



THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL OF BROWN COUNTY



P.O. Box 577, 2901 Long Lake Road, Nashville, Indiana 47448 812-988-8821

Back to School Report 2023-A Caring Community Comes Together!

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Brown County (SVDP) has served families in need in Brown County since April 1988 — 35 years of continuous service.

Currently located at 2901 Long Lake Road, the distribution center provides a client choice food pantry, warehouse, and home goods building. Together, the buildings offer families an opportunity to select food as well as furniture, clothing, appliances, household goods, cleaning supplies and personal care items. Between 12 and 15% of Brown County households have contact with SVDP each year. Although the pandemic has eased, a significant percentage of Brown County families remain at or below the poverty level. Each month, new families register with us, and we expanded our food distribution to a once per week pop-up distribution at St. David's Episcopal Church in Bean Blossom. In the last fiscal year, 187,375 pounds of food was distributed during 3316 household visits. With construction finished on a second building, the food pantry distribution was restructured to allow families to make their own selections rather than choosing items from a menu. Families have embraced this opportunity to view their options and make selections while volunteers assist.

The Back to School program began operation in 2004. It was initially started with a request from the Brown County Community Foundation to facilitate the intentions of the Truemper Family who created an endowment designated for shoes and clothing for children. Linda Beckman and Barb Tuley were primary drivers of the early days of this effort. In 2004, there were enough funds to provide \$20 vouchers for 49 children—sadly falling short of the identified need. This fund, however, inspired the volunteers to grow the program. Since 2004, the program has continuously expanded—made possible by never ceasing fundraising, grant writing, and personal donations. For 2023, a Speedway fuel card and a voucher valued at \$60.00 which could be redeemed at Walmart in Columbus, IN was provided to the parents, grandparents, foster parents and/or guardians for each school-age child. **This year 756 vouchers were redeemed for a total program cost of \$55,578--including the value of fuel cards.**

All households with school-age children registered with St. Vincent de Paul received a direct mailing informing them of the dates and times of the voucher distribution in June. Community partners also received a mailing with postcards which they could distribute. Starting in early summer, post cards were also distributed at Brown County food distribution sites along with information about "On the Road Again" offered by God's Grace. No family was turned away who asked for help.

Vouchers were distributed on July 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, & 31 as well as August 5, 7, 12 and 14. Families had until August 14 at 9:00 pm to shop and redeem the voucher at the Walmart Customer Service Desk. At the conclusion of the program, there was one family that requested special consideration which was handled by Jackson Township Trustee, Sandy Higgins.

Access to and the expense associated with transportation remains a challenge for our families. South Central Community Action had offered us \$1000 in Walmart Gift Cards and Speedway Gas cards as part of their closing out of some pandemic residual funds. We used the \$50 fuel cards provided by South Central Community Action to assist SVDP food pantry families who requested help with

transportation costs. We also offered \$10 fuel cards (supplied by a private donor) for those who were not regularly active for food distribution but are otherwise eligible for our support. Here is an overview:

	Description	Cost
771 vouchers	Were picked up by families for their students	
756 vouchers	Were redeemed by 305 different households for	\$44628
777 pairs of	Shoes, boots and/or sandals were selected	12,810
458 students	Purchased socks, underwear, or other clothing	8802
171 students	Purchased a backpack	3693
87 students	Purchased one or more sets of ear buds or headsets	831
51 students	Purchased calculators, USB drives, & art supplies	385
742 students	Selected school supplies such as paper, pencils, crayons, markers, notebooks, binders etc.	18107
197 families	Gratefully accepted a \$50.00 Speedway Gas Card (funding provided by South Central Community Action)	9850
110 families	Gratefully accepted a \$10.00 Speedway Fuel Card (private donor)	1100
	TOTAL PROGRAM SUPPORT EXPENDITURES	\$55758
462	Households received direct mail with dates & times	
500	Flyers or post cards were distributed to community representatives	
Yield Rate	96.7% of vouchers picked up were redeemed	
Average Value	Average voucher was redeemed for \$59.03	

