

Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning

Volume 13

Article 4

January 2016

Compassion Leads to the Creation of the Backpack Program in Kentucky--RESEARCH

Katrina Sexton

Eastern Kentucky University

Sherwood Thompson

Eastern Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/kjectl>

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sexton, Katrina and Thompson, Sherwood (2016) "Compassion Leads to the Creation of the Backpack Program in Kentucky--RESEARCH," *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning*: Vol. 13 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/kjectl/vol13/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning by an authorized editor of Encompass. For more information, please contact Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu.

Compassion Leads to the Creation of the Backpack Program in Kentucky *RESEARCH*

Katrina Sexton, Eastern Kentucky University
Sherwood Thompson, Eastern Kentucky University

Abstract

Children all over the United States currently endure food insecurity, which presents significant issues for their academic performance and general quality of life. This paper examines how the generosity of compassionate individuals and agencies helps to improve the wellbeing and self-motivation of students who go without food. To this end, we review the literature on compassion, particularly how it is theoretically described by positive organizational scholarship (POS). We also review some of the major programs and agencies that have arisen in recent decades to counter the problem of food insecurity and its related concerns—programs such as the Backpack Food program, which exists in many rural and urban cities across the United States. We specifically consider the case of Kentucky, which utilizes backpack programs to aid starving children and families. It appears that compassion can promote higher self-esteem among students and thereby help counter low academic achievement. Ultimately, addressing hunger highly correlates with academic performance and achievement.

Keywords: academic achievement, food programs, malnutrition, compassion, backpack program, cognitive development, body weight

Introduction

Educators across the United States are acquainted with the buzz phrase ‘closing the achievement gap.’ They discuss how better teacher quality, increased classroom technology, a longer school year, and more assessment testing will fill the achievement gap between average and high achieving students. What is missing from this discussion is the role compassion plays in the process of learning, especially for those students from poor families who suffer from food scarcity. After all, hunger highly correlates with academic performance and achievement.

This paper examines how compassion and the generosity of compassionate individuals and agencies help to improve the wellbeing and self-motivation of students who go without food. We posit that children who are hungry are not able to compete well in the classroom. We realize that a hungry family does not concentrate on assisting children in the home with their school assignments. And we found that without proper nutrition, children are not as active in classroom activities. We found that those hungry children who improved their

achievement in school were the ones who were recipients of food programs that assisted them and their families in receiving much-needed nutritious foods.

We noticed that one such program is called the Backpack Food Program, and it exists in many rural and urban cities across the United States. These Backpack Food programs have many names, however, the objective of the programs are all the same—to get needed food to hungry children and their families. Kentucky is one of the states that has backpack programs that come to the aid of starving children and families. This show of compassion seems to promote higher self-esteem among students and thus, students with low achievement demonstrate improvements in their overall academic success.

This paper examines the literature about the positive organizational scholarship (POS) trait of compassion, and the impact that the specific compassionate act of providing food has on families through backpack for food programs. A secondary purpose of this study is to examine how the concept of compassion applies to a specific organization and the services it provides.

In the following, we review the literature regarding compassion, childhood hunger, and supplemental food assistance programs. We then discuss the particular case of Kentucky, describing the efforts by local and state agencies address child hunger in regional school districts. To showcase the impact of compassionate leadership in an organizational setting, we present the case of one individual service coordinator at a Kentucky school.

Literature Review

Compassion is often defined as one individual becoming aware of the suffering of another individual, which spurs feelings of empathy or concern, and ultimately a response or call to action (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2011). However, compassion is not limited to a one-to-one experience. Rather, compassion can become institutionalized. Organizational compassion may start with the individual experience, but becomes a social experience among members of an organization, leading to a collective acknowledgement, feelings of concern, and ultimately a coordinated response (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius et al., 2011).

Although given nominal attention by the literature, compassion is noted as an intrinsic and fundamental part of human response occurring in the face of human suffering (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius et al., 2011). Dating back centuries, the concept of compassion is deeply rooted in religion and philosophical beliefs, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius et al., 2011). The concept of compassion has evolved from being an emotional experience or trait into a three-step process which can be found in organizations and the individuals who comprise them (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius et al., 2011).

