

Read 'n' Feed at Pendleton Library

By Lynn Hobbs, Director, Pendleton Community Public Library, Pendleton, IN

Read 'n' Feed is a unique combination of a bookmobile and mobile food pantry. We go out every week, and make three stops. The stops last about 45 minutes, and during that time, patrons are invited to take non-perishable food items, bread, and produce. They are also welcome to check out library materials and request items for us to bring out the next week. During the growing season, the Pendleton Community Garden (also a library project) provides fresh, locally-grown produce to Read 'n' Feed. Our patrons are getting the freshest produce ever!



We've been running Read 'n' Feed for nearly ten years. Over that time, we've been fortunate to have the financial support of the United Way, South Madison Community Foundation, the Township Trustees, Needler's Fresh Market, Kroger, and our local farmers' market. We also have many generous private funders. No tax dollars have ever gone towards Read 'n' Feed. It is 100% funded through grants and donations.

There are a few things that I really love about Read 'n' Feed. There is no overhead and no middleman. I think that this has really positioned us in a unique way, and has helped our community get behind what we are doing. If you come in to donate a can of food, it goes directly onto the trailer and into the hands of a local person who needs it. Another benefit of Read 'n' Feed is that it has enabled us to employ an individual with special needs. He stocks the trailer, and is 100% a member of our staff! Read 'n' Feed has given him the opportunity to be a part of the work force. Also, the trailer is driven by a township trustee who is great at connecting our patrons with local supports.

Read 'n' Feed is the only food pantry in Pendleton. If people cannot make it to the trailer stop, we welcome them to the library where they can visit the pantry to get food for the week. Local food drives always give their donations to the library. We benefit from the post office's Stamp Out Hunger, the Boy Scouts' Scouting for Food, and drives held at the school. In December, our Food for Fitness program stocks the pantry with hundreds of items.



For promotional purposes, we do occasional pop-up events. In the winter, we passed out food, blankets, hats, gloves, etc. And very recently, we distributed supplies for tornado clean-up. We had a tornado here on Memorial Day! Lots of people needed gloves, shovels, rakes, cleaning supplies, and food since their food spoiled. We distributed all of those items. And still...no library money at all went towards any of this! Donors came to us because they know what Read 'n' Feed does, and it was the perfect fit.

Every Thanksgiving, we provide turkeys. And, every Christmas we pass out Letters to Santa to the kids who use Read 'n' Feed. This past year the library staff decided to sponsor the kids, and every single item on their lists was purchased by a staff member or a friend of a staff member. So, you can see that we really believe in it. We have established genuine relationships with our patrons on Read 'n' Feed. We know their struggles, and we want Read 'n' Feed to be a positive and consistent service they can count on. We treat every single patron with respect. We don't want to see anybody's driver's license, SNAP benefits card, or anything like that. If you are on the trailer taking food, we assume you need it. No questions asked.

Read 'n' Feed is so much more than a food pantry and bookmobile, both for us and for our patrons.