When epilepsy creeps into your life, it can take over with a vengeance. The big question for Pam was, how would she deal with a debilitating disease while managing a household of seven? “We have my husband and me, then we have three children, and we’re raising our two grandchildren, she said.”

As tough as it has been to increase their family and responsibilities, Pam lovingly talks about her grandchildren, “They’re sweet. I’d do it all over again. They’re a joy.” Yet each dollar is spent cautiously to make everything count. Even so, they struggle to provide enough food, and often don’t have enough. “The cabinets are getting bare. Yes, getting tight,” she says.

A household of seven is more than enough to keep anyone busy and overwhelmed. Add Pam’s chronic illness, and she and her husband have more than they can handle. Pam says her epilepsy is, “Scary and never predictable. You never know when the seizures are coming, so my husband has to stay at home to help me and the kids.”

Trying to survive on a mechanic’s retirement is next to impossible with such a large family, along with Pam’s medical condition. Luckily, Pam can go to Providence House at Highland View Church of Christ to get the food they so desperately need. If it wasn’t for your continuous support of Second Harvest, our food pantry partners like Providence House would have a difficult time providing enough food for hungry families like Pam’s.

When asked what she would do without the help of Second Harvest and Providence, Pam laughed nervously and said, “I don’t know, I have no idea. They’ve really been a big help to us. We’re really blessed to have them.”

When people like you sacrifice so much, hungry families like Pam’s have hope despite the huge obstacles they face every day — that includes families without income because of the pandemic. Thank you for making a real difference where it counts.
Words of Hope

March 16th our world turned upside down because of the coronavirus. Shutdowns have been enormous, and everybody’s life has come to a halt. I’ve witnessed fear and generosity in our community in ways I’ve never seen before in my 27 years at Second Harvest.

Every day we’ve been helping more and more people. You can hear the desperation in their voices, terrified they won’t be able to feed their families. The demand for food has doubled since the pandemic hit, and we weren’t sure if we could keep up. Miraculously, we’ve been getting it done because of the overwhelming generosity of our community and donors.

The way we distribute food has completely changed. We’ve lost a large portion of our volunteers because working in close quarters is a health risk. People can no longer stand in line at food pantries. We can’t go into senior centers and packaging food is entirely different. Instead of loading food onto pallets for delivery, we’re packing boxes that provide a family with about two weeks of meals. We then put the boxes in the trunks of their cars as they drive through the line or deliver boxes to senior centers for their staff to distribute.

I am so proud of our staff who continue putting themselves on the front line to serve our community. Their passion and courage is remarkable in such a chaotic time. Typically, we distribute 250,000 pounds of food every week. Since the pandemic, this has increased to more than 500,000 pounds a week — that’s with fewer volunteers, distributing in completely new ways on a mass scale.

People who haven’t given money in years are donating so we can continue our mission. The community has risen to the occasion, but we still need your help. Our biggest fear is the unknown. How long will this last? How long will people be unemployed, and will our donors continue to give consistently in the fall and beyond?

Thousands of our neighbors are coming to Second Harvest — many for the first time. We are so grateful for your outpouring of support and your trust that we will feed everyone who needs us. We couldn’t do it without you.

Sincerely,

Elaine Streno
Executive Director

Trying to Survive

Ashley worked for years as a bookkeeper and her husband as a transmission mechanic after he got out of the Army. Now, both are trying to live on disability with their 10-year old daughter. “I have multiple sclerosis, and my husband injured his back and had back surgery,” Ashley said — that’s why she is getting food at Rush Strong Elementary Food Pantry in Strawberry Plains.

“Things get tight towards the middle or end of the month, and this helps,” Ashley explains. Their struggle is deeply physical, emotional and financial. Her husband is fighting to heal from his back surgery, and Ashley’s MS is relentlessly exhausting and painful. “You never know when you’re going to feel good or not,” she said.

Disability forces families to trim every expense to the bone just to survive. Most who live on disability are able to get help with food stamps or SNAP. But Ashley laughingly said, “We don’t get food stamps because we make too much.” The government takes half her husband’s income to pay child support but doesn’t deduct that from their eligibility for food stamps. “So, everything we get is either from food pantries or what we bought after we pay the bills,” she said, which isn’t much.

With rent, insurance and utilities for their small mobile home, plus expensive medicine, Ashley said things are “always” tight. She admits they often have to “Choose between buying food and taking care of the bills.”

