



A Squirrel Hill 8th grader's letter leads to a donation of 19,000+ pounds of cereal

Eight flavors were donated to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank



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Because of a letter from a Pittsburgh eighth grader, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank has a whole lot of breakfast cereal to distribute.

Ender Lin, a 13-year-old student at Community Day School in Squirrel Hill, wrote to multiple cereal companies asking for donations.

The WK Kellogg Co. — aka Kellogg's — responded by sending more than 19,000 pounds of cereal.

"Everybody likes cereal," said Lin, who was at the Food Bank in Duquesne on Wednesday to see the massive delivery.

The food was originally donated to the Jewish Family and Community Services' (JFCS) Squirrel Hill Pantry. But the 40-plus pallets were too much for the organization, so it was directed to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. It plans to distribute the cereal to other food banks in its network.

"[Ender] asked us if it would be OK if he reached out to manufacturers on our behalf," said Jesse Sharrard, director of the Squirrel Hill Food Pantry.

It "is really special," Ender wrote in his letter, "because ... people can choose their own food instead of just getting a pre-packed bag. There is also kosher and Halal food for those who need it, and gluten free food, which is pretty cool."

The letter was not his first crack at sending requests to companies for donations. For his bar mitzvah project, he wrote to spice companies, and donated herbs and spices to his neighborhood pantry

Then, for a project at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh about promoting peace, he sent out the letters seeking cereal.

Hunger is a first step for peace — really, a first step for anything, said his mother, Claire Topal, who is also a member of the JFCS board of directors. "If you are hungry, how can you think about anything else?"

Breakfast cereal, said Beth Burrell, director of communications with the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, is a valuable pantry item.

"It's shelf stable," she said. "And everybody eats it."

This is how Ender put it in his letter:

"Cereal is important because it helps people start their day. It is part of people's breakfast routines, and it's good to be able to keep your routine, especially when you are struggling with finances and feeding your family."

The 19,648 pounds of cereal, in eight different flavors, will translate to more than 16,000 meals.

And Ender, who now considers himself a burgeoning writer, said he is not done.

“I don’t know what I’m going to write about next yet,” he said. “But I’m going to keep looking.”

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