

Saturday Community Kitchen and Hunger & Homelessness Outreach, Programs, & Education (HHOPE)

*by Susie Williams, Bonner Scholars Program Senior Intern and
Laurie Chandler, Bonner Scholars Coordinator*

Purpose

- Offers a weekend meal to the hungry in neighboring communities.
- Fosters student collaboration in a structured organization dedicated to combating poverty through service, education, and activism.

Background

Saturday Community Kitchen

In August 2000, a Bonner Scholar who also served as a resident assistant was seeking service projects that would involve students in the local community. Because meals were only available to the poor during weekdays at lunch, the student saw a need for a Saturday community kitchen and organized a onetime Saturday meal.

Students' growing interest of students in the issues of hunger and homelessness, the success of the kitchen, and the realization that the onetime event only briefly touched the needs of the community inspired Bonner Scholars and other student leaders to consider how to address the need for a weekly Saturday community kitchen.

For over a year, students worked with Rome Urban Ministries and several other faith congregations to identify how and where the hungry could be fed on Saturdays.

Students turned to Trinity United Methodist Church, and in February 2002 the community kitchen finally found its permanent home there.

HHOPE

To support the community kitchen, students decided to create a structured student organization to combat hunger and homelessness. They established HHOPE (Hunger & Homelessness Outreach, Programs, & Education) in spring 2002. HHOPE strives to educate the Berry and Rome/Floyd County communities about hunger and homelessness on local, state, national, and international levels and provide direct support for the operation of the community kitchen. Membership includes Berry College students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

HHOPE hosts activities during Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Month, including a "Faces of Homelessness" panel of guests with a variety of perspectives on the issue, organizes a hunger banquet fund-raiser as well as reflection meetings for Bonners on hunger and homelessness, and provides literature for campus and community members.

How It Works

Saturday Community Kitchen

Each Friday, students work with the College's food services division to salvage food from campus for the next day's community kitchen. Students manage the kitchen and actively recruit volunteers from the campus community. Various religious organizations, dormitories, athletic teams, and faculty groups have assisted at the kitchen.

HHOPE

The organization has three committees dedicated to service, education, and activism. The service committee provides workers for the community kitchen and organizes clothing and canned-food drives. The education committee utilizes resources from the National Coalition Against Hunger and Homelessness to organize on-campus and community lectures. For example, HHOPE hosts the "Faces of Homelessness" panel and travels to local middle schools to educate youth about hunger and homelessness issues in the area. The activism group is involved in letter-writing campaigns and initiatives to affect policy decisions in the political arena.

Each committee meets weekly to plan and discuss its role in achieving the desired outcome on campus and in the community. The entire organization meets monthly to discuss progress. The organization's structure and operation is outlined in a constitution.

Bonner Scholars

Bonner Scholars make up half of the officers of HHOPE. They work alongside the college volunteer services office to coordinate volunteers at the kitchen each week. HHOPE's Bonner officers are present every Saturday to serve as supervisors for the visiting organizations. There are usually about three to four Bonner Scholars present to delegate and supervise. Most of the volunteers each week are College students from performance, athletic, and academic organizations.

Transportation

Trinity United Methodist Church is located just five miles from the college's campus. Volunteers are driven to the church in the Bonner program's vans. Some students use their own transportation.

Recruitment

HHOPE recruits underclassmen, especially freshmen, in the summer and early fall. During the fall semester, the existing leadership observes members and participants and determines which students possess the leadership qualities and the interest needed to manage the program. These underclassmen assume minor responsibilities over the spring semester to prepare them to take on larger roles over the next few years. This insures continuity once the upperclassmen leave.

What Makes The Project Unique

The kitchen offers all participants the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from one another while serving the needs of the region's poor.

As students partner with organizations on and off campus, they establish valuable relationships and help to insure the sustainability of the Saturday Community Kitchen.

HHOPE's mission of service, education, and activism provides prospects for change on local, state, national, and international levels regarding hunger and homelessness. HHOPE's efforts not only provide immediate assistance to the poor but also raise students' awareness of the local community.

Benefits

One hundred people are served a warm meal every weekend for 52 weeks a year.

Students improve their organizing and management skills and become more aware of the importance of the relationship-building and teamwork necessary to address social problems.

HHOPE's mission to better the community through education ultimately paves the way for future change and the eradication of hunger and homelessness locally and worldwide.

Timeline

The establishment of the Saturday Community Kitchen and the subsequent creation of HHOPE took two years. When beginning a community kitchen, student organizers must commit time for planning, relationship-building, and troubleshooting. It is also crucial to involve community members.

Resources And Partners

Berry College

- The Bonner Scholars Program provides administrative support and financial assistance through the Bonner Scholars Program Community Fund. Other funding comes from student fund-raisers, various campus organizations, and individual donations.
- Volunteer Services, a division of the chaplain's office, serves as the liaison between the college community and the local community.
- Berry College Food Services participates in a food salvage program that provides food for Saturday meals.
- The administration office provides institutional support.

Rome Urban Ministries

- This Bonner Scholars Program community partner operates a community kitchen Monday through Friday, helps manage the Saturday kitchen, and provides food.

Trinity United Methodist Church

- The church offers equipment and physical space to prepare and serve food.

Overcoming Challenges

When HHOPE was first started, it was difficult to recruit volunteers. New HHOPE members first networked with peers, especially underclassmen, to spark interest in the issue. Students did not perceive hunger and homelessness as pressing issues in the surrounding area.

Evidence of Success

The number of on-campus organizations and individuals who volunteer has increased significantly. Organizations that want to volunteer at the kitchen sometimes have to wait until the next semester because of the program's popularity.

The number of community members fed each Saturday has grown from 30 to 40 in the first few months to almost 100.

How to Make it Grow

HHOPE's strategy for sustaining the kitchen is to educate the greater community about hunger and homelessness issues.

HHOPE members are currently establishing leadership roles for underclassmen in order to foster the growth of students who will be the future managers of the kitchen.