Dutton and Workman (2011) suggest that the meaning of being a compassionate scholar is represented as a “generative force” in which people engage in work in “a more open-hearted way,” demonstrated when humans live in a manner that models the ideals and actions associated with compassion (p. 2). By being a compassionate scholar, people are opening themselves up to the vulnerabilities of others with hopes of bringing about significant change to societal experiences (Dutton & Workman, 2011). Of course, acts of compassion may vary, but compassion responses come in three general forms: (1) emotional support, (2) giving of material goods, and (3) providing time/flexibility (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton, & Frost, 2008; Lilius, Worline, et al., 2011). In the study by Lilius et al. (2008), the researchers concluded that large or dramatic acts of compassion may be rare, but in the minds of the recipients, the compassionate response becomes much grander. Compassion at work not only benefits the recipient, but is also linked with “more frequent positive emotions and heightened affective commitment” to the organization (Lilius et al., 2008, p. 211).

Compassion Capability

Many individuals and organizations display characteristics of compassion. Compassion capabilities are defined by the regular practices shaping conditions pertaining to intrapersonal relationships, the quality of those relationships, and a shared understanding of the exchange of information (Lilius, Worline, et al., 2011). This relational condition, according to Lilius, Worline, et al. (2011), is called “dynamic boundary-permeability norm” (p. 888). Within this norm, there is a collective understanding that it is acceptable to “relax and constrict the sharing of information about members’ personal information” (Lilius, Worline, et al.,

2011, p. 891). The literature suggests that “this norm enables compassion capability by making it more likely that people can discuss their suffering with those who will empathize and be best equipped to respond effectively” (Lilius, Worline, et al., 2011, p. 891). Also, it legitimizes the necessity to set boundaries on the amount and level of sharing when it becomes overwhelming (Lilius, Worline, et al., 2011). The conditions allow for engaging exchanges of pain and suffering, which results in adaptive responses that are paramount to the core processes of a unit’s compassion capability.

Compassion Tied to Other POS Traits

Positive Organizational Scholarship notes that positive leadership various traits to be present and demonstrated. Compassion may be a natural and embedded human response to suffering, but for individuals and organizations to effectively apply the compassion process, other POS traits must be present and applied as well. It is reasonable to think that organizations must employ individuals who display a disposition towards prosocial motivation, passion, hope, trust/trustworthiness, resourcefulness, and resilience under adversity (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Carlsen, Landsverk Hagen, & Mortensen, 2011; Caza & Milton, 2011; Felman & Worline, 2011; Grant & Berg, 2011; Mishra & Mishra, 2011; Perrtula & Cardon, 2011; Williams, 2011). The underlying POS trait that must exist is a calling in work (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Wrezesniewski, 2011).

When there is prosocial motivation in an organization, its members are usually inclined to help others in society (Grant & Berg, 2011). Essentially, actions of compassion must be purposeful with the intent to improve individual, group, and societal conditions. For such actions to be meaningful and effective for all individuals

or organizations involved, members must have passion. Passion is defined by Perrtula and Cardon (2011) as a strong desire for an activity of significance to which individual(s) willingly devote time and energy.

In addition to prosocial motivation and passion, there is a need to offer hope. The third step in the compassion process is to act or respond better to the human condition, but there is a reasonable and underlying theme of hope. Per the literature, people make excuses to remove themselves from circumstances or outcomes that create discomfort; however, people have a tendency to strive to meet positive goals (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Carlsen et al., 2011). It is logical to ask, why would an individual or organization take action to alleviate the suffering of others unless the ultimate goal is to provide hope for the betterment of their fellow man? Therefore, hope would need to be present.

