

CCGA Service-Learning Project Donates to CIS Backpack Buddies

By ANNA HALL The Brunswick News

March 25, 2016

For nearly three months, a group of nursing students from the College of Coastal Georgia have worked to collect pantries full of food for students in need in Glynn County.



College of Coastal Georgia nursing students Kyle Marona, from left, Peyton Waters, Calen Campbell, Jessica Heidt and Reagan Thompson pack a food box for the Communities in Schools program at Burroughs-Molette Elementary School Thursday. The students packed 122 boxes of food as part of a service-learning project to help feed students during their spring break.

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Through its service-learning project, the students reached out to college peers, community partners, churches, the Southeast Georgia Health System and individual donors to gather not only boxes of donated non-perishable food products, but also funds, which they on Thursday unloaded in the Communities in Schools station at Burroughs-Molette Elementary School.

Crackers, Ramen noodles, jars of peanut butter, granola bars and a laundry-list of foods were packed into 122 large boxes. The food will be given to children at the school who are part of the Backpack Buddy Program.

Coordinated by Glynn County's Communities in Schools, which is part of the nation's leading dropout prevention network that provides student support on multiple levels, Backpack Buddies is a program which provides students in need with a bag of food every Friday, to ensure students "have enough to eat over the weekend so they can come back to school rested, motivated and with energy to learn on Monday," said Earlene Dickson, site coordinator for Communities in Schools.

When the group of nursing students learned about the school system wide program, they knew they had found their next venture in service-learning, which is part of the nursing program's rotational community health unit.

Under the leadership of assistant professor of nursing and health services Nicole Masano, students collected the foods needed thanks to food drives as well as funding drives, through which they raised approximately \$1,000, said Peyton Waters, a senior nursing student from Brunswick at the college.

Donations will be vital this time of year, Dickson said.

While Communities in Schools has enough ongoing grant funding to keep their pantry at the ready for weekend meals and snacks, the same cannot be said for extended periods when students are not in school, such as the upcoming spring break week.

The 100-plus boxes donated from the college through the service-learning project is a sigh of relief.

"At this school (Burroughs-Molette), there is a 97 percent rate of students on free and reduced lunch. That means, in all likelihood, when they get home, they don't have enough or anything to eat," Dickson said. "So what do they do when they have long breaks? Likely, they go hungry. Thanks to this donation, each child in the program will take home a whole box for the spring break week."

The Backpack Buddies program launched at Burroughs-Molette in August, at the start of the 2015-2016 school year. When it began, 65 students were identified as in need of the service. Since then, that number has more than tripled, now serving 257 students, Dickson said.

Throughout the year, donations of food are always welcomed by Communities in Schools, as are donations of funds.

"It costs \$2.22 per student for a week's worth of food. For one student, a year's worth of food is only \$80," Dickson said. "This project from the college, and the overall support we receive from the community, is always welcome."