

# Coon Rapids High School opens food shelf for students in need

Thursday, April 7th, 2011



With more than a third of its students receiving free or reduced lunch and a number of homeless students, Terry Johnson, a Coon Rapids High School (CRHS) assistant principal, said the school opened a food shelf for students in January.

The possibility of the school hosting a food shelf first came up about five years ago when CRHS applied for a grant from the University of Minnesota. While CRHS didn't receive the grant, the idea for a food shelf stuck with Johnson.

With so many students struggling, the food shelf came up again in the fall. Administrators made a decision to move

ahead and turned an out-of-the way space in the school into a food shelf. The decision was made in October and the area was cleared out, shelves purchased and installed and items were purchased to build the inventory. The National Honor Society and DECA, an organization of marketing students, were two groups of students who raised money and collected items for the food shelf. The food shelf opened in January.

"We are seeing a lot of need right now because of family financial stress," Johnson said. "It affects students and their education. If necessities are not being met, students have distractions that keep them from learning."

Students can access the food shelf by talking with a staff member who notifies the students' assistant principal. Johnson said the assistant principal discreetly takes the student to the food shelf. The student fills a backpack that he or she picks up after school.

Johnson said it's nice to see the excitement on the students' faces when they visit the food shelf. In addition to food, the food shelf has toiletries and some clothing, including socks, underwear and sweatshirts.

"I didn't realize there are a lot of people going without toilet paper, tissue and other items," she said. "One student said, 'I can really have this tooth paste and tooth brush? I haven't had them for so long.' It really hits you in the stomach when they are so excited to have something they haven't had in a long time."

The public is invited to make donations of food, toiletries, new socks, underwear, sweatshirts or coats, or gift certificates to the food shelf.

"If anyone would like to help students in need, they can bring donations to the high school office and we'll be happy to put them in the food shelf," Johnson said. "I'd like to thank people in advance for their donations. If they bring it, it will be used."

Anyone interested in making a cash donation can make the check out to the Anoka-Hennepin Educational Foundation (AHEF) with "Coon Rapids Family Crisis Fund #237" in the memo line. About three years ago, Johnson and her husband, Ted Johnson, an adaptive physical education instructor in this district, started the Coon Rapids Family Crisis Fund #237. The AHEF acts as the funds fiscal agent. Money from the Coon Rapids Family Crisis Fund is used for everything from buying winter coats for students to helping a family whose house burned down. It is now being used to help the food shelf, too.