

Backpacks to Fight Hunger

A food program provides weekend meals for thousands of U.S. kids.

Until a year ago, Karen Lozano of Tyler, Texas, had trouble feeding her children over the weekend. During the school week, Cody Lozano, now 8, and his sister Cherokee, now 9, were able to eat breakfast, lunch, and an after-school snack at school. But Lozano couldn't afford to provide those meals over the weekend.

"I had to choose whether to pay bills or buy groceries," Lozano told *WR News*. "It's the same with a lot of families." An estimated 17 million children in the United States live in **food-insecure households**, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That means these families often don't have enough grocery money after they pay bills or buy medicine.

Backpacks to the Rescue

A few years ago, a BackPack club was launched at Douglas Elementary School in Tyler to help **alleviate**, or lessen, the problem. Each Friday, backpacks are filled with food that children like Cody and Cherokee take home for the weekend. "There are cans of chili, healthy snacks, Goldfish crackers, milk, cereal, juice, and cookies," says Lozano.

In 1995, the Arkansas Rice Depot, a food bank in Little Rock, started loading backpacks with food after a school nurse requested help. Many students at her school were complaining of stomachaches and dizziness from hunger. Today, BackPack programs are being run in 39 states to help thousands of hungry children.

"We purchase the backpacks and the food, and volunteers put the food in the backpacks and distribute them," Robert Bush, the executive director of the East Texas Food Bank, told *WR News*. Bush runs the organization that started the BackPack program in Tyler.

Making a Difference

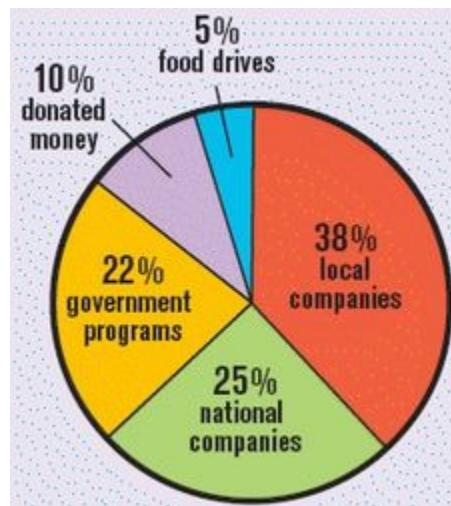
The BackPack club also gives other students a chance to help those in need. Many of the

volunteers who fill the backpacks on Fridays are looking for ways to contribute to their community.

Although the program is one way to help, people are still looking for ways to eliminate poverty. Nearly 38 million Americans go hungry each year, and many of those are children. With Thanksgiving around the corner, many people will be thinking about what they can do to help.

Stuffing Backpacks

The food provided to kids in the BackPack club is donated. Each year food-rescue organizations distribute more than 2 billion pounds of food. Where does that donated food come from? Check out the pie chart.



Source: Second Harvest

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The section called "Making a Difference," suggests that the author
 - A. dislikes holidays.
 - B. wonders whether Friday is the best day for the program.
 - C. is in favor of helping less fortunate people.
 - D. worries especially about hungry adults.

2. The graph tells us that
 - A. not enough food is donated to meet the demand.
 - B. food drives account for most of the donations.
 - C. government programs donate most of the food.
 - D. local and national companies donate more than half the food.

3. A school nurse requested help filling backpacks with food, because
 - A. she noticed children were eating too much candy.
 - B. she had extra food.
 - C. students had stomachaches and dizziness from hunger.
 - D. all of the above.

4. The author of the article believes that
 - A. the Backpack program helps many people.
 - B. Backpack programs are not necessary.
 - C. hunger is not a big problem in the United States.
 - D. too many people volunteer for the Backpack program.

5. Why do you think Karen Lozano's comments were included in the article?