

Students raise money for food insecurity

Over coffee at a local coffee shop with Dr. Holly Donohoe, Associate Professor and Director of the University of Northern Iowa's (UNI) Nonprofit Leadership Alliance and Barb Prather, Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, the idea was born for a collaborative service-learning project for students in Donohoe's Financial Resource Management class.

The Northeast Iowa Food Bank (NEIFB) distributes nutritious food and grocery products to 170 nonprofit organizations and programs that help families and individuals with food assistance. For 40 years, the Food Bank has alleviated hunger and provided nutrition education through its programs.

The Food Bank oversees eight programs that serve our communities: Member Agency Distribution, Cedar Valley Food Pantry, Backpack Program, Kids Cafe, Elderly Nutrition, Mobile Food Pantries, Summer Feeding, and a Community Garden. The Food Bank is a proud member of the Iowa Food Bank Association and Feeding America. Last year, the NEIFB distributed more than 9.4 million meals within a 16-county service area.



Courtesy

Students volunteer hands-on as part of their service-learning project. As a group, they raised money to provide 10,000 meals for those in need.

The Sack Lunch service-learning project was the product of the collaboration between Dr. Donohoe and NEIFB that was built upon a successful history of community engagement between UNI and NEIFB. The Sack Lunch campaign is a biannual fundraiser led by NEIFB to raise crucial funds to help those who are hungry in 16 counties in Northeast Iowa, including Black Hawk County. The Sack Lunches are generously donated by community partners Tyson Fresh Meats, Blue Barn BBQ, Culvers, and Walmart, and then they are sold and delivered locally by NEIFB staff and volunteers. In years past, the involvement of the UNI community was very limited and on-campus orders accounted for less than 8% of the funding raised through the Sack Lunch fundraising campaign.

The purpose of the Sack Lunch service-learning project and partnership between UNI and NEIFB was to provide an experiential fundraising learning experience to Dr. Donohoe's students, to increase awareness about NEIFB and food insecurity, and to directly increase the number of Sack Lunch sold on campus. The project was kicked-off on March 24th by Dr. Donohoe and Jared Feigenbaum – the Community Events Manager at NEIFB. Students immediately began by volunteering to prepare and pack Sack Lunches at NEIFB, by selling Sack Lunches to the UNI community of staff, faculty and students, by overseeing on-campus lunch delivery and distribution, and they concluded with the preparation of a final report for NEIFB.

The outcomes of the student's efforts are significant and a direct benefit to the community they served. Dr. Donohoe's students sold 321 Sack Lunches on the UNI campus – surpassing their goal to sell 250 lunches. The students were responsible for more than 1/6 of the total lunches sold during the campaign and they were directly responsible for increasing sales on campus from – from 8% to 16%, a doubling of previous campaign sales. The most significant outcome of the service-learning class project was that it generated the funding required to provide 10,240 meals to those in need in Northeast Iowa – for every 1 Sack Lunch sold, NEIFB is able to provide up to 32 meals.

This project enabled UNI students to learn first-hand about the art of fundraising which enhanced their learning in Dr. Donohoe's class. Lindsay Hubbell, a senior in environmental resource management reported that "It [the project] offered a lot of insight into the different levels of management that go into a fundraiser". Zachary Zippe a political science student shared that "I learned a lot about the operations of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank and what it takes to put on such an incredible drive". Nonprofit management student Haley Cummings shared that "knowing that each lunch we sold fed 32 people is a great feeling". For UNI student James Howard, the class project provided a way to "truly get an understanding of how much helping a good cause means" to donors, volunteers, and those in need.

Barb Prather – Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank highlighted the value of this service-learning project: We appreciate the partnership with the UNI class this semester, partnerships throughout the community are what help the Food Bank continue to grow and end food insecurity all throughout northeast Iowa. The students played an important role in the fight against hunger.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Dr. Holly Donohoe (info below), Jared Feigenbaum – Community Events Manager at the Northeast Iowa Food Bank – jfeigenbaum@neifb.org, or Barb Prather – Executive Director of the Northeast Iowa Food Bank – bprather@neifb.org.