

Student Needs Pantry

Fran Dalton is the Southeast Neighborhood Organizer for the Garfield Park Neighborhood Association. She has been working in the neighborhood for over a decade. For the last eleven years she's been involved in helping community members have the resources and support to stay long term in the neighborhood.

Today, her efforts are going to help families in the area experiencing homelessness.

"I became aware that we have a population of children the Grand Rapids Public Schools identifies and recognizes as homeless. I dug a little further and found out how many of those children are in our area -- it turns out there was a significant number like more than 40," Fran explains.

She says she was appalled at the high number of students who were either doubling up with friends and family, staying in shelters, or living in their cars with their parents.

"We've got a population of kids in the public school's system whose parents' resources are going towards food or gas and things like hygiene products are not always top of mind," she adds.

Knowing this, says Fran, motivated her to figure out exactly what she needed to do -- propelling her to launch the Student Needs Pantry.

The Student Needs Pantry is a community effort with partnerships with the Boys & Girls Club of Grand Rapids, Seymour Church, Kent School Services Network, The Alger Garfield Neighbors Collaborative and Grand Rapids Public Schools.

"We will have bins set out in different locations that are accessible without someone needing to ask permission," Fran says. "We decided to create bins that could be outside all the time, so people weren't hesitant to access the supplies that were available for them."

The Pantry will make available food, hygiene products, and community resources to anyone everyday 24 hours a day. The items will be placed in accessible and weatherproof bins in high trafficked areas.

"We're putting them in places where students are and then we're going to ask the sponsor sites to use their networks to promote our bins," Fran explains.

The spark that lighted it all Fran says was the grant they received from the Neighborhood Match Fund.

"It made my dreams for the community possible," Fran adds.

Fran's vision for the pantry is long term sustainability. She says she hopes the sponsors of every bin we'll see the impact these have on members of the community and will continue to keep them stocked and accessible.

This is why she's ensured she collaborated with key partners -- partners who already have relationships in the community and are accountable to the residents in the area.

"A year from now, I hope that the bins that we've built are still out there and that they are serving those who need it," Fran says.

For Fran, this project is one easy and simple way to care for one another during a time of uncertainty.

"We all have the capacity and ability to help each other out. Neighbor to neighbor. That's all I did: I demonstrated my responsibility to my community," Fran says.