



Township of Monroe

County of Middlesex

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Monroe's Empty Bowls Project Filling Hearts and Food Pantries Across the Region

MONROE - Hunger is not only a universal struggle, but one of the most relatable.

More than six years ago, the Empty Bowls Project, an international initiative to fight hunger, struck an immediate chord with Brookside Elementary School teacher, Theresa Anthony, as she sought a service project that would instill empathy and compassion among her fifth-grade students.

The Empty Bowls Project has since proven itself an extraordinary teaching tool for many of the Township's school children. Monroe's youth have leverage the Project's mission and program, which involves auctioning-off handmade glazed and decorated ceramic bowls, to raise more than \$16,000 for area food pantries over the past five years.

The culminating event for this local effort is fast approaching on June 6, during a silent auction, soup dinner and bread sale at the Township's senior center.

"This year we've added a pantry," Anthony said, naming recipients at Monroe Township's Food Pantry, Deacon's Food Pantry in Jamesburg, Lutherans Feeding Friends in Asbury Park, Rise Food Pantry in Hightstown, Ginny's Pantry in Hamilton and new to the roster, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. "It's important for students to know at 10 or 11, they may not be able to change the world; but they can certainly make a difference."

Thus far, the school-year-long endeavor has enlisted the help of students and parents for an awareness campaign and the glazing and decoration of bowls. It's also sparked a now three-year-spanning partnership with the Township's senior center, where students pair with senior members during painting sessions to liven up the ceramic bowls that will be up for auction.

"It's an intergenerational activity to support the efforts of these fifth graders, who are very passionate about helping the community," said Bonnie Leibowitz, director of Monroe's senior center and also, a lead organizer for the Township's food pantry. "Our pantry services some 70 families during monthly distributions and this Project and these students have become an important component to that operation."

In recent years, a number of helping hands have come to the students' aid in the form of grants, donations and sponsorships and from sources like the Monroe Township Education Association, the Barclay Brook-Brookside Parent Teacher Association and even The Gardens at Monroe and The Chelsea at Forsgate.

"If they're starting this at 11, imagine what they can do when they're 25?" Leibowitz said of the students. "In the bigger scheme, they are learning all about the needs of others, to appreciate what they have and how to be better citizens."

To register with a \$10 donation for Monroe's Empty Bowls Auction, which will include a performance by a middle school chamber chorus group, a soup dinner and dessert, contact a Senior Center representative on or before June 4 at 609-448-7140.

All media inquiries may be directed to the Monroe Township's Public Information Officer Maria Prato at 732-521-4400 or mprato@monroetwp.com.