Even with compassion and hope, the action does not always translate into improved conditions. Everyone involved, including the giver and recipient of compassion and hope, must be invested or the outcomes will most likely only be bandages over the underlying cause of the suffering. Therefore, trust and trustworthiness would likely need to be present in the compassion process. However, society as a whole has a tendency to distrust. According to Mishra and Mishra (2011), trust is at an all-time low, especially when involving government agencies (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Personal experience supports the statements that clinicians/workers are skeptical of clients and the clientele have been exposed to insufferable conditions for an extended period, leaving them feeling suspicious and jaded when faced with compassion or offered hope of a better tomorrow. Research by Mishra and Mishra (2011) justifies this by noting persistent societal issues about failures within the economic system and malfeasance among organizations and the appointed

leadership of those organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). It is during times of struggle when resourcefulness and resilience under adversity become essential traits within the compassion process.

Resources and resourcefulness are essential to the potential of an organization and individuals. Resources are the tools, supplies, or goods by which organizations respond to promote positive outcomes (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2011). However, it is important to note that resources “can be used for good or for evil” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Feldman & Worline, 2011). When resources are scarce, it is the resourcefulness of individuals and organizations that enable them to find and obtain the services needed to provide a compassionate response to suffering. It is within these moments, when resourcefulness becomes tantamount to successfully meeting the needs of others, that resilience under adversity is displayed.

Compassion in a Bag: Backpack Food Programs

One elemental need of all humans to survive is food. However, food insecurity and hunger are some of the most persistent societal problems around the globe. According to the Feeding America program, more than 21 million children qualify for free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program and the National School Breakfast Program (Feeding America, 2014). According to Bello (2015), more than half of students in public schools in the United States were in low-income families in 2013, as found in a study by the Southern Education Foundation. Bello (2015) shares eye-opening research, which indicates that many children and families rely on schools’ meal programs to serve their daily meals. For instance:

- More states are providing after-school meals in communities where

at least half the children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. A federal program covering dinner at school expanded to all states in 2010. Before that, only 13 states and the District of Columbia could provide dinner. The rest could offer only after-school snacks such as peanuts and popcorn. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which runs the program, estimates that 108 million after-school meals were served in the fiscal year 2014, up from 81 million in the fiscal year 2013.

- More schools are opening permanent or mobile food pantries. Last year, approximately 1,141 schools ran food pantries on their grounds, up from 834 the year before, says Feeding America, which runs 200 food banks across the country. Food banks are the warehouse operations that provide food to pantries.
- More than a third of teachers, 37%, buy food more than once a month for students, according to a 2015 report by advocacy group No Kid Hungry. On average, teachers spend \$35 a month to keep food in their classrooms for hungry children.

The United States is not oblivious to this issue. Although the U.S. is considered the land of plenty and obesity rates are among the highest in the world, thousands of people throughout the U.S. go hungry each year (Byker & Smith, 2015; Irwin, Irwin, Miller, Somes, & Richey, 2010; Krisberg, 2005; Leung et al., 2012; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Tragically, a large percentage of those people in the U.S. who experience food insecurities or hunger are children. Over the past 20 years, between 230,000 - 280,000 households with children experienced hunger or some level of food insecurity annually (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007).

According to the literature, one organization whose efforts started small but ballooned rapidly is Rice Depot, a non-profit, faith-based food bank. They created the Food for Kids program. Started in Little Rock, Arkansas in the 1990s, the Rice Depot created the Food for Kids program as a response to school children suffering from headaches, dizziness, stomach aches, and disruptive behavior as a result of going hungry (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Initially, the program provided foods in grocery bags, resulting in teasing for many children and negatively affecting self-perceptions and social relationships (Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). As a compassion response, the Rice Depot displayed resourcefulness in obtaining backpacks donated from stores and sent food packages home with children more discreetly, ending the teasing.

The municipality of Lincoln City, Oregon sponsors the Backpacks for Kids program. The group, using 100% volunteer labor, runs a food booth at the city's two annual kite festivals (The Backpack Food Program, 2015). The Oregon program provides child-friendly, easy-to-prepare food to chronically hungry children. According to program literature, the food is distributed in ordinary backpacks that students take home over the weekends and during out-of-school breaks.

