



# NEWSLETTER

**Olivia Gubbay, Editor**

**February 2021**

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As we reflect back on 2020, we are reminded of the challenges, losses, and isolation so many people faced during the pandemic. Kids Backing Kids launched during this difficult time to give a little extra help to kids, to let our friends and neighbors know that we care about them and are here to help. In August we provided backpacks with school supplies to over 150 kids and in December we provided 1,300+ gifts to over 200 kids in our local communities. We learned about childhood homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty. We recruited over 50 youth volunteers and more than a dozen community partners. None of this would have been possible without your generous support -- your encouragement, your time, and your financial support. Thank you for helping us help kids!

We are so hopeful that we'll be able to reconnect in familiar ways in 2021. Maybe, just maybe, we'll get back to school full-time, be with our classmates no matter what letter their last name begins with, go to a movie together, and... see each other smile again without the burden of a mask.

But we're still in the midst of this pandemic. Kids and families are still struggling. Rates of childhood homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty are at all-time highs. Kids Backing Kids still has work to do in the months ahead. In addition to our annual school supply and holiday gift drives, we'll be working with local food pantries to meet the food needs of our neighbors and friends. We'll continue to educate ourselves and our community about these important societal problems. Please join us. We welcome your ideas and engagement.

This newsletter features articles exceptionally well written by four KBK youth volunteers. **Hannah Cronin (WHS '23)** shines a spotlight on food insecurity during the pandemic; **Teddy Griswold (WHS '24)** reports on his interview with Mr. Peter Lull of the Wellesley Food Pantry; and **Stephanos Maramaldi (WHS '22)** and **Olivia Rodrigue (WHS '22)** report on the success of the Holiday Gift Drive.

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## Spotlight on Food Insecurity in the COVID Era



**Hannah Cronin**  
**Wellesley High School '23**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a trying time for many, with unemployment in Massachusetts at 6.7% in November, up from the 2.9% in 2019. With the pandemic spiking again during this past holiday season, many were left to celebrate alone with only immediate family. But, though many were lucky just to alter who they celebrated with, others in Massachusetts were unsure of how they would put food on the table. Food insecurity has long been an important issue and, with the rise in unemployment, more people are looking for support— including many who have never needed to in the past.

The pandemic has pushed more families, even ones who had been previously thriving, back a step, which will continue to affect their lives beyond the pandemic. In Massachusetts, the hunger rate has increased by 59% since 2018, and now 1 in 5 Massachusetts children are food insecure, a rise from previous rates. Additionally, lowering food insecurity rates is even harder because many of those who lost their jobs and now rely on food banks worked in industries that have been incredibly affected by the pandemic. For example, the sectors that were hit the hardest during the pandemic include food service, retail, tourism, and education. Many of these sectors include mostly low-income jobs. With the pandemic raging on, this problem will continue to plague many families and many will still have to rely on food banks, which is why we must support our local food banks and national organizations to get nutritious food for every hungry person.



Additionally, food insecurity hits certain groups harder than others. For example, households with children are 5% more food insecure, and Latinx and Black communities in Massachusetts are almost 2 times more likely to face food insecurity than their White and Asian counterparts. These statistics demonstrate the divide between White and BIPOC families in Massachusetts and are important to understand— we must allocate the resources necessary to the communities that need them the most. Immigrant communities are also harder hit by food insecurity, which means that their adjustment into American life becomes harder and their reliance on aid is continued. These communities are many times located in areas of lower-income and lower-quality public education, so it is essential to provide food to the residents of their communities to help set not just adults, but children up for success.

Examining childhood hunger more, it is important to know that eating a balanced diet is essential to children's focus in school to make improvements in their classes and courses. If a

child is in a food insecure home, they are more likely to suffer from increased hospitalizations, poor health, iron deficiency, developmental risk, and behavior problems such as aggression, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorder. With higher hunger rates, Black and Latinx children are disproportionately more likely to suffer. Additionally, children in food-insecure households are more likely to suffer from obesity, which can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes later in life, which lowers their expected lifespan.

To conclude, the state of hunger in Massachusetts is in a dire place; with hunger rising every day and children across the state going to bed with empty stomachs, the pandemic has proved to be a catalyst for increasing food insecurity rates. It is integral that steps are taken to combat hunger across the state because of the effects that food insecurity has on communities and their members, including students and families. Hopefully, in the coming year with the vaccine rollout, jobs will return to many of the hardest-hit sectors providing income for those who need it most. Finally, it is important to support your local food bank to provide food to those who need it, and KBK also hopes to help those who are suffering from food insecurity through our upcoming programs with your help.

## Addressing Food Insecurity: An Interview with Peter Lull of the Wellesley Food Pantry



**Teddy Griswold**  
Wellesley High School '24

Imagine being hungry. We can all do that. But imagine being hungry without the ability to get food and you will begin to get a sense of the vital role the Wellesley Food Pantry plays for some Wellesley citizens. In an affluent suburb like Wellesley, it can be hard to understand the pain and suffering of the needy; however, it exists right under our nose. As citizens, it is important to understand the power we have to make the world a better place for those less fortunate than us in our own community. The Wellesley Food Pantry (WFP) serves a key role in helping those in need and experiencing food insecurity, including children, adults, and senior citizens.

