

WAM Report to Donors

The end of the 2016 school year is upon us. With that comes the end of the first official year of a fully implemented WAM (Weekends and More) Program with the Calgary Food Bank supporting ten schools through the Calgary Board of Education.

At the start of the 2014/2015 school year, the WAM program was introduced as a pilot to test the capacity, logistics and effectiveness of supporting hungry kids with weekend food support. Teachers and school staff had identified these children as returning to schools on Monday showing signs of not eating enough over the weekend.. The goals of this pilot were for teachers to not only ensure that food insecure students would receive nourishment where they might not otherwise receive it, but also to engage with students as to circumstances at home, and provide a tool for teachers and school staff to educate parents and families about resources available to them.

The 2015/2016 school year started with WAM expanding from a pilot program to full program status, serving a total of ten schools by the middle of the year. With full implementation, 4,600 WAM bags were distributed to students that had been identified by teachers and school staff as needing food support. These bags contain two items from each food group with the exception of 4 fruits and vegetables. This includes shelf stable milk, tuna, rice, low sodium soups, granola bars, oatmeal/cereal, fruit cups/unsweetened fruit sauce (non-syrup), and dried fruit.

In order to gauge the impact of the program, an anonymous online survey was sent to teachers at participating schools. We are pleased to report that 86% of respondents said that WAM helps kids do better in school either 'quite a bit' or 'a tremendous amount.' The largest improvement noted was in the area of concentration, where 64% of respondents said that receiving WAM hampers has helped improve students' concentration quite a bit, and another 9% said concentration has been improved a tremendous amount. Also of interest was that 73% of respondents stated that participating in the WAM program improved the health of those students either a tremendous amount or quite a bit.

The WAM Program is not only about helping food insecure kids with immediate nutrition support. It is also about helping families connect with help in their community and helping to prevent a family's slide into poverty, or helping to escape poverty. Information about the programs at the Calgary Food Bank is

provided to all participating schools to be passed along to parents of students. Twenty-four families were referred to the Calgary Food Bank from Calgary Board of Education during the school year. With those referrals, Calgary Food Bank was able to help those families to connect with other agencies in their areas to begin to address the root cause of their food insecurity because food insecurity does not occur in a vacuum.

What are teachers and school staff saying about WAM?

“This has been a very beneficial Program for our students. Families are able to feed their kids through the weekend. Many of our students are not wolfing down their lunches as soon as they enter the class as much, and seem happier.”

“Thank you. It's amazing that we can provide kids and their families with nutritious food that helps them better succeed both in and outside of school.”

“Our students and their families are very fortunate to have this program in our school.”

“We love this program! Our families are so grateful.”

On behalf of the students, teachers and school staff that are impacted by WAM, thank you for generously supporting Calgary's students. Because you understand that today's kids are tomorrow's future and that the wellbeing of those kids now is pivotal to their success you have given kids a chance to improve themselves, their schools and their community. You have let them and their families know that help is there and that they are not alone.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.