The Feeding America program has been in operation for over a decade and is currently the largest food relief program in the United States. Backpacks with food are assembled at more than 160 local food banks and distributed to more than 450,000 children at the end of the week.

In Southern Nevada, the Three Squares Food Bank gets needed food to children and families during the summer months (Feeding America, 2015). The program provides free meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer months and long school vacations. The program recognizes that the

summer months are critical for food-deprived children and their families. Therefore, the Three Squares Food Bank dedicates a special campaign during the summer and over long school breaks to provide food to children in backpacks because the children are not able to access school meals during the summer months when schools are closed. The program works to reach children in need through sites operated by schools, government agencies, summer camps, day camps, churches, or community organizations.

Due to the passion and hope of non-profit organizations and individuals, the program grew rapidly. Under the work of America's Second Harvest (a faith-based non-profit organization), the Backpack Program spread to more than 30 other states who implemented similar programs by 2005 (Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Through the Backpack Program, children are provided ready-to-eat foods such as non-perishable items, canned goods, and some fresh produce, all packed by volunteers. All items are donated and considered easy to open and prepare for young children (Byker & Smith, 2015; Hurst, 2004; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007).

Eligibility for most backpack food programs nationwide are based on need and symptoms associated with food insecurity or hunger and include both students who are and are not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Free-Reduced Lunch programs (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Food items include cereal, shelf-stable milk, granola/cereal bars, cheese crackers, peanut butter crackers, little sausages, baked beans, Spaghetti-O's, ravioli, soup, fruit cups, dried fruits, and pudding cups (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). In addition to food items, the backpack program is used to provide personal-care kits. Backpacks are commonly distributed once

per week, but distribution and choice of food items is generally decided by the school district and the needs of the students (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007).

Why the Need for the Backpack Program

Throughout the literature, it is suggested that programs such as Backpack Buddies and Food for Kids are a necessity in many communities across the U.S. due to various factors. Many times, parents are working and children are home alone with little or no training in preparing foods, very few food options are available due to household income constraints, parent/guardians are dealing with substance abuse, or temporary hardships occur such as house fires, parent illness, or sudden loss of employment by a parent (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). In addition to these factors, welfare reforms in the past may be of some hindrance. Families are more and more displaced, one or more members of the household are suffering from illness, and in most cases there is not any adequate transportation.

The federal poverty level averages to be \$27,486 for a family of four. When a family's total income falls below this threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to be living in poverty (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). According to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - formerly the Food Stamp Program), to be eligible, households may have \$2,250 in countable resources, such as a bank account, or \$3,250 in countable resources if at least one person is age 60 or older, or is disabled. People could easily think this criteria comes from a developing country—certainly not the United States; however, this is the reality that larger and larger numbers of people are living within the United States. These realities make backpack programs vital for attacking issues

of food scarcity and providing families with a chance to have a nutritious meal.

Welfare Programs and Legislation

Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as when a household experiences uncertainty of having access to or the inability to acquire enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is not a defining factor in determining food insecurity, since many households may be eligible for SNAP benefits, but are not enrolled in the program for various reasons (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). The literature suggests many households across the nation, especially in southern states where risk factors are prevalent, may be impacted by legislation and welfare reforms (Byker & Smith, 2015; Cornwell, Hawley, & St. Romain, 2007; Irwin et al., 2010; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007).

According to Rodgers and Milewska (2007), welfare reform may have reduced caseloads, but it also contributed to above-average rates of food insecurity among children due to redefining eligibility and participation guidelines of states' public assistance programs. It is suggested that food-assistance programs operate under the assumption that parents will take care of their children. However, some parents fail to do so, perhaps due to a combination of circumstances as mentioned previously alongside administrative red tape, confusion about eligibility requirements, and lengthy paperwork (Rodgers & Milewska, 2007). Other legislation noted in the literature includes the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Section 204 of the act (Public Law 111-296, Section 204) establishes a guideline and 5-year strategic plan for instituting local school wellness policies nationwide,

specifically directed at schools participating in federal lunch programs (USDA Food & Nutrition Service, 2013). In coordination with non-profit community organizations, governmental assistance agencies, and schools, workgroups have been developing and implementing strategies to provide supplemental foods to hungry children utilizing the Backpack Program, which currently operates under the umbrella of the Feeding America organization (Byker & Smith, 2015).

