

Let's Feed the KIDS

**A Story of Two Women and Their Concern for Hungry Children
Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek, California
Ministry Story – June 2015**

Cindy had tried everything to find housing for Audrey. As the storm approached, with no indoor housing options, Cindy put her head in her hands and cried a prayer, "Jesus please help me". Audrey turned to Cindy and said "Leave me alone, I want to go lay down in a field and get some sleep. I am ok". Audrey found a resting place in a green field across the road from the Shell Ridge Community Church. Cindy stayed out of sight, but where she could keep an eye on her homeless friend. Many cars and hikers passed by, but no one stopped to check on the graying, wrinkled, 80 year old Audrey, even though she was visible from the road. After a while a car with a couple in it stopped at the church and immediately the man walked over to check on Audrey. Cindy walked up then also and explained the situation that no housing could be found for the woman and learned that the couple was the Shell Ridge pastor and his wife. The outcome of their conversation was that the pastor invited Audrey into the church and gave her lodging until other arrangements could be made and the storm was over.

Cindy was so impressed with this act of kindness, on Sunday she decided to attend the Shell Ridge Community Church. During the service's time of prayer and concerns, Cindy asked for prayer for Audrey. Not long after this Cindy was diagnosed with a very serious health problem and scheduled for surgery at Stanford Medical Center. The pastor and the church were very supportive of Cindy during this difficult time. Cindy fully recovered and is back at work in the field of education for the county; she is a past school teacher and principal.

During this time Wendy and her husband were dealing with her husband's recent heart attack and upcoming heart surgery. He had the surgery and twelve days later died of complications. Two months later Cindy and Wendy were both at Shell Ridge Community Church for the Sunday worship service. Wendy went over to visit with a friend, came back and took her place in the chair, which now was beside someone she did not know. They introduced themselves by name as the service began. Following the service Wendy and Cindy began to converse, sharing life's experiences and learned they had very much in common. The biggest commonality was they were both very concerned about children who were hungry in our own county and unable to learn because of hunger issues. The two women met for breakfast the

following Friday both arriving carrying a notebook and laptop. “Let’s Feed the Kids” (LFTK) was birthed that morning at the Butter Cup Restaurant.

Sandy, Mary, Betty and Tina joined the working committee. The goal became to help feed children during the summer who receive government subsidized breakfasts and lunches at school during the school year. What happens during the summer when school is out? With our help, children were enabled to be healthy and to continue to learn, even during the summer months...concentrating on reading books, writing stories, playing sports and learning new games...instead of worrying about where the next meal would come from or worrying because mom is feeding them and not feeding herself.



This summer’s pilot project was initiated through the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County’s Food Security Task Force. The work group became known as “Let’s Feed the KIDS” (LFTK). Shell Ridge Community Church (SRCC) and Congregation B’nai Tikvah (CBT) partnered to provide 40 families with 2 meals/week. The ingredients for a breakfast and a dinner for a family of 5 were sent home in a bag with 50 children who were attending Summer Camp at the Monument Crisis Center for 7 weeks.

In 2 weeks SRCC and CBT raised over \$3,000 to cover the cost of providing 2 meals/family of 5 for 7 weeks. Thirty-seven volunteers packed a total of 286 bags. The bags included such items as 1 dozen eggs, oatmeal, rice, beans, can vegetables, tomato sauce, and fresh produce of zucchini, carrots, bell peppers, onions, potatoes, apples, oranges, pears and peaches. Two of the weeks included jars of peanut butter and loaves of bread.

The volunteers were as blessed as the families receiving the food. Seeing and hearing a little guy look in his bag and say to his dad “we finally have a loaf of bread” brought tears to their eyes and hearts.

Next, “Let’s Feed the Kids” initiated a program which will provide groceries for a shelter which houses 8 families with children. The groceries are placed in a central place at the shelter and the families “shop” for the items they prefer and have a decision in the choice of the healthy foods they receive. This food is being provided on the last Wednesday of the month and has become called the Family Market. The last Wednesday was chosen at the end of each month to provide meals when the EBT/food stamps have run out. There is ample data showing that this is the hardest time for these families. When the program at the 8 family shelter is running smoothly, LFTK plans to expand to another 13 family shelter. Shelter Inc. and Loaves and Fishes of Contra Costa County in California are two of the groups supporting this new program. LFTK is not trying to invent the wheel, but wants to be able to expand and work with groups that are already making a difference. We are not competing, but partnering and working together.



