



Backpack Brigade

We **END** Weekend Hunger



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I started Backpack Brigade 12 years ago after learning how many children in our region face weekend hunger. I believed then - as I still do today - that no child should ever go hungry between leaving school on Friday and returning on Monday. I never could have imagined that this idea would transform Backpack Brigade into the largest provider of weekend hunger bags to students in Washington State.

When I talk about our work, I often say we're delivering bags of hope. I see that hope every time a child gets their bag and smiles. When we give them the same opportunities for a healthy future. I see it when a volunteer shows up, rain or shine, to make a delivery. These moments remind me why we do what we do.

As inspired as I am by our progress, I never could have anticipated how much we were going to need to grow, and how resilient we would need to become to reach this level. We do this work each and every day, because the need is only increasing. The staggering uptick in the requests for service we received in 2024 points to the rising rates of food insecurity among Washington's families, driven by the ever-increasing cost of food. The Consumer Price Index shows an inflation rate of less than 3%, but that number doesn't reflect the reality behind the economic pressure on ordinary families. We are also seeing a heartbreaking increase in the rate of homelessness among students as reported by the Seattle Public School District.

More than once, we wondered how we were going to continue to rise to the challenge. But, thanks to the generosity and support of our community, we did! Our robust network of volunteers are the engine of our ambitious meal delivery every week, and the addition of full-time staff members expanded our ability to improve key operational areas within the organization. In addition to serving more students than ever before, we evolved the way we provide and package food, emphasizing the importance of honoring the dietary, cultural, and religious needs of the students we serve.

During the 2023-2024 school year, we expanded from serving 3,500 students to 4,500 across four additional schools. By the end of the year, that number had grown to 5,100 children across 102 schools in five school districts. And we are on track to meet our 2025 goal of serving 5,500 students - all within the districts we already serve.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With our record-breaking fundraising year, a solid Board and Team in place, and the resilience and can-do spirit that has become our hallmark, we are ready for what 2025 will bring. We remain fully committed to the mission that burns in every team member, every donor, and every volunteer: to END weekend hunger for homeless and food insecure kids in King County.

With Gratitude,



Executive Director
Nichelle Hilton



MISSION STATEMENT

MISSION STATEMENT

We END weekend hunger.

Backpack Brigade partners with local schools to provide weekend hunger bags to homeless and food insecure kids in need. We ensure every child is fed all weekend long.

WHY IT MATTERS

Weekend hunger – or any period of food insecurity – has significant physical, mental, and behavioral effects on children, which can last well into adulthood and have a lifetime impact on a person's outcomes. Children who regularly experience hunger experience poorer overall health; higher levels of aggression, anxiety and hyperactivity; impaired cognitive thinking; and diminished capacity to learn. This often results in lower academic achievement; increased absence, tardiness, and suspensions; a higher dropout rate; and reduced chance of matriculation into post-secondary education. Without academic credentials, adults have more difficulty finding and maintaining employment, leading to a continuous spiral of poverty.

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE

The USDA found that 9.5% of Washingtonians faced food insecurity in 2023, and surveys from the University of Washington and Washington State University find that families with children are more likely to face food insecurity. Rising food prices have exacerbated the economic pressures felt by households across the state, and the end of COVID-era assistance programs further strained Washington families going into 2024. Continued cuts to assistance programs are all but guaranteed to lead to continued and increased food insecurity in Washington. These economic headwinds have caused us at Backpack Brigade to think even bigger about our mission and future as we continue to put kids front and center of our operations.

“The kids look forward to [bag deliveries], the parents look forward to it, because they know that every Friday – even if they don’t have food – they’re going to have something for the weekend.”

– Shirley Wroten, Family Advocate, Emerson Elementary School



2024 IMPACT REPORT

BY THE NUMBERS


1.3 million meals


150,000 food bags

1,500 new children served

102 schools in **5** school districts

244 weekly volunteers

	Meals Provided (annual)	Bags Delivered (annual)	Students Fed (weekly)	Schools Supported (weekly)
2024	1,300,000	150,000	5,100	102
2023	1,075,887	119,543	3,600	96

	Total Volunteers	Total Volunteer Hours	Total Corporate Volunteer Groups
2024	244	14,109	56*
2023	205	22,140	80

Data collection methodology changed from 2023 to 2024

*Groups may volunteer multiple times

HOW WE DO IT?

Backpack Brigade partners with 102 schools across 5 school districts to provide weekend hunger bags to students in need. Each bag contains food to provide 3 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 3 dinners, and 3 snacks, enough to take a child from Friday afternoon to Monday morning with no loss of reliable access to food.

Our dedicated team of 244 volunteers stayed strong over the course of the school year. These tireless people join us at the warehouse every week to prepare, pack, and delivery thousands of weekend hunger bags. 100% of individual donations go to food purchases to fill our weekend hunger bags. We purchase all the food at bulk discounts from many distributors to have control over nutrition, equity, and inventory.

