 800 children. It has also referred the families of 165 BackPack recipients to safety-net services that provide literacy coaching and job training. This year, the Programs goals are to feed 300 children in Billings seven Title 1 elementary schools each weekend and holiday and expand its reach to children in the twenty non-Title 1 schools. These ambitious but necessary goals are only achievable with support from the Billings Soroptimist.

Sincerely,
Dr. Ginny Mermel PhD, CNS

Chair, Billings School Health Advisory Council

BackPack Meals Program Coordinator