

Blessings in a Backpack chosen as DM's 2016 beneficiary

Blessings in a Backpack, a nonprofit that provides weekend meals for food insecure elementary school students, has been selected as the primary beneficiary for next year's Dance Marathon.

Each Friday, more than 3,700 Blessings in a Backpack volunteers distribute weekend meals for children dependent on federally-funded free and reduced price school meals during the week. The organization can feed one child on the weekend for a 38-week school year for between \$80 and \$100.

"(Hunger) could arguably be the biggest problem that our generation ends up facing," said DM executive co-chair Arielle Miller, a Medill junior. "Especially on a really socially active and engaged college campus like Northwestern, we are the people that can start to think about how to solve this problem and start contributing on a grassroots level."

This is the first time since 2010 that DM has not chosen a medical-related organization for its primary beneficiary and only the third time in the organization's 42-year history.

The funds raised for DM will first help expand existing programs in Evanston's Haven Middle School and Oakton Elementary School, DM announced Thursday. Cook County has the fourth highest rate of childhood hunger in the nation.

The money will also support the development of new program sites in other Chicago area schools and across the country, as well as help recruit and train new volunteers.

"Childhood hunger is an invisible problem that has spread across the United States," said

Brooke Wiseman, CEO of Blessings in a Backpack, in a news release. "Being the NUDM 2016 beneficiary will allow these kids to know that people in their neighborhood care about them and are working together to keep them fed."

DM is also starting a yearlong service component through which members of the Northwestern community will be able to engage with the beneficiary beyond fundraising. Although the details of the service project are still being worked out, DM will give students the opportunity to help pack lunches in backpacks.

Additionally, DM organizers said they hope to establish a mentorship program with local Evanston school children as part of next year's Hero Program.

"Adding something like as service component allows us to engage a large part of campus, which is ultimately DM's goal," said DM executive co-chair Kevin Harris, a Weinberg junior. "It's not just to raise a ton of money and fund a great cause every year, but to unite the Northwestern community."

The Evanston Community Foundation will serve as the secondary beneficiary for the 19th year in a row.

Additionally, DM will hold an early registration period this month ahead of next year's event. Organizers hope the early registration, which will take place from May 21 to May 29, will give students more time to fundraise and learn about the beneficiary.

The registration fee for DM will also be no more than \$37, down from the usual \$50 fee, the organization announced. For the second year in a row, students can have the fee waived through the Office of Financial Aid.

The lower registration fee comes after Associated Student Government recognized DM as an A-Status group. The final registration fee will be determined after ASG votes on how much funding to give to DM next week at Senate.

This year, DM [raised](#) a total of \$1,130,979 for the Starlight Children's Foundation and ECF.

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