Delivery and quantities are coordinated with the partnership and support of school counselors, social workers, and staff who then distribute the bags, first to students on their McKinney-Vento Act rosters, then to those experiencing food insecurity.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

PROGRAM GROWTH & IMPACT

- Increased overall program impact by 25% (measured by number of bags delivered)
- Served 42% more children and provided 20% more meals than the previous year.
- Expanded services to include preschool students in Bellevue School District, providing critical nutrition during early developmental years.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT & CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Increased volunteer engagement by 32%.
- Grew number of drivers by 32% and prep/pack volunteers by 24%.
- Hosted dozens of corporate volunteer groups, many returning multiple times to deepen their engagement.
- Added 23 new corporate volunteer group.

STAFFING & CAPACITY BUILDING

- Grew staff from 2 to 7 employees, adding capacity in development, media, program management, volunteer coordination, and administration.
- Built operational infrastructure to support growing community needs and organizational sustainability.

MENU & SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

- Expanded ABC Bag menus from 7 to 9 options customized for specific dietary, ethical, medical, and religious preferences, all developed in partnership with a nutritionist.
 - Refined special menus to include:
 - Pre-school specific bags.
 - Build-Your-Own Bag option.
 - Separated kosher and halal menus for greater cultural sensitivity.
- Expanded the cold bag program offering fresh foods (yogurt, apples, cheese sticks).

FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

- Achieved a 5x increase in Winter Gala fundraising year-over-year.
- Secured first-ever corporate event sponsorships.
- Raised a total of \$1,696,442.

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

- Continued to receive strong support and recognition from the Seattle community, reflecting broad community understanding of the critical role nutrition plays in student success.



2024 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Despite inflation, supply chain disruptions, and rising community need, 2024 was a record-breaking year for fundraising and impact. We raised \$1.7M, led by the Winter Wonderland Gala (\$256K) and strengthened by a growing base of corporate partners, individual donors, and 12 outreach events. Our Decade of Impact campaign added over \$10K, and we welcomed new sponsors and volunteers.

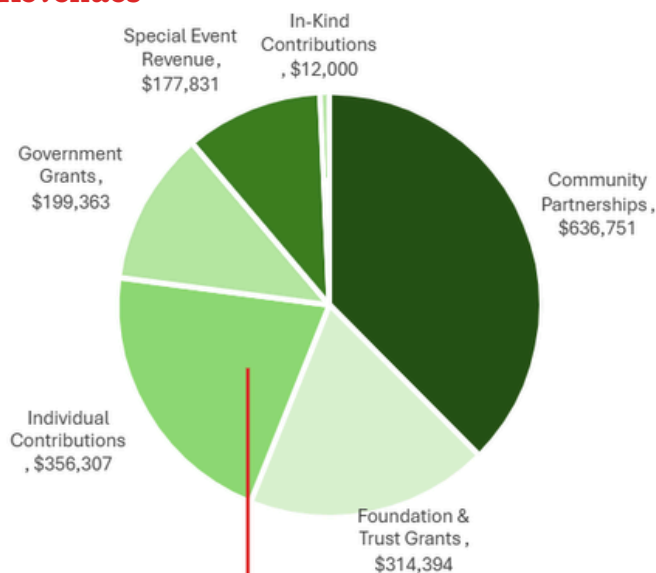
At the same time, food costs rose 39%, with some items up 58%, and our team expanded from 2 to 7 staff, increasing operational costs. Still, we met every request for support and delivered more food bags than ever before.

We end 2024 financially strong, operationally resilient, and deeply grateful to the community that made this growth possible.

Financial Highlights

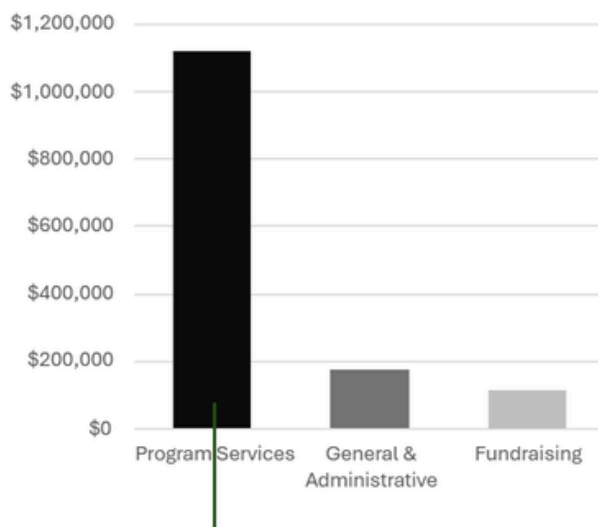
5,100	\$1.7 M	\$5.98	\$500 K
Kids Served Weekly	Total Revenue	Avg. Cost Per Bag	Cash Reserve @ YE

