

Backpack Snacks

2025 marked a record year for our Backpack Snacks Program. Thanks to a generous grant from **Gateway Wellness Foundation** that funded the program throughout the year, **10,678 bags were distributed** to Polk County students.

For 18 years, in partnership with Polk County Schools, Backpack Snacks provides child-friendly, ready-to-eat food each week for students to take home over the weekend. Teachers and counselors help identify students who would benefit from the program, our volunteers pack and deliver the bags each Thursday and schools distribute them to students on Fridays.

Throughout 2025, we averaged **305 Backpack Snacks bags each week**, the highest annual average in the program's history at the time. This continued several years of steady growth, increasing from an average of 288 bags per week in 2023 and 293 in 2024.

As participation grew, we also wanted to better understand how the program was working for the students receiving it. In partnership with Polk County Schools, we surveyed teachers and counselors who work directly with participating students. Their feedback provided invaluable insight into what students prefer eating, how they respond to the different foods included and how Backpack Snacks can continue to better serve them.

The survey helped us look beyond how many bags were distributed and consider what happens once they reach students' hands. Based on that feedback, we adjusted our rotating menus, reducing or replacing less popular foods and adding more of the items students enjoy while continuing to provide enough food to supplement two to three meals over the weekend.

Each Backpack Snacks bag includes two breakfast items, one lunch item, one high-protein snack, two additional snacks and a drink, with four different menus rotating throughout the month.

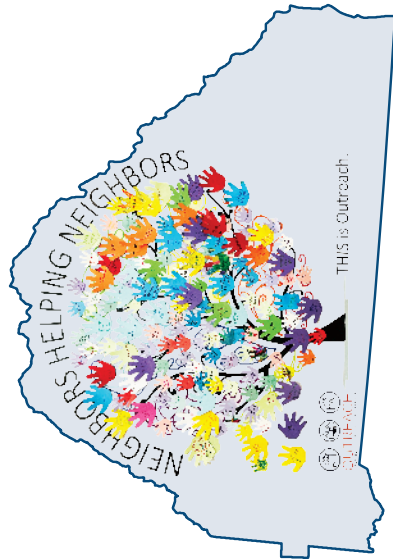
Reaching a record number of students in 2025 would not have been possible without the partnership with Polk County Schools, our volunteers, donors and community partners. Each partner plays an important role in making the program possible. Their continued involvement allows us not only to provide Backpack Snacks each week but also to listen, learn and strengthen the program for the students we serve.



NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
ASHEVILLE NC
PERMIT #575



P.O. Box 834
Columbus, NC 28722



Like us on Facebook
www.tboutreach.org
828.894.2988



ANNUAL REPORT

Serving Polk County Since 1991

This Is Outreach



From Our 2025 Board President:

It has been an honor to serve on the Board of Directors at Outreach. The support of the board, staff, volunteers, and community has been instrumental in providing compassionate and consistent assistance throughout Polk County.

Through Outreach's Food Assistance program, community members of all ages have received healthy and nutritious food offered in a dignified fashion. Outreach's Shelter Assistance program has provided financial support for mortgage and rent payments, as well as utility assistance and home repairs for community members experiencing financial hardship.

With the intention of providing housing options, Outreach continues to construct rental homes for residents who need quality, safe housing at an affordable rate. In 2025, **2** houses were completed providing housing for a total of **10** families.

As in previous years, Outreach participated in the School Supplies Program, which provides a new backpack and grade-appropriate school supplies to students, helping them begin the school year prepared and ready to learn. Teachers also received teacher classroom-kits equipped with essential items for year-round classroom use.

Because the holidays are so special in our community, Outreach assisted with providing Thanksgiving hams and turkeys as well as toys & gift cards to Polk County children and senior citizens at Christmas.

As our community continues to recover from Hurricane Helene, I am humbled by the generous support of all our donors, who continue to allow us to provide compassionate assistance to Polk County residents who do not have the resources to provide for their basic life needs. We are excited for the opportunities that lie ahead which will allow us to continue to carry our mission forward in Polk County.

