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JM students volunteer lunch hours to feed homeless

By Vera Kochan



Peanut butter sandwich assembly line. Photo Vera Kochan

lunches for the homeless in Oakland."

Lorie's wife and son helped him get the ball rolling a year ago. Since then Karlene Steelman and other JM teachers helped him to establish the lunchtime program. With additional adult help from Matt Vattuone, Kim Anderson and the JM community, the 10,000 Lunches program has blossomed into today's well-oiled, sandwich-making army of volunteers.

The name "10,000 Lunches" was born from Lorie's optimistic dream to one day provide said number of lunches to feed the homeless. The volunteers strive to put together 100 bagged lunches each week in the space of their own 45-minute lunch period. His dream, at this point, is fast approaching the halfway mark.

"It wasn't hard to get kids to participate," Lorie said. "We have an amazing community. A call went out during one of our school's daily video bulletins describing what we were planning on doing and how the students could help." He proudly added, "We had to put up a sign-up sheet (as we still do to this day) because we had too many volunteers. What a wonderful problem to have."

Sixth-grade volunteer Grace said, "Helping out people that don't have much takes only half an hour of my day, and they appreciate it." Seventh-grader Cole stated, "I started doing this last year. I like helping out people, and I'm president of all the kids here. I'm also in the Scouts and this counts as a service badge. I also get to do this with my cousins Cale and Declan." Sixth-grader Avery said, "I think that spending a lunch here is nothing to us compared to what we're doing for people." Another sixth-grader, Isabella, added, "We don't get too many opportunities to do community service. When you do it with other people, it's an added bonus." Declan first heard about 10,000 Lunches when he was in the fifth grade. "My brother did it last year. It's so sad that people have to live on the streets and don't have much to eat. I feel like I'm making their lives better." Hannah, who is also in sixth grade, felt that, "I just like helping out people who aren't as fortunate and in need."

Most of the supplies are purchased at Costco and JM has a SignUpGenius page where members of the community can donate specific items such as bread, bananas, socks and dog food for pets directly to the school.

The bagged lunches are prepared with lightning speed and efficiency by about 15 students and two to three adults in an assembly-line fashion. Lorie, in the midst of expertly orchestrating the flurry of activity, modestly stated, "I walk around and do nothing, and if everyone does their part it all comes together."

One table makes turkey and cheese sandwiches, while another table generates peanut butter sandwiches (two flavors of jelly packets are later included in each lunch bag). The sandwiches make their way to the end of each table where they are put into plastic sandwich bags. The bagged sandwiches are collected and placed (one of each) into brown paper lunch bags that have been expertly stocked, by another group of students, with a banana, two granola bars, mustard/mayo packets, the afore mentioned jelly, and an instant oatmeal packet. Each recipient of a lunch also receives two bottles of water during the distribution process. Lorie makes sure that each lunch contains food with nutritional value, saying, "Our budget allows me to try and get two dollars worth of food into each lunch bag."

This is parent volunteer Liz Ludwig's fourth time helping out. "I do a run for bread and bananas and make the kids in the carpool help carry everything into the school." Her sixth-grade son, Owen, said, "I heard

about (the program) and got my mom to come." Sixth-grader Cooper, finishing his own lunch before running to his next class, added, "If there are any butts left over (a term the kids use for the ends of each loaf of bread), we get to put peanut butter on them and eat them!"

Anna Seaman, another parent volunteer, said her seventh-grade daughter, Zoe, was in Lorie's class last year and loved it. "When he asked for volunteers, I thought I'd do it. I get to see all of these kids, too. I love it! They choose to do this - it's awesome!"

Due to time constraints for the students, not all of the volunteers had a chance to be interviewed; however, JM students Charles, Jack, Vincent, Arnav and Kye all gave their time selflessly to help the less fortunate.

The lunches are distributed by three adults to homeless camps in the Oakland area the following day. Accompanying Lorie are Vattuone and Anderson. "They know we are coming," said Anderson. "I can't tell you the light of hope this organization gives to people."

To donate food, supplies or to make a cash contribution visit www.10000lunches.org or call (925) 377-4233.



10,000 Lunches volunteers and the finished lunches.

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