

West Virginia Youth Lend a Helping Hand to Their Community

West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle has not escaped hardships as a result of the struggling economy and increase in poverty throughout the United States.

In 2010, the Eastern Panhandle Health and Human Services Collaborative (HHSC) presented a 'Point of Time Study,' revealing an overall increase in the number of homeless people living in Morgan, Jefferson and Berkeley Counties. A spike from 212 to 362 homeless individuals in the past year, and a recorded 52 unsheltered individuals, up from seven the year before, shows the Eastern Panhandle needs more basic necessities, as well as community outreach.

The HHSC has reported an 82 percent caseload increase in their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (formerly called food stamps), as well as increases in their caseload for Medicaid.

This holiday season, the Outdoor Education Center of For Love of Children's Leaders In Action students have taken the initiative to do their part in helping their hungry and impoverished community members. Leaders In Action students set a goal to have 75 cans provided to a local food bank four weeks ago. The students, now having everything collected, and having sorted their inventory, reported that between the OEC staff and the LIA students, they have collected more than 117 cans and numerous other nonperishable goods to donate to Jefferson Counties Community Ministries.

The cans and food will be delivered this week in a countywide collaboration through Leadership Jefferson, a leadership program for current and future community leaders through the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce. The hope is to aid the Eastern Panhandle's community effort, bringing awareness and nourishment to those who may be struggling during difficult economic times.

Our students work hard to empower and inspire our community and are learning new ways to improve the well-being of others. LIA students are not only learning how to help people, but learning vital life skills to advance in their ever-changing world.