Schools' Role in Addressing Food Scarcity

Schools play a vital role in improving food insecurities for children and supporting healthy lifestyles for families (USDA FNS, 2013). The literature from Section 204 of the USDA FNS guidelines suggests that schools are essential to teaching healthy eating habits and engaging kids in physical activities. Prior to 2010, Congressional legislation in 2004 provided for the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition and WIC (Women, Infants, & Children) Act, Public Law 108-265, Section 204, requiring all local educational agencies (LEA) who participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) to develop and implement school wellness policies by 2011 (USDA FNS, 2013). This legislation also requires schools and other stakeholders responsible for providing nutritious foods to children to monitor and evaluate local wellness policies (LWP) and report outcomes based on the 5-year plan (USDA FNS, 2013). The current year, 2015, is expected to show improvements in nutrition and physical activities for children, but the reports are not out yet and, according to the USDA FNS (2013), the strength of overall policy provisions is weak.

It is imperative to understand the role of schools in childhood hunger. According to Welford and Langmead (2015), schools are

vital to the psychological, social, and emotional well-being of children. The literature suggests that hunger has a definite negative impact on students' well-being and academic achievement, including mental health and cognitive performance (Byker & Smith, 2015; Rodgers & Milewska, 2007; Welford & Langmead, 2015). Welford and Langmead (2015) state that 1-in-10 children or young people aged 5- to 16-years-old meet some requirement for a mental health disorder diagnosis, some of which is possibly related to food insecurities and childhood hunger. For this reason, there is a call for a compassion-based approach in education.

Compassion in Schools & Services

Food-insecure households struggle every day to provide hot meals for their family. Food banks, charity organizations and backpack programs serve as hunger-relief agencies, but schools are becoming the dining room for many needy families across the United States. As a result, neighborhood schools have taken on a larger role in helping hungry households receive food relief. Welford and Langmead (2015) cite Gilbert's (2009) explanation for the compassion-approach in educational settings, stating that schools "aim to nurture, look after, teach, guide, mentor, sooth, protect, and offer feelings of acceptance and belonging" (p. 73). For the most part, many people see these qualities as instrumental to schools and communities for students to flourish (Welford & Langmead, 2015). The literature goes on to suggest that educational policies can be constrictive, utilizing criteria for identification and interventions that lead to patchy services. Welford and Langmead (2015) suggest that compassion and understanding can lead to a "collective motivation to improve and achieve greater things" (p. 73).

Kentucky's Compassion Program

The Commonwealth of Kentucky is not immune to the problems and suffering that result from food insecurity and hunger among families and children. As a state response to the issue, Kentucky's General Assembly passed a provision in the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, amending KRS 156.496 and KRS 156.4977 to create the Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSCs), as noted in the FRYSC School Administrators Guidebook (2015). The goal of the FRYSC program is one of compassion with much more intertwined. FRYSC seeks to enhance students' learning from early childhood through high school, promote academic achievement and well-being, and improve graduation rates as students transition into post-secondary education or adult life by creating and maintaining community partnerships (Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2015). The FRYSC initiative hopes to establish a standard of excellence for the provision of school-based family support as a model for the nation (Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2015). The FRYSC program is funded by state education appropriations used "to coordinate a network of services through community collaboration" (Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2015).

Kentucky's FRYSC program is founded on four key principles: (1) all children can learn and most will if high-level barriers can be removed and services created to address the well-being of the whole child including the parents; (2) the child and family need an atmosphere that empowers them to meet familial needs, maximize competency, and achieve goals; (3) an interagency focus is needed that joins education and human services with community partners to meet the ever-changing needs of children; and (4) the unique needs and character of the community should be reflected in community ownership (Cabinet for Health and Family Services,

2015). As of 2013, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has 822 centers serving 1,167 schools housing 622,086 students—representing an estimated 98 percent of eligible schools (Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2013). Schools in Kentucky, where 20 percent or more of students are eligible for the free/reduced lunch programs, are eligible for a Family Resource or Youth Service Center, depending on the needs of the school (Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2013).