With the spread of COVID and its restrictions, it has become more critical and yet more difficult to provide the services the WFP has in the past. We spoke with **Mr. Peter Lull, President of the WFP Board**, to get a better sense of how they operate and the challenges of the current environment. The organization got its start back in 1989 and since that time has grown to provide a supplemental source of food to over 400 Wellesley residents — roughly one third youth, one third adults, and one third seniors. The WFP is run



out of the basement of the Wellesley Congregational Church. Operationally, they take in donations on Mondays, sort them, and distribute them to clients on Tuesdays.



Mr. Lull outlined some of the WFP's challenges as well as successes under normal circumstances. While it can be challenging at times, maintaining a supply of fresh and healthy food with variety is very important. "I was looking at one food pantry's website and they had a picture of their shelves with Pop Tarts and Coke," Mr. Lull noted. "Wonderful as that is, you will not find that on our shelves. We strive to bring healthy foods to the community we serve." Storing fresh and healthy foods is a challenge, although the freezers generously donated to WFP by Roche Brothers allows for items such as fish and chicken to be stored safely.

The core group of volunteers at the WFP, many of whom are senior citizens, are shouldering more work during the COVID pandemic. "There has been a huge stress on our volunteers because of social distancing, which has greatly limited the number of people who can be there [at WFP] and interact at one time," stated Mr. Lull. Also, fewer clients can enter the building, so more work is required to take and package the order and deliver it to them compared to walking through the aisles and picking out what they need individually. The WFP has benefited from Wellesley High School students who volunteer to help carry bags out to their clients.

Kids facing food insecurity are especially struck by the COVID pandemic because of school closures or hybrid schooling. Many students can no longer rely on free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches that they get from their schools. Also, changes to or ending the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act may make it more difficult for families to provide healthy foods for their children. "The number of clients has increased slightly from a year ago, but we anticipate we could see more of an increase as federal assistance programs end," Mr. Lull stated.

The WFP does not receive any public funding and exists solely on donations. It receives donations from a variety of sources, some of which include congregations, local businesses, and individuals. In the past, the largest food drive of the year, Scouting for Food, would run on the first Saturday in November. Mr. Lull said, "It usually accounts for about 40% of our total donations, but this year we couldn't have it because of the restrictions and complications." The WFP is also fortunate to receive food donations from collection bins at Roche Brothers and Whole Foods. Monetary donations also allow the Pantry to buy items and food that may be in short supply despite community-based donations.

Those interested in making donations now should review WFP's online "wish list" ([www.wellesleyfoodpantry.org](http://www.wellesleyfoodpantry.org)). "Sticking to the list is important because we have limited storage space for items we do not regularly need and also because of the limits on our volunteers' time for sorting," Mr. Lull mentioned.

Overall, the WFP provides an invaluable service to our community and is successfully fighting through these challenging times. Kids Backing Kids encourages you to support the WFP and those with food insecurity.

## KBK Holiday Gift Drive a Big Success



**Stephanos Maramaldi**  
**Wellesley High School '22**



**Olivia Rodrigue**  
**Wellesley High School '22**

COVID-19 has taken jobs away from many individuals in all communities. For some, this meant that they had “given up on gifts this year.” This led to many difficult conversations between parents and their children. We wanted to help those parents bring some happiness to their children during the holiday season.



In December 2020, Kids Backing Kids had its first annual Holiday Gift Drive to provide gifts to children in need. An incredible 85 people and families in the community agreed to buy gifts for 2 to 8 children, spending \$125 per child. KBK also had an additional 26 individuals donate a combined \$2,800 in funds, which we used to sponsor more children.

In order to make sure that families received gifts in time for the holidays, Kids Backing Kids held two wrapping events in early December. Each was 7 hours long with 6 to 8 volunteers per hour wrapping gifts, all observing social distancing requirements and wearing masks. Volunteers wrapped gifts that were placed in a red bag for each individual child. We also included a list of the gifts that were in the bags so the parents would know what they were giving to their kids. The bags were given to our community partners, who then delivered them to the individual families in order to preserve the anonymity of the families and kids.

Initially, we expected to provide gifts for 50 or maybe even 75 children, but because of the great community response we were able to deliver **1,350 gifts to 204 children** living in Wellesley, Newton, and Needham. We have received several emails from families expressing how much it meant to them to be able to watch their kids' faces as they saw presents under the tree.



We want to give a big thank you to the family sponsors, those who donated money, and Haynes Management who donated the space to wrap the gifts. A special thank you to our community partners who helped coordinate wish lists and deliver gifts, including Wellesley Public Schools (Sara Berenson), Wellesley Housing Authority (Maura Renzella, Pam Meehan), Wellesley Health Department (Joyce Saret), Newton Public Schools (Jill Glashow, Rachel Kaplan, Elizabeth Goncalves Wachman, Fhynita Brinson), and Needham Housing Authority (Deb Tambeau). Without all of you, our holiday gift drive would not have been possible.



During the 2021 holiday season, we hope to build on this great success by expanding our reach and providing gifts for even more children in need.

## Contact Us



If you want to volunteer, share ideas about helping kids in our communities, or donate to support our mission, we would love to hear from you.

Kids Backing Kids is dedicated to improving the lives of children experiencing poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and trauma by providing material goods, raising community awareness, and training the next generation of community leaders.

[Contact Us / Donate](#)

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