

The West Texas Food Bank started 35 years ago when a group of concerned individuals from Odessa saw a problem with hunger in the community and took the initiative to be a part of the change that they wanted to see in our world. In their first year, the West Texas Food Bank distributed more than 200,000 pounds of food to 40 Partnering Agencies. Currently, the agency serves not only Ector and Midland Counties but also other rural communities across 19 counties, covering approximately 34,000 square miles of West Texas. The mobile food bank goes out to these rural communities and distributes food, benefiting the community members who would not normally have access to resources due to location or transportation.

The Food Bank is a non-profit, non-governmental agency that depends on generous monetary donations from individuals, the community and local businesses' help. These donators help support the cost of daily operation and the cost of food products that the agency purchases at wholesale prices. Besides monetary donations, the agency also benefits from food drives in the community and through their membership with Feeding America. Community members spend countless hours where they volunteer to pack food boxes and help distribute them to the less fortunate members of our society. For my community service hours at the Food Bank, I also helped pack boxes that will later be distributed. Boxes included canned goods, peanut butter, noodles and macaroni and cheese. This was a humbling experience for me. Being raised by a single mom and having five daughters myself, I thought for

sure that I knew exactly what it meant to struggle. This experience opened my eyes to a new world of struggle, hunger, which is fortunately not a problem I have ever had to endure. Once completing my first 2 volunteer hours, I called my mom and told her that they put items that I normally wouldn't think of utilizing together in the boxes and asked her "What is someone supposed to do with canned salmon, apple sauce, peanut butter and noodles? Who eats that?" And in all my mom's wisdom she said, "I guess it depends on how hungry you are or how desperate you are to feed your kids." When I thought about what she had said after hanging up, I realized that though I have faced many struggles as a child and as an adult, I have NEVER wondered where my next meal will come from. I have never wondered how my kids would eat. As a parent, I can't imagine not knowing how or when my kids will be able to eat their next meal. When I returned to do my next two-hour shift, I saw those random goods a little differently and was proud that I was able to be a part and help with providing a basic need for someone else.

Learning about the difference that the West Texas Food Bank is making in my community was interesting and I am glad that I picked an agency local to me. I have lived in Midland for almost 40 years and though I frequently participated in canned food drives while in school, I guess I never really considered how great the need was in this area. Thankfully a small group of concerned West Texans saw a problem bigger than themselves and sought out a way to change things for people in this area. I have no doubt that the

West Texas Food Bank will continue to do their part to eliminate hunger in our area. No one should have to worry about if or when they will be able to eat.