

# Northdale Middle School opens food shelf for students, families

Thursday, December 15th, 2011

This school year, the number of students at Northdale Middle School (NMS) receiving free-reduced-priced meals has jumped to 47 percent. With almost half of the students receiving this service, NMS administrators decided to follow in the footsteps of the high schools in the Anoka-Hennepin School District that have food shelves for students and their families.



Gretchen Johnson, a NMS administrative intern, said what really sold the idea of a food shelf at NMS was when Karrie Schaaf, the homeless youth and families liaison, held a meeting that included those who currently host food shelves. Schaaf also provided ideas and resources for those who were interested in starting food shelves. Johnson said through that meeting NMS administrators decided it was something they could do too.

One obstacle the school faced was to find \$3,000 for shelving. Johnson said the school put out a Parent Link to families saying they wanted

to start a food shelf but needed shelving. The Parent Link asked if families knew of resources or were willing to donate.

"Two days later a parent came in and said he heard we were looking for shelving," Johnson said. "He was at a company who had shelving they were going to throw away and he had it in his truck. We set it up that day. Walmart in Fridley is going through a remodel and they have some shelving they will give us as well."

"Once we had the shelving it was, OK, let's go."

Thanks to donations from students, families and staff, "Victor's Pantry" was up and running by the beginning of November. Principal Laurie Jacklitch said a homeroom competition to collect items for the food shelf was held. As part of the competition, students also discussed hunger, poverty and ways they can help others. More than 1,500 items were collected.

"It was fun to see the kids beaming with a spirit of service to others," Jacklitch said. "And parents who can are rising to the occasion to support our efforts to stock the food shelf."

In addition to collecting items, students also help sort and stock items for the food shelf. In addition to nonperishable food items, Victor's Pantry also provides students and families with personal hygiene items and school supplies.

Open to all students and their families every day school is in session, students can let a staff person know they are interested in visiting Victor's Pantry. Families who want to use the food shelf can contact Johnson at 763-506-5531 or at: [gretchen.johnson@anoka.k12.mn.us](mailto:gretchen.johnson@anoka.k12.mn.us). Students don't have to qualify for free or reduced price meals to use the food shelf and no questions are asked of parents asking to access the service.

In the short time the food shelf has existed, it has positively impacted people's lives. Johnson said she has received a lot of thanks, hugs and "a few tears have been shed."

"We provided food to a family while the mother was in the hospital," Johnson said. "The mother called to say we were a life saver."

Having a food shelf at the school teaches students a lesson that goes beyond food and basic needs.

"We are teaching students empathy, awareness and to be accepting of others," Johnson said. "The reward of helping people to have their basic needs met has been great. It makes the work seem so minimal."

Victor's Pantry has also highlighted how giving NMS is. In addition to donating items for the food shelf and plans to reach out to families to provide holiday assistance, Johnson said Brad David, the building supervisor, has played a key role in getting Victor's Pantry up and running.

"Brad adjusts on the fly and has been open and supportive of our ideas," Johnson said. "This couldn't have been done without his help and patience."

Anyone interested in donating items to Victor's Pantry can contact Johnson at 763-506-5531 or at: [gretchen.johnson@anoka.k12.mn.us](mailto:gretchen.johnson@anoka.k12.mn.us) or drop off their donation at NMS's office. The school is located at 11301 Dogwood St. N.W., Coon Rapids. NMS is not requesting clothing donations. Anyone who has clothing to donate can take it to the Pathways Program at Coon Rapids Family Place Mall, 11224 Crooked Lake Blvd., Coon Rapids.