To introduce the Family Market to the residents, LFTK provided a healthy meal of salmon loaves, au gratin potatoes, tossed salad, apple sauce with cinnamon, rolls and butter, and home made cookies, water with lemon, milk, and coffee. This was to be a time of getting acquainted for the residents and LFTK and an opportunity for LFTK to tell them about the planned monthly Family Market. It was an enjoyable evening of sharing what the residents needed and also how hard the end of the month can be. LFTK also learned that these moms had to buy diapers with cash and could not use their EBT cards. So, the market decided to provide diapers also. Several groups are doing diaper drives each month to have them available at the Family Market. The children range in age from newborns to teenagers.

When Cindy and Wendy had their initial breakfast and were sharing their concerns for children, the biggest concern was for children during summer and spring break. So LFTK provided food during a summer program and then began the Family Market for the end of the month. The desire to help kids during spring break had not yet been addressed and doors were not opening. One day while Cindy was

driving and listening to the radio she heard a public service announcement for a group that was feeding kids during the winter break. She called the station to find out who they were. No one could tell her. At the next Food Security Task Force meeting, Neil, a man in attendance from Temple Beth Hillel (TBH) in Richmond, California, casually mentioned a food program they were doing with schools during the winter break. Cindy about jumped out of her chair. She asked Neil to talk with her after the meeting. Neil briefly told her what they had been doing for about 3 years. Cindy told him of LFTK's interest in doing this during spring break. She followed up with a phone call to Neil the next week and he agreed to tell his committee about the conversations he was having with Cindy.

Cindy and Wendy were invited to a meeting at the TBH with their "Food for Thought" committee. The meeting was exciting and fun and Cindy and Wendy were welcomed with open arms. It was agreed that TBH would set up the plans for providing food for children during the spring break. LFTK offered money and volunteers. A new project was launched.

Four days prior to spring break the work began. On Sunday afternoon, 10 volunteers "built" over 200 boxes. Monday, 4 volunteers with trucks went to the Contra Costa Food Bank to obtain what food they could provide. Tuesday, 20 volunteers from many sources packed boxes. The boxes contained beans, rice, apples, oranges, bananas, pears, zucchini, carrots, potatoes, yams, bread, 2 frozen chickens and peanut butter. Peanut butter had been donated by a Cardiac Unit at Kaiser Hospital and breads donated by White Pony. A pleasant surprise was baked goods of pies, cakes, and cookies were also donated by White Pony.

On Wednesday, 4 volunteers and a U-Haul truck were used to deliver the boxes to 4 Elementary Schools. 90 families were given two food boxes to help them get through the spring break. Parents had been notified and were at the schools to pick up the groceries. Some piled the boxes on strollers, some brought wagons, others carried their boxes home.

Those delivering the boxes didn't expect to see the kids. However, they arrived at lunch time and had to carry the boxes to a room on the other side of the cafeteria. The kids were having their lunch which consisted of the uniform little box with a sandwich



and banana provided by the Federal School Lunch Program. One little guy brought a little piece of chocolate to Jeff, one of the bearded men, delivering the food boxes. It brought tears to Jeff's eyes. Other kids were giving the gloved hands of the volunteers hi-5's!! Once again, who feels blessed?

Cindy and Wendy feel the story has only begun. Until there are no more hungry children in Contra Costa County, California, the story will continue.

NO CHILDREN SHOULD BE HUNGRY

The friendship of Cindy and Wendy could be another story. It started with Cindy caring about Audrey her homeless friend. This act of kindness brought her to Shell Ridge Community Church. Wendy's caring for a health compromised husband who had heart surgery just prior to Cindy's surgery, gives total understanding of the stress they have both experienced. The loss of one and the success of the other brings understanding and caring between Cindy and Wendy. Both feel a need to be useful and have a burning desire to help kids who are hungry. They feel Audrey was the one who brought them together as friends and yesterday Audrey left this life.