If she didn’t have access to the food pantry, Ashley confesses, “I’d go see mom. I wouldn’t want to, but I’d be like, ‘Mom, help. Dad, help.’ Otherwise, I just do what I have to.” Thanks to your generosity, Ashley can get the nutritional food she and her family so urgently need.

To everyone who supports Second Harvest, Ashley said, “Thank you very much. It’s very much appreciated.” Your gifts are helping families get back on their feet when life is pulling them down. Thanks for all you do.

You never know when you’re going to feel good or not.

ASHLEY
A Hero That Gives People Hope

He’s been called a hero, is known as The Vol Piper and was deemed the Pandemic Quarantine Piper by the City of Knoxville. Actually, he prefers Tyler ... Tyler Roy. To us, Tyler is a hero for generously using his talents as a bagpiper to raise money and awareness about the tremendous hunger needs in our service area during the pandemic.

In 2018, Tyler decided he wanted to play the bagpipes, his uncle’s bagpipes. Tyler’s wife, Maja, said, “When he started it was horrific.” She asked him to stop, “But he wouldn’t, and we had a little disagreement. Finally, we set a schedule where I knew when he was going to practice. And, he’s practiced every day,” she explained.

“I wasn’t very good when I first started going door-to-door playing the bagpipes, but when you go on a street that is totally quiet because of the pandemic, then all the neighbors come out to hear you play, and they start talking, it brings life into neighborhoods,” Tyler said. Happiness replaced hopelessness and despair. So, he kept playing.

Thus far, Tyler has performed for more than 30 neighborhoods, playing up to four hours a day, and marching for hundreds of miles. “I wore right through the soles of Ghillie Brogues (his kilt shoes),” he said with a chuckle. “It was amazing to see his dedication,” Maja said. “He would play on sunny days and rainy days. So many times he was tired after work, but he went out anyway. I am so proud of him.”

With fascinated audiences, Tyler started inviting folks to donate money to Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee. He’s raised more than $20,000 so far, still his goal is $33,000. “There’s no other instrument that makes you feel feelings like bagpipes, Tyler said. “It puts people into their heads to think and feel.”

One little girl painted Tyler and his fellow-pipers a message, “Your beautiful music made me, my family, and my neighbors so happy. Please donate this $ to 2nd Harvest. You are heroes, because you give people hope.” Thank you for bringing us all hope and help, Tyler!

Special Thanks

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Timken Foundation of Canton
Megan Baker-Graves was born and raised in Strawberry Plains where she runs the food pantry at Rush Strong Elementary. In fact, “I went to school here when I was little,” she said. It’s home to Megan and “God just gave me a passion for the pantry, and I love it here,” she said. You can hear the passion in Megan’s voice as she explains, “So many of the kids here are hungry. They know us, they know we’re here, so they get super excited. I love the kids and it’s just nice to know that we can help them.”

The food pantry at Rush Strong Elementary plays an important part in helping us get food to desperately hungry families. They are among more than 550 partnering nonprofit organizations in our network that help us distribute more than 20 million pounds of food and grocery products every year.

“I love it when the kids come with their parents and they get so excited and know they’re taking food home. When they walk out and say, ‘Oh my God. I love you, Miss Megan.’ It melts my heart,” she said.

Megan is a teaching assistant at the school. “I work with preschoolers all day, but I get to use my degree in this lovely pantry. I actually have a degree in business management and I’m an organizational guru, so I love it,” she explains. For her time at the pantry, “I get hugs and kisses and smiles, and ‘Thank you, Miss Megan.’”

Because Megan works in the school, she said, “I can ask, ‘Hey, does this family need help?’ Or someone can come to me and say, ‘Hey, this family needs help, what can we do for them?’ My phone number is everywhere in the school, so they can call me if they need help. No judgement, nothing. I’m here for them.”

“Second Harvest and First Baptist of Strawberry Plains are what makes this pantry, but if it wasn’t for Second Harvest, we wouldn’t be able to grow it, and that’s huge. It’s just growing by leaps and bounds. God is doing beautiful things here, amazing things.”

Because of your ongoing sacrifice, we’re able to feed hungry families and their children all year long at the school. Thank you for caring so much.

Save the Date

- Hunger Action Month — September 2020
- Giving Tuesday — December 1, 2020
- 10th annual Double Your Donation Day — December 10, 2020

Support Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee, and you support more than 550 local nonprofits and programs.

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