Sources of Funding

Brown County Community Foundation Grant	4000
Howard Hughes/Bob Kirlin Memorial Mushroom Sale	1150
Walmart Community Fund Grant	2500
Christ Church Cathedral/Episcopal Women/Strawberry Festival	3000
South Central REMC Operation Round Up	4000
Church of the Lakes, Nineveh, Indiana	1900
Lion's Club	1000
Hamblen Township Trustees	500
Jackson Township Trustees	500
South Central Community Action Grant & Fuel Cards	10850
Family Foundation Grants & Donor Designated Funds	16000
Rotary Club	149
St. Agnes Catholic Church/St. Agnes Guild, Nashville, IN	2514
St. Vincent de Paul South Central IN Discretionary Fund	800
Individuals	6715
Total Funding from all Sources	\$55578

Distribution of vouchers redeemed by school for the past 8 years:

School Attending	Number of Children/Youth Served							
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Helmsburg Elementary	30	31	27	27	21	85	96	74
Sprunica Elementary	46	57	41	42	51	99	103	94
Van Buren Elementary	37	45	38	34	45	77	74	71
Brown County Middle School	New for 2021					135	116	153
Brown County Intermediate	36	48	59	61	62			
Brown County Junior High	41	36	38	42	61			
Brown County High School	64	76	84	77	91	110	131	164
Home School	4	2	3	2	9	10	19	41
Indian Creek Schools	7	12	10	9	7	22	28	32
Pre-K, K & Head Start	New for 2020				7	7	9	85*
Other Schools Outside County	5	0	3	6	3	31	34	42
TOTAL	270	308	303	300	357	576	610	756
* Of note is that 61 of the 85 were identified as enrolling at Helmsburg, Sprunica or Van Buren Pre-K or Kindergarten								

Year	Number Served
2004	49 children
2005	87 children
2006	97 children
2007	112 children
2008	184 children
2009	187 children
2010	183 children
2011	183 children
2012	224 children
2013	228 children
2014	289 children
2015	294 children
2016	270 children
2017	308 children
2018	303 children
2019	300 children
2020	357 children
2021	576 children
2022	610 children
2023	756 children
Total	5308 children

Back to School 2023 –A Community that Cares

John Aumage and Shirley Boardman coordinate the program, with John preparing and distributing the vouchers and handling the contact with Walmart, purchasing gift cards used for payment, communicating with customer service staff, and reviewing the purchases and keeping a detailed spreadsheet which tracks families as they pick up and redeem each voucher. This meticulous recordkeeping forms the basis for reporting and accountability. It also means many trips to Walmart in Columbus to keep up with the accounting and ensuring that all is going as planned. Concurrently, John maintains a data environment for each family including ages of the children and contact information. Many community partners including Kim Robinson, Donna Niednagel, Cori McCabe, Sean Hilldreth, Mary Kilgore, Pastors Raymond Dupree and Cory Joy and St. Agnes Members, Becky McCarty and Margie Brandon provide invaluable assistance. The Brown County System of Care members, especially Centerstone personnel, assist by promoting the program to the families they serve. Church of the Lakes in Nineveh provides support year around and reaches out to those households in their immediate area. Shirley handles fundraising, promotion of the program, communications via email, phone, and social media inquiries, as well as special needs of families. Reporting is a shared responsibility of John and Shirley, requiring hours of data entry and analysis.

During the voucher distribution period, more than 27,000 pounds of food were provided to families as well as generous amounts of household goods, clothing, personal care items and cleaning supplies.. The newly constructed home goods building opened in time for the beginning of the voucher distribution. This new facility allowed families to better see and identify usable items such as mattresses, bed linens, towels, beds, dressers, or a desk. Volunteers who worked in the home goods building visited with families and learned more about what each family might find useful, with a goal of relationship building.

A few reflections:

- As noted earlier, providing fuel cards made a significant impact. We thank South Central Community Action for donating the cards.
- The yield rate of vouchers distributed to vouchers redeemed was 98%. Only 15 vouchers were not redeemed and as stated earlier, one family required accommodation which was arranged.
- An analysis of the cash register receipts showed that families could use more than \$60.00. Many vouchers revealed that families had made selections and then returned items to keep their total expenditure within \$60. Some families did personally pay for additional purchases which totaled \$4922.

