

The Women behind Feeding Empty Little Tum mies

Kim Bailey has been living in Manatee County with her family for over 20 years and has dedicated much of her time to community involvement helping children. Kim stated, "I was either helping kids at church raise funds for mission trips or serving on committees for students going to National FFA Convention." While attending a family reunion out of state, Kim received a phone call from a friend urging her to meet with an amazing lady named Jane Evers. Mrs. Evers is the foundress of a non-profit organization called Feeding Empty Little Tum mies (FELT) in 2010 that she operated from her dining room table whose mission was providing meals to food-deprived children at three schools in Manatee.



Jane Evers. Mrs. Evers is the foundress of a non-profit organization called Feeding Empty Little Tum mies (FELT)



Kim Bailey, FELT

Kim met Mrs. Evers in October 2013 and kindly remembers her as a “small-statured woman with both a large heart and personality.” Mrs. Evers was losing her battle against cancer and needed a caring individual that would oversee FELT and continue the undertaking of providing meals for homeless students.

Kim began learning about FELT from Ms. Evers and confessed to being unsure if she was “right for the job” to run the charity, however, “with the realization of how many hungry kids lived within my community and Mrs. Evers commitment, I knew I had to find some way to help!” Sadly, Mrs. Ever passed away on December 31, 2013. Fortunately, Kim was able to continue her predecessor’s goals for FELT.

Feeding Empty Little Tummies has partnered with Manatee School District to identify food-insecure students and are placed in a program that provides them with meals for the duration of the weekend. There are an estimated 2,200 registered homeless students, which does not include the fluctuating number of food insecure students. At the FELT warehouse located in Palmetto, two employees and up to 70 volunteers are tasked with filling backpacks with meals and delivering them to designated schools. Kim explained, “Each student in the FELT program is supplied with a backpack containing two breakfasts,

lunches, dinners, and snacks of shelf-life food at the end of the school week because of the possibility of these children not having access to refrigeration due to being homeless, staying in hotels, or living with extended family members.”



FELT’s mission is to ensure there isn’t a single hungry child in the community and Kim noted “Students in Manatee County are blessed with free breakfast and lunch, but once they leave school on Friday afternoons, they could face more than 63 hours without nutrition on the weekends.” Students that are provided with weekend meals return to school on Monday morning “vibrant and ready to learn”.

FELT receives funding from grants, private donations, and coordinates with Sysco West Coast-Wholesale Restaurant Food Supplies to order food in bulk. Kim stated, “we are good stewards of the money and donations given to FELT, because students deserve the comfort of an honest organization to provide them with nutritious meals.” FELT is diligent about using social media and their website to network and has worked with community leaders, volunteers, and the Manatee Chamber of Commerce for fundraising and food drives. During the last week of 2021 school year, FELT provided 966 students with 6 meals each.



The COVID-19 pandemic caused many non-profits, public, and private sector to make many adjustments to fulfill the needs of the community. FELT suspended their operations for a week at the beginning of the pandemic and schools closed for the remainder of the school year, Kim stated "FELT immediately started to receive several phone calls from concerned principals and teachers asking us to provide them with the meal filled backpacks they would personally deliver to hungry students." Due to privacy reasons, FELT cannot have access to students' addresses, but educators do, so FELT made changes in their program to continuing providing 300 students a week with meals. Sysco West Coast faced the problem of perishable items and produce spoiling because of restaurant shutdowns and to avoid wasting potential meals and donated the food to FELT, which leads the organization to also become a food bank.

Combined with FELT inventory and food supplied by Sysco, Kim highlighted “FELTs open their doors as a food pantry for 2 weekends and were able to feed 3500 families in our community!”



Jane Evers dream of Feeding Empty Little Tummys began on a dining room table in 2010 providing a food program for three schools, and under Kim Bailey by 2021, has evolved into providing 350,000 meals annually to students in any of Manatee's schools, a food bank, and feeding families.

If you would like to volunteer, donate, or learn more about FELT, please visit their website <https://feltinc.org/>, or email FELT at info@feltinc.org.

FELT is also hosting a golf tournament on Saturday, October 16th honoring Patricia Snyder if readers are interested to sign up.