

Back to School Backpacks: Resource Packet



The GO Initiative Gives Opportunities for you and your parish to Gain Ownership of creating and sustaining local service initiatives.

The GO process has three key phases: Activation, Formation and Ownership. The Back to School Backpack Program is a vital step in the Activation phase: Meaningful service opportunities that expose you to the needs of your community and engage you in responding to them.



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Suggested Packing List

*This is a list of supplies that would be useful for any student to own.
Your group can make modifications to this list and even make your own additions!*

- 2 Notebooks
- 4 Folders
- A Pencil Case
- 5 Pencils
- 5 Pens
- 3 Highlighters
- 2 Large Erasers
- 5 Pencil Cap Erasers
- 10 Pack of Crayons
- 10 Pack Colored Pencils
- 1 pair of Small Scissors
- A Pencil Sharpener
- 2 Glue Sticks
- An 8-Inch Ruler
- Additional Items:
 - Handwritten note cards in each backpack
 - Stickers or Patches (If you are able to get a list of the children who will receive these backpacks and their likes, you can even include personalized stickers/patches)
 - When you or your group distributes the backpacks, ask the school or organization if you can bring other donations (snacks for classrooms, gift cards to local restaurants, book covers, summer reading books, etc.)

Packing Party and Distribution Event

As you set-up your summer initiative, there are many opportunities to connect people and be creative. Two ways to do this are through a Packing Party and a Distribution Event!

A Packing Party is an opportunity for the whole parish to be involved in the preparation of the backpacks. A Distribution Event could connect your parish more closely with the people you are serving with this Initiative.

Here are some things to consider when planning.

PACKING PARTY:

- Designate and advertise a day for your packing party.
- Gather people together who will participate.
- Plan to have food and drinks there.
- Different groups in your parish can make and contribute items (i.e. Sunday school classes can write letters, Teens can make friendship bracelets or lanyards).

DISTRIBUTION EVENT:

- Coordinate an event at the school or organization to distribute backpacks, or invite the children to your parish. FOCUS will help get the date and details set for this.
- Set up a “Pop-up Shop” of backpacks and supplies for children to choose from.
- Have fun and be creative! Think of some other supplies or snacks that you can distribute. Plan some activities that you enjoy with the children.

How Can I Raise Funds from my community for the Backpacks?

If you plan on engaging your parish or group in giving towards the Summer Local Initiative, there are various ways to do this. One great option is to have individuals or families donate the cost of one or more backpacks or backpacks + supply kits, depending on what you ordered. All donations towards your order should please be collected locally and donated in one lump sum to FOCUS NA.

How Can I Pay the balance for the Backpacks My Parish Ordered?

As we indicated above, your parish can contribute the full amount for your backpacks when you initially place your order. If you opt to start with a small deposit, you can contribute the rest of the funds by September 1st.

Remember that your parish should gather all of the funds and then contribute to FOCUS.

Individuals should not give directly to FOCUS as part of their parish's participation in the Summer Local Initiative.

Your parish can either pay the balance of your backpacks [via this link](#), or you can mail your donation to:

FOCUS NORTH AMERICA

Back to School Backpacks

PO BOX 645039

PITTSBURGH, PA 15264-5039

memo line: your parish or group name

Briefing and Debriefing Groups for Events

A service project becomes a ministry to everyone involved when there is proper briefing and debriefing for the volunteers. Both setting the tone and reflecting on the work are necessary parts of the ministry. It is important for the group to know how to approach the work, and also for the group to process their experience.

BRIEFING should be full of joy and excitement, and should accomplish the following things:

- **Who will they be serving?** *Share the mission statement or other relevant information that will help them to get to know the school or organization.*
- **What will the group be doing?** *Prepare the volunteers very well for their roles and responsibilities.*
- **How should they approach the work?** *Share these helpful tips with your volunteers. It's important to have a common approach to serving the people you will meet.*

Let them know that it is completely normal and expected that they may feel uncomfortable.

- In these moments, you have an opportunity to recognize that God is working through you and that He will help you to do what He has given you to do at that moment with that person. You are not alone! ☺

Look approachable and happy.

- The most important part of our interactions with people is that they feel the love of Christ. A smile goes a long way! Always greet people and ask their name.

Use proper Body Language.

- If the person you are talking to is on the floor, crouch down and be level with them. If they are sitting, sit with them...standing, stand with them. Being at their level will also allow you to keep eye contact, which is also vital to connecting with a person. You want to meet them where they are, so your body language should convey that.

Practice active listening.

- Beyond the need for food and resources is the need for human interaction, love, attention, and fellowship. If there is an opportunity to chat, allow the conversation to be about them. Demonstrate that you care about the experience of the person you're talking with.

See Christ in every person you encounter!

- Point out the beautiful qualities that you see in others...your fellow volunteers and the people you are serving.

DEBRIEFING should be very informal and comfortable. It is essentially a time for reflection and processing with those that have just had a shared and formative experience. Sitting in a circle is best.