- The Brown County school administrative team helped us by posting the school supply lists in time for the program's start and Walmart also posted the supply lists.
- Information was provided during food distributions in the County, at churches, at the Brown County Fair, at the "On the Road Again" event as in the mailing to families in our database. There was also promotion via social media and the Brown County System of Care.
- Once again, we opted to be generous, low barrier, and let families determine if they were in need. We saw no evidence of families "taking advantage" of the program. Many of our families are multi-generational with grandparents, parents, and children all living together in the same household. Tears and gratitude often accompanied our interactions.
- Funding sources were generous again, but it took a great deal of faith and effort to secure the necessary funding. Many private donors contributed from \$5.00 to \$1000. One private donor provided \$10,000 which encouraged us to keep looking for additional resources.
- This is a high touch program. Communicating with families, donors, community partners and keeping up with the cash flow at Walmart requires countless hours. Record keeping, analysis, and reporting as well as expressing our gratitude to all who make it possible are time consuming but make it possible for this program to thrive. St. Vincent de Paul is all-volunteer organization and hundreds of hours go into this program-- not just during the distribution time but throughout the year. All told, volunteers donated 14,156 hours of service in this past fiscal year to our neighbors in need.
- The Customer Service Personnel at Walmart in Columbus remain our heroes as they, also, work one-on-one with each family to ensure that purchases are consistent with the program guidelines.

Once again, artwork cheerfully provided by loving children whose parents had all that was needed for their return to school but wanted to share

some artwork for this year's report. Thank you, Juniper & Ransom! Your smiles and artwork brighten our world.




Juniper's Halloween Eve



Ransom's Roar!

Report prepared by John Aumage & Shirley Boardman. Ad acknowledging donors published in the Brown County Democrat on January 9, 2024, is provided below.

**Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Brown County
Back to School Program 2023**



The Brown County community came together once again to support the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Back to School Program. This year marks the 20th year of the program. The Board and program co-leaders, John Aumage and Shirley Boardman, wish to thank donors and supporters for going the extra mile to make this year's program a success. Through the generosity of many, 756 students from 305 households redeemed vouchers for \$60 each at Walmart in Columbus and purchased shoes, socks, underwear, backpacks, calculators, and school supplies. Families were provided a Speedway Fuel Card to help with transportation expenses due to the generosity of South Central Community Action. The total program cost was \$55,578.

Volunteers, donors and community members make this possible. The Brown County Food Alliance convened by Donna Niednagel together with members of St. David's Episcopal Church provided outreach. Sandy Higgins, Jackson Township Trustee, personally worked with numerous families and Kim Robinson, COAD, also helped identify families in need. Church of the Lakes in Nineveh provides support and outreach throughout the year. The Brown County System of Care network promoted the program. Invitations to participate were distributed by social service agencies, area churches and at community events including On The Road Again, hosted by Mary Kilgore.

Organizations/Churches who donated financial support:

**Brown County Community Foundation & Truemper Fund
Brown County Lion's Club
Church of the Lakes, Nineveh
Christ Church Episcopal Church/Strawberry Festival-Indianapolis
Howard Hughes/Bob Kirilin Memorial Morel Mushroom Sale
Hamblen Township Trustee/Phil Stephens
Jackson Township Trustee/Sandy Higgins
Rotary Club of Brown County
South Central Community Action
South Central Indiana REMC Community Fund
St. Agnes Guild/St. Agnes Catholic Church
Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Brown County & Indianapolis)
Walmart Community Fund**

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We also wish to acknowledge many private donors and the parents and grandparents who transported their young scholars to Columbus and helped them to make their selections. And, a special shout out to the Customer Service and Accounting personnel at Walmart in Columbus who worked with the families to make their purchases. We couldn't do this without them!

This past fiscal year, 187,375 pounds of food was distributed during 3316 household visits. Volunteers recorded 14,156 hours of service. St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and Warehouse is located at 2901 Long Lake Road. You may call 812-988-8821 or visit our website at: <https://stvincentedpaulbrowncounty.com/> Volunteers are always welcome and you can access the volunteer schedule from the website. Founded in 1988, SVDP has provided 35 years of continuous service to our neighbors in need.

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