

OXFORD FIGHTS AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

By Kendall Kipping

opinions editor

Food insecurity is an issue that affects more than 44 million people across America. Mississippi holds the title of America's hungriest state, affecting approximately 480,600 Mississippians. One in five Mississippi citizens face struggles with food insecurity every day. In fact, only two years ago Lafayette county had 16.2% of its population subject to food insecurity. Despite these numbers, the city of Oxford has been, and continues, to work together to provide resources to those in need, and overcome this adversity.

An annual tradition at Oxford High School is Charger Christmas. Charger Christmas is a program that is dedicated to donating gifts to students of OHS whose family may not have the resources to get through the holidays. One of the school's supporters of Charger Christmas is OHS guidance counselor Kelsey Dodson.

"The mission of Charger Christmas is to provide families that have fallen on hard times with an opportunity to still give their children a Christmas experience that is joyful," Dodson said. "Charger Christmas goes all out and does their best to love and support families in need."

One of Oxford High School's greatest partners in the fight against food insecurity is Love Packs. Love Packs is a local non-profit organization that works to provide food for Oxford School District students with food on non-school days.

"Love Packs has supported our students and families with food insecurity for years," Dodson said. "Love Packs also ensure that our students have food over each weekend and during the holidays. The school district never turns away a child who asks for food, no matter whether he/she has credit or money in their account."

Additionally, Oxford High also provides fee waivers for students who cannot pay for different types of testing or necessities other than food. Students who do not have the resources to access necessary school technology or tools will also be helped by the high school.

"The students that receive free or reduced lunch receive four ACT fee waivers between their junior

and senior year," Dodson said.

"This waiver also gives them access to the Kaplan prep course for one year which provides students with ACT prep

materials. Students that qualify for free and reduced lunch also get a tech waiver for the tech fees at the beginning of the year."

The local food shelter, Oxford Food Pantry, supplies Oxford families in need with food that they need. The Oxford Food Pantry uses civic organizations, churches, volunteers, and donations to provide resources for locals in need. Cur-

FOOD INSECURITY IS, "WHEN PEOPLE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT AND DON'T KNOW WHERE THEIR NEXT MEAL WILL COME FROM."

12.9% OF AMERICAN CITIZENS FACE FOOD INSECURITY AS OF 2022

1.9% ARE MISSISSIPPIANS 7,410 LIVE IN LAFAYETTE COUNTY

rently, Ann O'Dell serves as the chair of the board for the pantry.

"Our mayor says we serve more people in our community than any other organization," O'Dell said. "It is a big job, and new volunteers are constantly joining us. Their enthusiasm and new ideas keep us fresh and engaged".

The Oxford Food Pantry is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., and is located on Molly Barr Road. The non-profit accepts donations of any non-perishable food items.

There are many known detrimental physical effects of food insecurity such as malnutrition, poor sleep, and muscle weakness. Mental effects can include many types of mental distress and disorders. The effects on children have been known to be much longer-lasting, with depression, anxiety, aggression, and low mental development. With these severe and unfortunate side effects, Oxford bands together to work against this epidemic.

Ruth Beyene, student and leader of Oxford High School's RISE Club expressed her concerns about food insecurity on students. RISE Club is the OHS mental health club who's mission is to reach, impact, support, and empower students.

"Obviously, food insecurity can effect a person's physical health, but it has mental effects, too." Beyene said. "It can effect their brains development, cause them stress, anxiety, depression, and more. We want to help students overcome these obstacles that come with food insecurity"

Oxford High School and the Oxford community have fought against food insecurity for years now, and they continue this fight. Members of the community have banded together to help those in need. Students are encouraged to speak up to counselors when they face food insecurity.

"A lot of students may not voice that they are hungry for fear of how it looks to other people," Dodson said. "We are very private in how we distribute food, so I hope that no student feels like they cannot come to us with food needs or wants."

SOURCES: FEEDINGAMERICA.ORG UNITEDSTATESDEPARTMENTOFAGRICULTURE.GOV