Amber Griffin



Amber Griffin



2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Amber Griffin

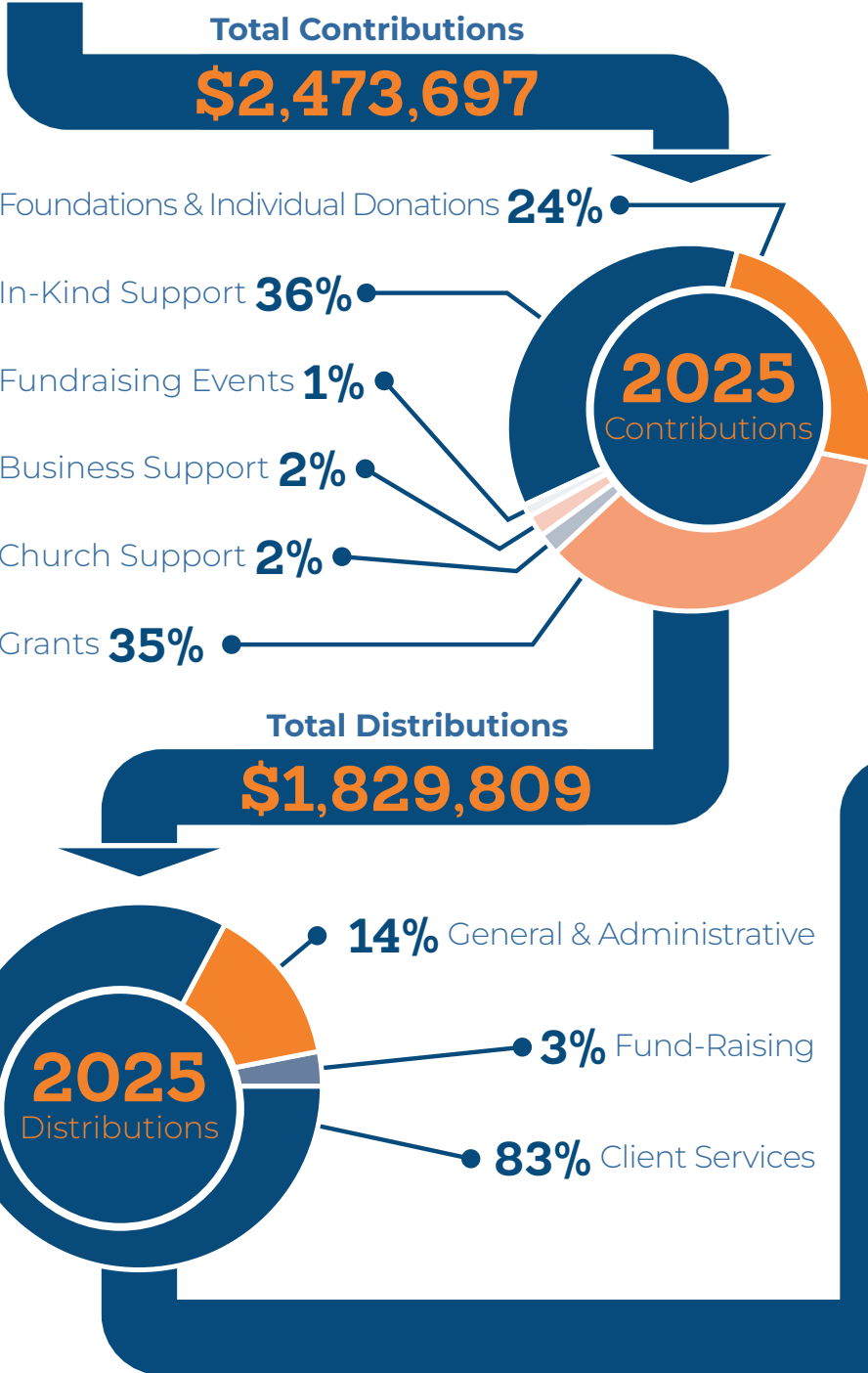
Vice Pres: Allan Purtill

Members at Large: Jeff Carter, Skip Crowe, Mike Karaman, Bob Morrow, Todd Murphy, Angie Pena, Lane Price, Gene Thompson