The FRYSC program in Kentucky attempts to fulfill all the POS traits discussed within this literature review through the various programs and services it provides throughout the school year and during school breaks in the summer, spring, and fall. Kentucky's FRYSC program handles various school initiatives and services, including the Backpack Food Program for children. Other services provided by FRYSC programs include preschool childcare assistance, after-school day care assistance, parenting/family trainings, family literacy services, health services and referrals, career exploration and development, summer and part-time job development, substance abuse education and counseling, and family crisis and mental health counseling. The FRYSC Coordinators identify problems or barriers for children and families, then link students and families to local resources that may be helpful to their circumstances (Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2015).

FRYSC Coordinator at Burgin Independent School

For the purpose of this paper, we conducted interviews with FRYSC Coordinators at three schools in Mercy County, Kentucky. Of the coordinators interviewed, Mrs. Sharon Perkins (personal communication, January 14 & 22, 2015 and May 1, 2015) revealed her positive attitudes

and traits as an individual who cares about the well-being and outcomes for people living in poverty. The center at Burgin Independent School where Perkins works is one of only 131 combined centers out of 1,167 schools. Mrs. Perkins has an extensive education, completing her bachelor degree at Centre College and continuing her FRYSC training annually as required by the FRYSC Task Force. Although Perkins has been the FRYSC Coordinator at Burgin Independent for many years, she stated she has “done a little of everything,” which included working in television, newspapers, sales, adult education, and graphics before settling into her current position about which she is very passionate, and says it is a true calling to work with needy families. Understandably, Mrs. Perkins comes from a family steeped in compassionate work: Her mother was a social worker who helped children and families since the 1960s, when Child Welfare and Community Action programs were not commonplace.

Mrs. Perkins’ passion for her job is evident. She stated that her work gives her life purpose, although she does not like the parts of the job where she is simply putting “Band-Aids on wounds.” Her desire for the job, compassion for others, resourcefulness, and resilience is why she strives to “do the deep, hard things that heal wounds from the inside out vs. just covering them up for the short term.” She has concerns that she is not as successful in helping others as she would like; however, other discussions make clear that the work and services Perkins provides are priceless for many families and her community. She is truly seen as the “heart” of the school, where compassion shines through. During our interview, Mrs. Perkins stated her passion is for families. She expressed concerns for many others and described a deep-seated desire to improve the lives of those with whom she comes in contact, stating, “If I can keep a family from

crashing and burning, that’s good, but if I can help a family to thrive, that’s great! When families function as they should, then kids have a better chance to succeed” (personal communication, May 1, 2015).

Beyond compassion, Mrs. Perkins also offers hope to her clients. She plans to develop parenting classes for struggling parents in the community using the Nurturing Parenting Abuse Prevention curriculum. Many of the FRYSC programs are coordinated with other non-profits and area churches to provide other forms of support for students and parents, as well as build a sense of community and partnership. As an individual, Mrs. Perkins exemplifies compassion and the traits previously described in this article. She goes so far as to say she plans to continue helping those in need until she absolutely cannot do so.

Conclusion

Sharon Perkins, and individuals like her who dedicate their lives to helping others, display exemplary levels of compassion. For them, compassion seems hardwired; some people have a more difficult time expressing compassion or accepting compassion from others. Regardless, thanks to those who meet the challenge, compassion continues to shape social change and organizational leadership. Compassion is a process of awareness, feeling the emotion, and taking action to resolve the suffering of another. Case in point: The scriptures have long instructed us to *do good unto others*.

