

A wanderer now follows a new course

As a U.S. Navy chef, Charles Levers fed 8,000 people three times a day. But multiple sclerosis (MS) knocked him overboard into a dark ocean of addiction and homelessness. An MS Society staff member referred him to MUST's Elizabeth Inn Shelter – and Charles' life took a new course.

He was inspired by shelter caseworkers who cared about their clients and persistently guided them toward a better direction.

Now Charles plans to undertake the biggest challenge he has ever faced: becoming the first person with MS to hike the entire distance of the 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail.

"I went down dark roads," Charles says. "I drank. I did drugs. I slept under bridges. But I admired the MUST staff members who helped me and I wanted to have the kind of power they had to change people's lives."

So he dove head first into the Elizabeth Inn program, submitting to the rules and volunteering every chance he got. He faithfully attended AA and NA. Staff also helped him enroll in an eight-week teleconference to become certified as an "MS Ambassador" and small group leader.

Charles and his service dog, Molly, embarked on their Appalachian adventure March 21, the first day of spring.

"I have survived MS because of my faith. I didn't have that inner strength before I came to MUST," Charles explains. "It took a lot of ministry the past three or four years to get me as spiritually strong as I am these days. I want to make a difference in other people's lives, not just my own. If it weren't for places like MUST Ministries, people would die. This place builds your spirit."





The numbers are staggering: Day by day, 1 in 4 children in Georgia – more than 650,000 -- do not have enough food to eat.

'Helping people in our own neighborhood'

MUST's food pantries at 33 schools couldn't begin to serve the hundreds of families they help each month without the army of dedicated volunteers who staff the pantries. These loving souls welcome parents and children like family and help them select the month's supply of food and toiletries – even carrying the treasures out to the family car and sending them off with a hug.

Smita Alex, Jessica Burnette and Dana Peterson represent Cobb Moms Helping Cobb. These dedicated volunteers work long hours each month to help non-profits, like MUST, reach a multitude of families in need.

"We have worked at the Sprayberry High School pantry for several years now," Dana says. "We get to establish a relationship with families and it makes a big difference in their day-to-day lives."

"We see the same families month after month and we get to know them," Smita adds. "It's good to feel like we're helping people in our own neighborhood."

"My husband and I foster, so we see the other side where families don't know where resources are," Dana explains. "All of a sudden, the mom can't afford to take care of her family, so the kids go into foster care. That's why I help."

Smita Alex, Jessica Burnette and Dana Peterson love volunteering in MUST's Neighborhood Pantry at Sprayberry High School. They are just three of the dedicated volunteers who work each month to help families in need.

Helping at-risk students *and their families*

Nearly half of all children in our state live in low-income households.

MUST's vision is to eliminate hunger for at-risk students and their families in local schools - giving them a greater opportunity to succeed in school and life.

Through its Neighborhood Pantry program, MUST partners with 33 host school pantries, serving 70 schools in Cobb, Cherokee, Kennesaw State University and Marietta. The MUST team works closely with school staff to identify children and families in crisis, who come to the pantry once a month for food and toiletries. For many families, the pantry saves them from having to choose between eating and paying the bills.

School communities pitch in to help hungry students

As a school social worker, Maggy Hoskins wants families in crisis to get the help they need in a way that maintains their dignity. That perspective is a perfect match for MUST.

The food pantry at Sprayberry High School (and others in the MUST network) is designed to do just that. The pantry is "client choice" and the experience is much like shopping in a grocery store.

"Our volunteers get to know the families and are there in a non-judgmental way to help them shop the shelves," Maggy says. "The families select what they need and the volunteers bag groceries and toiletries, then push carts to client cars."

The entire school has taken the food pantry to heart and pitches in to make it a success. "It's really become a community that is involved with feeding our students," Maggy says. "We enjoy being able to give back to the community."

"On behalf of the families, we are so incredibly grateful that our Sprayberry pantry continues to be stocked by MUST."



'I thank God for y'all'



Things couldn't have gotten much tougher for Sandra Jenkins. Her husband died, then the landlord raised the rent. Sandra and her two children had to move into an extended stay hotel. A bad accident put her granddaughter in a wheelchair and totaled their car – the family's only means of transportation.

Then Sandra lost her job.

One day her son came home from classes at Sprayberry High School and told his mom, "I love my school counselor." Sandra talked with the social worker, Maggy Hoskins, about their situation.

Soon Maggy showed up on the doorstep with a tub of food and toiletries from the school's MUST Neighborhood Pantry – and Maggy kept bringing food until Sandra was able to get another job and car.

"Maggy's an angel - that's her heart," Sandra says, choking back the tears. "Sometimes you're in a situation where you've only got a little for food or rent. You don't want to be out on the street but your family has got to eat. I thank God for MUST. Loving your neighbor is what it's all about."

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