

Bluffton Self Help Awarded \$5000 WAHHI Grant

By Gina Hines

Way to go, WAHHI women! Your membership dues and participation in all of WAHHI's fundraising events allowed us to award \$40,000 in grants to our community non-profit organizations this year!

WAHHI grant committee members were honored to present one of these awards on February 19th to Bluffton Self Help. The \$5,000 award will help fund BSH's School Snack Program.

In 2018, BSH launched the School Snack Program to provide snacks for teachers to utilize when needed. According to Beaufort County's school social workers, teachers were spending upwards of \$500 annually on snacks for their classroom. While teachers rely on parents to rotate and provide snacks, when this need was unfulfilled, the teachers were underwriting the costs.

The South Carolina Department of Education's measure of poverty is the poverty index, which is the percentage of students who are transient, in foster care, homeless, have been Medicaid-eligible or qualified for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) services within the last three years. That index states that **57% of students in Beaufort County Schools are in poverty**. We know that 9,400+ students are enrolled in Bluffton-area schools and that the ten Bluffton-area schools include: May River High School, Bluffton High School, Bluffton Middle School, HE McCracken Middle School, Bluffton Elementary, Red Cedar Elementary, Pritchardville Elementary, Okatie Elementary, MC Riley Elementary and River Ridge Academy. The student population and their teachers are our focus for this program.

This program is managed by BSH basic needs staff, while BSH volunteers deliver designated snacks to the area school social workers every month.

In 2022, BSH provided 23,339 snack units to Bluffton-area schools. At a value of \$1.25 per unit, this is a \$29,173 value in school snacks. While many of the snacks provided to the schools are donated by individuals and community food drives, BSH still does not collect enough snacks to fill the gap experienced by the schools. BSH must purchase additional snacks to serve all the children in need.

If 57% of the 9,400+ students in Bluffton-area schools are in poverty, then **5,358+ students would need food assistance while at school.** With an academic calendar of 180 days, to provide all students in poverty in Bluffton-area schools one snack per day, 964,440+ snacks per year would be needed.



WAHHI Grant committee members presented the award at Bluffton Self Help and received a short tour of the Market facility where they have a food and clothing market for families in need in Bluffton and Jasper Co. Pictured to the left are: Alli Damas (BSH Development Director), Debbie Gorski (WAHHI President), Gina Hines (WAHHI Grant Committee Member), Jan Stallmeyer (WAHHI Grant Committee Chair) and Courtney Hampson (BSH CEO).

We know that children who experience hunger are prone to various adverse mental and behavioral consequences; however, food security significantly contributes to promoting positive mental

well-being in both children and adolescents. This is particularly crucial within the school environment, where ensuring students' access to nutritious food is vital for their learning and overall growth.

WAHHI is particularly pleased to play a part with BSH in this ongoing effort to meet the needs of children and their families in our community!