Small acts of compassion may seem minor to the giver – the individual who takes the time to give back to those who are less fortunate – but in the minds of the recipients, each small act matters a great deal. Compassion is also institutionalized within organizations and encompasses other positive organizational scholarship traits, such as passion, hope, trust/trustworthiness, resourcefulness, and resilience under

adversity. The compassion process falters without the other POS traits. Each act arising from these traits requires the exertion of the human spirit and the extension of the heart and hand.

An example of institutionalized compassion can be seen through the Food for Kids program and Feeding America program, also known as the Backpack Program. Although these programs are not federal initiatives, they provide relief by developing systems of food distribution that help to sustain the very lives of people living in poverty. These programs that come to the aid of needy people, especially children and families, are important social initiatives that collectively respond to the suffering of school-aged children across the United States.

Similar programs have sprouted up all over the United States, and the national network grows with each year. In 2014, the national network of food banks counted 200 members, with 46,000 agencies in the Feeding America Network operating over 58,000 food programs. From that number, 51 percent rely on volunteers, 62 percent are faith-based organizations, 62 percent provide groceries, 33 percent serve meals, and 46.5 million people receive food staples each year—that is one in seven people living in the United States. To drive home the larger

picture of food scarcity, one should note that, of the 46.5 million people receiving supplementary food packages, 12 million are children and 7 million are senior adults. In Kentucky, the Family Resource and Youth Services Coalition (FRYSC) proudly ranks among the agencies that are demonstrating *compassion toward the least of these*—a description that scriptural teaching—such as that in the book of Matthew—uses to describe the care of individuals who have less than others (BibleGateway, 2015).

The FRYSC program is a unique program in Kentucky, but it is similar to other food programs, and it has its challenges. The individuals who comprise the FRYSC Coalition, especially the school coordinators, face difficult tasks. One would think that donating food would be an easy form of compassion, but for various and unknown reasons, the attainment of food and finding volunteers often create stressful challenges. However, given the difficult challenges, the individuals at the FRYSC in many ways exemplify traits of POS, especially compassion. Compassion can be draining and stressful, and practicing compassion when helping others can be challenging. Sometimes, individuals and agencies lack the the resources to help all the people in need. Even still, compassion triumphs, connecting real people with real needs.

References

- Bello, M. (2015). *Schools becoming the last frontier for hungry kids*. Retrieved from USA Today: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/04/05/public-school-dinners-pantries/70389176/>
- BibleGateway. (2015). *New International Version*. Retrieved from https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=least+of+these &qv_version=NIV
- Byker, C. & Smith, T. (2015). Food assistance programs for children afford mixed dietary quality based on HEI-2010. *Nutrition Research*, 35, 35-40. doi: 10.1016/j.nutres.2014.10.009.
- Cabinet for Health and Family Services. (2013). *Facts and Figures*. Retrieved March 2015 from Family Resource and Youth Services Coalition of Kentucky: <http://www.fryscky.org/>
- Cabinet for Health and Family Services. (2015). *FRYSC School Administrators Guidebook*. Retrieved March 2015 from <http://chfs.ky.gov/dfrcys/frysc/>
- Cameron, K., & Spreitzer, G. (Eds.). (2012). *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carlsen, A., Landsverk Hagen, A., & Mortensen, T. F. (2011). Imagining hope in organizations: From individual goal-attainment to horizons of relational possibility. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The*

- Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 288-303). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caza, B. B., & Milton, L.P. (2011). Resilience at work: Building capability in the face of adversity. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 895-908). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cornwell, L., Hawley, S. R., & St. Romain, T. (2007). Implementation of a coordinated school health program in a rural, low-income community. *Journal of School Health, 77*(9), 601-606. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2007.00239.x
- Dutton, J. E., & Workman, K. M. (2011). Compassion as a generative force. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 20*(4), 401-406. doi: 10.1177/1056-492611421077.
- Feeding America. (2014). *A Report on Charitable Food Distribution in the United States in 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/hunger-in-america/hia-2014-executive-summary.pdf>
- . (2015). *Backpack program*. Retrieved from <http://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/we-feed-children/backpack-program/>
- . (2015). *Battling summer hunger with the backpack program in southern Nevada*. Retrieved from <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/news-and-updates/our-perspective/battling-summer-hunger-with.html>
- . (2015). *Schools becoming the last frontier for hungry kids*. Retrieved from <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/news-and-updates/hunger-in-the-news/schools-becoming-the-last.html>
- Feldman, M.S., & Worline, M. (2011). Resources, resourcing, and ampliative cycles in organizations. In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 629-643.
- Grant, A.M., & Berg, J.M. (2011). Prosocial motivation at work: When, when, why, and how making a difference makes a difference? In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 28-44). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hurst, M. (2004). Care packages. *Education Week, 23*(33), 3-4.
- Irwin, C. C., Irwin, R. L., Miller, M. E., Somes, G. W., & Richey, P. A. (2010). Get fit with the Grizzlies: A community-school-home initiative to fight childhood obesity. *Journal of School Health, 80*(7), 333-339. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2010.00510.x.
- Krisberg, K. (2005). Schools taking center stage in battle against childhood obesity. *Nation's Health, 35*(7), 1-23.
- Leung, C. W., Blumenthal, S. J., Jensen, H. H., Foerster, S. B., Nestle, M., Cheung, L. W. Y., Mozaffarian, D., & Willett, W. C. (2013). Associations of food stamp participation with dietary quality and obesity of children. *Pediatrics, 131*(3), 463-472. doi:10.1542/peds.2012-0889.
- Lilius, J. M., Kanov, J., Dutton, J.E., Worline, M. C., & Maitlis, S. (2011). Compassion revealed: What we know about compassion at work (and where we need to know more). In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lilius, J. M., Worline, M. C., Dutton, J. E., Kanov, J. M., & Maitlis, S. (2011). Understanding compassion capability. *Journal for Human Relations, 64*(7), 873-899. doi: 10.1177/0018726710396250
- Lilius, J. M., Worline, M. C., Maitlis, S., Kanov, J., Dutton, J. E., & Frost, P. (2008). The contours and consequences of compassion at work. *Journal of Organization Behavior, 29*(2), 193-218. doi: 10.1002/job.508.
- Mishra, A. K., & Mishra, K. E. (2011). Positive organization scholarship and trust in leaders. In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 449-461). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Perrtula, K. H., & Cardon, M. S. (2011). Passion. In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 190-200). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Piner, C. (2013, October 18). Compassion – The Heart's Response to Suffering [Blog post]. Retrieved April 2015 from <http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/blog/compassion-the-hearts-response-to-suffering/>
- Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. (2013). *Kentucky School Updates: Family Resource/Youth Services Centers*. Retrieved March 2015 from <http://www.prichardcommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2012-FRYSC-KSU-Chapter.pdf>
- Ramsey, B. & Carter, K. (2010). *Needs of Kentuckians rise during recession, balanced approach needed to meet demand*. Retrieved March 2015 from http://kyyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/10pub_RevenueOptions.pdf

- Rodgers, Y. & Milewska, M. (2007). Food assistance through the school system: Evaluation of the Food for Kids program. *Journal of Children & Poverty*, 13(1), 75-95. doi: 10.1080/10796120601171385.
- The Backpack Food Program. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.backpacksforkids.org/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Food & Nutrition Service. (2013). *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act 2010, Section 204: Local school wellness policies 5-year technical assistance and guidance plan*. Retrieved March 2015 from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/lwp5yrplan.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2015). *U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Federal Programs*. Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/2015-poverty-guidelines>
- Welford, M. & Langmead, K. (2015). Compassion-based initiatives in educational settings. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 32(1), 71-80.
- Williams, M. (2011). Perspective taking: Building positive interpersonal connections and trustworthiness one interaction at a time. In K. vS. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 462-473). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wrezesniewski, A. (2011). Callings. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 45-55). New York: Oxford University Press.

Katrina Sexton is a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership, Eastern Kentucky University.
Sherwood Thompson is Professor of Educational Leadership, Eastern Kentucky University.