Based on the group and the work, all of the following questions may not apply. Some may be addressed without the leader of the debriefing posing the question. The leader of the debrief should be identified before the project so that they can keep their eyes open during the project for what may need to be debriefed.

The leader should also discern the group and their needs during the debriefing process. The first 3 questions will generate conversation, while the last 3 should be where the conversation is guided towards. This is both strategic and organic, which is why choosing a capable leader for the debriefing is important.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

- How would the volunteers describe their experience in simple one word answers?
- What did they see and hear that stood out to them?
- Who did they meet that they will remember?

- How was it different than they expected? What surprised them?
- What happens now? What more can be done? What is their place in the solution?
- What did they gain from this experience that they can apply to their daily life?

DEBRIEFING PRAYER

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.
And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in
the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done to bring justice and kindness to all our
children and the poor. Amen.

How to Create a Needs Assessment

A community needs assessment identifies the needs of children, adults, and families and demonstrates the gaps that exist between the current and desired outcome. The assessment focuses on the poverty in the community as well as the capabilities of the community. The needs assessment can help guide your group's service initiative and future work

How to start researching:

- Use any search engine to start researching the needs of your city
- When researching, the assessment should be current and relevant topics.
- Read recent articles (2019-present) published in the city
 - If you would like to know more information in an article, email the writer of the article, if possible
- When discussing more general information regarding the city, the information should be dated 2019-present.
- Look for information that is consistent in multiple articles
- Try different combinations of words when you're searching (People experiencing homelessness, the homeless population in *city*, poverty population, poverty percentage, etc.)
- Find the thing that isn't happening by talking to the people who are doing what is needed!
- History and relevant personal stories can be added to the research:
 - What is the history of the issue in the city? Take a look back and look for some important dates and events regarding the issue.
 - Research some current stories for news articles. What are the names and experiences of people in the city related to this issue?

Research these different issues/causes:

- **Homelessness** (youth, veterans, adults, families)
 - What are the local shelters doing to serve the homeless and those living in poverty? How can we help?
- **Hunger** (families, children...)
 - Statistics about hunger in the city.
 - What are some statistics regarding food insecurity?
- **Working Poor Families** (clothing drive, food drive...)
 - What are the local shelters doing to serve families living in poverty? How can we help?
 - How is the economy in the community shifting? What can we do to help people who are unemployed?
- **Abuse** (child or domestic)
 - What are domestic hotlines doing to address recent issues?
- **Mental Health Awareness** (social isolation, lack of community, loneliness...)
 - How has people's mental health been affected due to COVID-19? How can we bring awareness and support? What are hotlines doing? Loneliness?

- **Domestic Disaster Relief** (earthquake, hurricane, tornado, fires, destruction of property...)
 - Have any domestic disasters occurred in the community? How can we help with relief?
- **Inequality** (racial, gender, socioeconomic...)
 - What issues have surfaced or become worse due to COVID-19? How are we able to help?
 - Have there been protests in the city supporting these issues? How have those affected the community?
- **Elderly** (nursing homes, elderly living alone...)
 - How has COVID affected those living in isolation or nursing homes? How can we serve them safely? What have been the after-effects?
- **Prison Ministry** (writing letters, support of families of prisoners...)
 - What needs or issues have surfaced for those in prison? How can we support them and their families? OCPM?

Needs Assessment Template:

Use the following template to lay out your research on 5 main topics: Education, Economy, Social, Health, and Environment. *Click here for the [Needs Assessment Template](#)*

Examples: The following are examples of Needs Assessment YES Staff have created for trips in the past.

- [Louisville Needs Assessment 2020](#)
- [Twin Cities Needs Assessment 2021](#) (an example of researching and focusing on certain issues in your city)
- [DMV Needs Assessment 2021](#)

U.S Statistics on Childhood Poverty

Our childhood poverty rate is higher than other developed nations. Children living in poverty in the U.S. may be challenged by health issues, exposure to violence and drug use, and have difficulty at home and school.

Read these statistics together as you and your community prepare to supply children with resources to support their education with the Back to School Backpacks summer initiative:

- 1 in 6 children live in poverty compared to 1 in 8 adults. 11.9 million children live in poverty in the U.S.
- Child poverty rates were declining before the COVID-19 pandemic. The official rate dipped to 14% in 2019 from 21% five years earlier. It shot back up to 16% in 2020, when the pandemic compounded economic hardships for many families.
- The poverty line for a family of 4 is \$26K – half the income needed for basic financial security.
- Children in families below the poverty line are more likely to lack “food security,” as well as have diets that are deficient in important nutrients. Rates of several chronic health conditions, such as asthma, are higher among poor children. They are less likely to receive preventive medical and dental care
- In 2017, 40 million people struggled with hunger in the United States.
- By third grade, children who had been food insecure in kindergarten saw a 13% drop in their reading & math test scores compared to food-secure peers
- In 2021, about 77 million children lived in the U.S. About 4 million children did not have health coverage.
- Children living in poverty have a higher rate of absences from school
- Students from low-income families are 7 times more likely to drop out of school than other students.