Revenues



100%
of Individual Donations
Go Directly to Food Purchases

Expenses



Program Services Breakout

Food Distribution	\$896,352	80%
Salaries & Benefits	\$92,370	8%
Occupancy	\$99,087	9%
Program Supplies	\$29,465	3%
Miscellaneous	\$2,002	<1%
Total Program Services	\$1,119,276	100%



2024 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

**BACKPACK BRIGADE
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024
(SEE INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTANTS' REVIEW REPORT)**

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
REVENUE AND SUPPORT			
Contributions	\$ 356,307	\$ -	\$ 356,307
Community Partnerships	636,751	-	636,751
Special Event Revenue, net	177,831	-	177,831
Foundation and Trust Grants	314,394	-	314,394
Government Grants	199,363	-	199,363
In-Kind Contributions	12,000	-	12,000
Total Revenue and Support	1,696,646	-	1,696,646
EXPENSES			
Program	1,119,276	-	1,119,276
General and Administrative	170,709	-	170,709
Fundraising	112,529	-	112,529
Total Expenses	1,402,514	-	1,402,514
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	294,132	-	294,132
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	491,053	-	491,053
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	<u>\$ 785,185</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 785,185</u>



SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT

Thank you to our key partners:



Seattle



**Emerald City
Rotary**
Seattle, WA



**THE NORCLIFFE
FOUNDATION**



[HomeStreet] Bank®



Deloitte.



**Brighton
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Live a richer life.®

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CULTIVATING FRESH

SUSMAN GODFREY

- Agua Verde
- Ascend Hospitality Group/Stanford's
- EverFree NW
- Georgetown Brewery
- Hand of God Winery

- Il Bistro
- Mioposto
- Red Robin
- Sabine Bakery
- Softchoice



ADVOCATING TO END WEEKEND HUNGER

It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a village to feed them, too. In addition to her work at Backpack Brigade, Executive Director Nichelle Hilton Chairs two advocacy organizations bringing regional partners together to work on the problem of weekend hunger. She also sits on the Executive Committee of the Seattle Food Committee. Backpack Brigade also partners with the Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition to develop and support public policy initiatives aimed at reducing hunger and poverty in Washington State.



**Seattle Food
Committee**

The Seattle Food Committee, which works to end hunger by identifying and addressing the root causes, including systems of injustice and oppression. Together, our member organizations work to educate, advocate and collaborate for food and social justice. Applying an equitable anti-racist and food justice lens to guide our work, our goal is to partner with food distributors, farmers, co-ops and small businesses to ensure that the fabric of the city's emergency food system continues to grow stronger. We strive to prioritize environmentally sustainable farming, fair labor and equitable resource management, and are well-positioned to lead the community forward with an emphasis on equity and collaboration with BIPOC vendors. Together let's put an end to food insecurity in Seattle

FOOD FOR SCHOOLS

Food For Schools (FFS) brings together agencies in Seattle that provide weekend hunger bags and partners that help accomplish that goal. FFS meets monthly to help share best practices, resources, and ideas to reach as many children as possible in Seattle and beyond.

KING COUNTY COALITION

The King County Coalition (KCC) brings together agencies in King County that provide weekend hunger bags and partners that help accomplish that goal. KCC meets monthly to help share best practices, resources, and ideas to reach as many children as possible within King County, WA.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

This year, the Board experienced planned attrition as we bid a fond farewell with much gratitude to Bahareh Samanian and Bryce Hanson who rolled off the Board in 2024. We welcome to the board Matt Camrud, Loretta Douglas, Lauren Schiltz and Brittany Malidore. Along with our new members, the Board elected a new slate of executives, and Mariela Torres took the reins as our new President. Under her leadership, the Board plans to expand further, increasing the breadth of its expertise and fundraising capacity, and continuously improving processes, communications, and overall strategic governance of the organization.



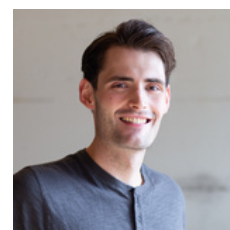
Mariela Torres
President



Mary Ellen Osthus
Vice President



Open
Secretary



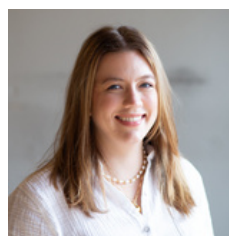
Nick Stoner
Treasurer



Sara Call
Member at Large



Matt Camrud
Strategic Development
Officer



Loretta Douglas
Member at Large



Matthew Lemieux
Marketing Chair



Brittany Malidore
Member at Large



Marcy MacAdam
Nutrition Advisor



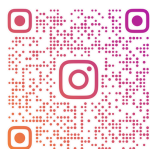
Lauren Schiltz
Member at Large



Aga Schurich
Member at Large



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for homeless and food insecure kids**



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