

Coon Rapids Middle School starts food shelf for students and their families

Thursday, November 17th, 2011



With almost 50 percent of Coon Rapids Middle School (CRMS) students receiving free or reduced meal prices, counselor Peggy Schierl and student learning advocate Lisa Tauer decided to create a food shelf in their school. "The Falcon's Nest" is set to open this week.

CRMS is the first middle school in the Anoka-Hennepin School District to have a food shelf. All district high schools have food shelves for students and their families.

"We had been going to the Coon Rapids High School food shelf on occasion because there is a growing population of homeless and economically challenged

families in our community," Schierl said. "We know we can direct families to food shelves in the community, but for some it's a problem to get there. If we can provide food and personal hygiene supplies to students, that will help their families free up money for other necessities."

When Schierl and Tauer approached CRMS administration for a location for the food shelf, they said the response was great. Before the end of the day, a room in the school's basement was being cleared for the new endeavor. To help get the food shelf up and running, Tauer said they sent an e-mail out to staff members asking for donations.

"They were wonderful," Tauer said. "They brought in food and personal hygiene items, as well as backpacks and coats."

The Falcon's Nest also received \$500 from The Mat Bandits Wrestling Club to purchase food and winter clothing. (Coon Rapids High School wrestling coach Bob Adams is a teacher at CRMS.) The Falcon's Nest had another boost to get up and running thanks to The Dollar Tree in Coon Rapids that had donated 15 boxes of school supplies to the school.

Schierl and Tauer also asked students in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program for their assistance. (AVID is a program that prepares students for college.) Students were more than happy to help out and have selected two eighth grade leaders, Chontae McDonald and Ahmed Hussein, who will coordinate the students' work stocking the food shelf with donations, checking for expiration dates on food and keeping the food shelf and clothing donations in order. To access the food shelf, students will contact Schierl, Tauer, or another staff person who works to support students. The student will receive a backpack or other school-type bag with food in it. Other students will not know that it is full of food from the food shelf.

Schierl said having the food shelf shows that CRMS is aware of what students' families are experiencing.

"This is something hands-on we can do to help," said Schierl who is also the CRMS homeless lead.

"Some families don't have a lot of food. Sometimes talking with kids about what they are going through can break your heart."

Anyone interested in donating food, personal hygiene items, coats, hats or mittens to The Falcon's Nest can drop off the items at CRMS's main office. Gift cards to grocery stores are also welcome.