



Perry County Food Bank

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Independence—freedom from the control, influence, support, aid, or the like, of others.

Wouldn't we all like to be Independent? 241 years ago on the 4th day of July, a group of men gathered in the State House of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, in the heat and humidity that all of us in Central Pennsylvania can relate to, and attached their signatures to a document that was largely the work of a young Thomas Jefferson. They affixed their signatures to the document that lay before them, "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, mutually pledging to each other their Lives, their Fortunes, and their Sacred Honor". They declared their, and our country's, Independence and instantly became traitors to the crown of Great Britain and hunted men with a price on their heads—all for Independence. John Adams believed that the day was so significant that it should be celebrated as a great festival from that day forward forever more.

So what does Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness look like to some who share our existence here in Perry County in 2017? Here at the Food Bank in New Bloomfield, we see about 850 families each month who, like all of us, have stories to tell. With Independence comes freedom, and with freedom comes choices. That is what life is all about—choices. We have all made choices that have had repercussions where we wished that we could back up and do things over differently. But it doesn't work that way and we have to live with the choices. The first bad choice happened with our first parents in a garden and with that choice misery entered into our world and has been with us ever since—all because of a single choice.

Many of our clients are the victims of bad choices. Some are choices that they made and some are choices that others have made that directly impact them. Most of us are quick to judge, but we judge only with what we can see. How would you judge? A young, single, healthy mom is using the food bank. She has no job, but she could work. Would you deny her food because she refuses to work? If you knew the entire story, you would find that she has an 11-year-old child who tried to commit suicide because she is a special needs child and is made fun of at school. The mom is working but the child requires more attention or she will be removed. How would you choose—lose your child or quit work to keep your family together and depend on others for support while caring for your family and figuring out what you will do next? This is an example of the kind of choices that some of our people have to make.

On a bright note, we now have sites in the county that are feeding kids during the summer when school lunches are not available. It is inconceivable to most of us that there are kids who will be hungry around us when school lunches and breakfasts are not available. But it is true. Our thanks go out to the churches that have made choices and stepped forward to provide sites, people, and management so that kids can be fed using a free program from the Department of Education and the Department of Agriculture. This year, Perry County has sites in New Bloomfield, Newport, Duncannon, Loysville, Liverpool, and Ickesburg that are using the program and feeding Perry County kids during the summer months. Some sites are feeding throughout the summer and others have tried it at their Vacation Bible Schools to see how it works.

In the month of June, we served 1,198 households and 2,890 individuals. We had 35 new households and 91 new individuals. In the month of May, our numbers were 1,247 households with 32 new households and 3,021 individuals with 74 of those being new.

So celebrate our Independence and our freedom to choose in this month of July. We are touched with the concern and compassion that is being shared with the "least of these." Thank you for seeing the needs around us and choosing to reach out and help.

Linda Bates & John Kiner -- Co-directors, Perry County Food Bank