Treasurer: Stewart Cameron

Secretary: Dave Scherping

2025 Stewardship



Program Impact

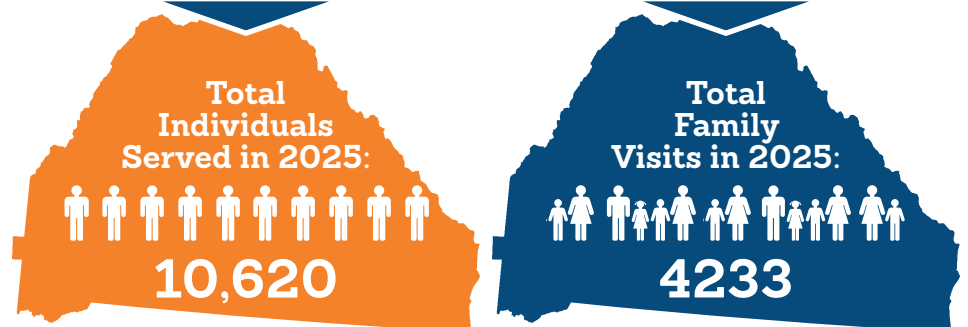
Food Assistance
367 households visited our food pantry for the first time. Neighbors shopped in our client-choice food pantry 3,995 times and selected an ample amount of food to feed their family for 21-24 meals.* 88,783 lbs of fresh produce were provided to families, helping residents in need eat more healthily. 2192 EATS (Edible, Available, Time-Saving) meal kits including TEFAP commodities were distributed to families and individuals.

Financial Assistance
We helped 81 households avoid foreclosure or eviction by assisting with rent / mortgage payments. We assisted 14 families with home repairs. 178 families received utility assistance, or were provided with fuel oil, kerosene, fans, heaters or loads of wood. 117 people received transportation support to help travel to important appointments and run critical errands.

Programs for Children
On 1127 occasions we assisted families with baby supplies including diapers, formula, wipes and other necessary items. 10,678 packs of weekend food helped to alleviate hunger for school children facing food insecurity at home. 591 new backpacks and grade appropriate school supplies were given to qualified school children, ensuring all Polk County students had the tools they needed for academic success. 173 teachers received grade-appropriate classroom kits that supplied teachers with essentials to be used throughout the school year.

Special Programs
\$882,765 worth of in-kind donations including food, household goods and pet food benefited local families. Through our partnership with Meals on Wheels we distributed 1,800 care packages to 150 homebound participants. We served 884 families with Thanksgiving and/or Christmas holiday meals and distributed 817 gifts to qualifying children and senior citizens. 8,428 essential household items deemed excess by retailers were distributed through the food pantry to our neighbors. 1910 pet food provisions were contributed to our neighbor's beloved dogs and cats.

Provided benefits to...



One family or individual may have been served several times during the year. All family members are counted. On average, families visit Outreach 4-5 times a year.

Auditor's Remarks: A recent independent audit of Outreach's finances performed by Prager Metis, CPA PLLC found Outreach to be in a sound financial position. Outreach met every requirement, exceeded every measure, met every compliance standard and received no findings. Complete audited financial statements may be obtained by request.
*The amount of food in a meal scales with the size of a household.

21-Meals: Meeting an Immediate Need

When SNAP (food stamps) benefits were temporarily interrupted in November 2025, Outreach quickly adapted its food assistance services to help local households through the disruption.

For 14 days, Outreach operated a curbside distribution model and provided participating households with food for seven breakfasts, seven lunches and seven dinners. Each household received a Breakfast and Lunch Package along with an EATS Dinner Package containing ingredients, seasonings and step-by-step recipes.

During the response, Outreach served 490 households and 1,389 individuals. Of those households, 106 were visiting Outreach for the first time.

We are grateful for the generous support that made this rapid response possible. With the help of donors, volunteers and community partners, Outreach was able to purchase, prepare and distribute food on a larger scale than usual, responding quickly and providing dependable food assistance during uncertain times.

Outreach's staff and volunteers adjusted their daily responsibilities, schedules and routines to meet the demands of the plan. Their flexibility, dedication and willingness to step in wherever needed were essential to carrying out the response.

The **Polk County Community Foundation** provided significant support for the 21-Meals Plan and our community, alongside contributions from:

Gateway Wellness Foundation • AdventHealth • Members of our community



A Community Effort Support for Every Season

The first day of school and the holidays are moments children remember. Through Outreach's School Supplies and Holiday Programs, community generosity helps turn those seasons into opportunities for confidence, belonging and joy.

A backpack filled with the right supplies helps a student enter the classroom ready to participate. Classroom kits help offset some of the out-of-pocket costs teachers face at the beginning of the school year. Holiday meals and carefully chosen gifts give families room to celebrate without sacrificing another essential need.

Community contributions and volunteer efforts help ease some of the pressures local families experience at the beginning of the school year and during the holidays. **Your support makes these moments possible.**

With Gratitude,
Margot Carter, Executive Director



2025 Grantors

We wish to thank the following organizations for providing critical financial support to help Outreach fulfill its mission.



2025 Gift-In-Kind

We thank these following organizations for providing In-Kind donations of food.

