

The most wonderful time of year...for some
By Heather Ellison, chief strategy officer of The Children's Home

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It is indeed the most wonderful time of the year ... until it isn't.

According to a study called Map the Meal Gap 2019, nearly 140,000 people in Hamilton County alone have what the academic and professional communities call "food insecurities." In Clermont County, there are another 22,440.

The children and families experiencing it call it something else.

Being hungry.

Unfortunately, we know that the actual number may be significantly higher. Some parents or caregivers won't openly admit their family has food insecurities because of the fear they'll lose their children. So, our city's neediest families in low-income and disadvantaged neighborhoods keep the problem hidden behind closed doors. As a parent, I can imagine only one thing worse than hearing a hungry child cry.

And that would be knowing, "There is nothing I can do about it."

This is the harsh reality for many of our neighbors in Greater Cincinnati. More than 40% of families at or below the federal poverty level answer "sometimes" or "often" when surveyed and asked if they worry about running out of food for their children.

We have to do better.

Many charitable organizations are looking for ways to change the equation for some families who need our help. Eighty-five percent of the children and families served by The Children's Home live at or below the federal poverty level.

Already, the agency is supplementing some of the meals kids receive on campus with non-perishable foods they can take home over the weekend. The organization, in a partnership with the Freestore Foodbank, gives some of the most underserved kids in our community over 500 Children's Home "Power Packs" per year.

But, as supplies are limited, the Children's Home is about 700 short every year. There is real meaning behind these numbers. They mean that some of Cincinnati's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children may end their day on campus knowing they may go hungry over the weekend.

The agency is blessed to have a young professionals board who are canvassing their personal networks to help supplement the Power Packs. There is also a new fresh produce bar on campus to offer

nutritious fruit and vegetables to the kids because, for many, their day with us is the only chance they have to eat healthy.

For some, it's the only chance they have to eat at all.

If you'd like to get involved, visit The Children's Home's website to learn how or call 513-272-2800. Cincinnati has a rich tradition of neighbors helping one another.

Let's never tell another child, "I can't help you."

I hope you'll join us in ensuring it is indeed the most wonderful time of the year.

Heather Ellison is the chief strategy officer of The Children's Home.