



Food Brings Hope Expands to Deltona School

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DELTONA -- Food Brings Hope, a program that assists homeless and economically disadvantaged students at six East Volusia schools, has expanded to the west side of the county with a new project at Deltona High School.

"We believe the need for the program is as great, if not greater on the west side of the county," said Forough Hosseini, founder/chairwoman of Food Brings Hope and senior vice president of ICI Homes in Daytona Beach.

Pam Woods, homeless liaison for Volusia County schools, couldn't agree more. Woods said there are more gaps in services available to homeless and needy students and their families in West Volusia than on the east side of the county.



Spruce Creek High School students gather groceries for the Food Brings Hope at Turie T. Smalls Elementary School in Daytona Beach in December. The program is expanding to Deltona High School.

District figures show 398 of the county's 2,016 homeless students are enrolled in elementary through high schools in Deltona and DeBary, Woods said. Twenty-five of them attend Deltona High, where 57.4 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on family income -- just about the county average.

Woods hopes the expansion of Food Brings Hope -- which provides after-school tutoring, nutrition and money management information, visits to area colleges and field trips to sports and cultural events along with food -- will help fill those gaps.

Hosseini shares that vision. "Deltona (High) is just the beginning," she said. "The need is great. We need to expand thoughtfully and go to schools where the principals want to work with us." The Pierson area is already being considered, she said.

Hosseini started Food Brings Hope in 2007 after her children told her about classmates who were homeless. It operates as a donor advised fund of the Community Foundation of Volusia & Flagler Counties, a division of the area United Way.

A \$5,000 donation from Ed Lacy, a retired car dealership owner from DeLand, made the West Volusia expansion possible, Hosseini said.

Woods said 11 students are already involved in the voluntary Food Brings Hope program at Deltona High. They meet Wednesday afternoons after school and attended an Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University basketball game this month with other Food Brings Hope participants. They plan to take part in a Jan. 31 meeting where seniors can learn more about Daytona State College programs.

Some Southwest Volusia churches and organizations are interested in working with homeless youths in the area, Woods said, and she hopes they can join forces with Food Brings Hope to provide support for Deltona High students.

"The end goal is they successfully complete high school. We want to make sure we have things in place to help them do that," Woods said.