

# PUTTING THE POWER 9® INTO PLAY

*An ongoing series for improving well-being*



brought to Fort Worth by Texas Health Resources

*Fort Worth is the largest certified Blue Zones Community® in the country. Each month we talk to a different member of our community and find out how they experience well-being in their neighborhood. This month's featured guest is **Patty Pressley**, the director of the WHHS Cougar Pride Foundation, which supports students (and families) at Western Hills High School.*



**Q: Tell us about the genesis of the Foundation.**

A: Four years ago we had our 35th year reunion, and we knew that the city was trying to revitalize the Las Vegas Trail area. We knew (the alumni) needed to do something. We attended the revitalization meeting and found out from the coaches that while the athletes were receiving free or reduced cost lunches, they'd often be hungry after practice.

**Q: Why is that?**

A: The school has changed so much then from when I went there. The air force base shutting down – that school was essentially built for the military kids. There are lots of single parents and multi generations living in the same household. Some families are immigrants from Kenya and other parts of Africa. The kids go into sports to get away from a small apartment that may or may not have Wi-Fi.

**Q: What did you do to start?**

A: We started by putting freezers in the field house, gym, and band hall and stocked them with frozen meals.

**Q: You and the other alumni have really found your Blue Zones Power 9 sense of Purpose and Belonging in service to the kids at the high school. Besides the food outreach during the school day, how else are you helping the kids?**

A: We essentially have a clothing closet and a food pantry called Cougar Corner. We make sure there are some plant-based snacks across campus so that teachers don't have to pay for snacks out of their own pockets. We give out 300-400 food bags during winter holidays and spring break. Non-perishable food bags are sitting in the portables for anyone who needs them.

**Q: What do you see as the main purpose of the Foundation?**

A: We want to give the kids hope. Our goal is to get these kids to graduation. We're helping to build one-on-one relationships with them so that they know people care about them.

**Q: You credit the alumni base for doing a lot of the heavy lifting around donations.**

A: Family isn't always who you're related to – Western Hills alumni are very much a family (Family First is another Power 9 principle). We quickly realized we needed to raise money for this endeavor. The Western Hills Church of Christ provides a lot of donations through the Tarrant Area Food Bank— that connection was made by a retired Western Hills teacher who saw the need. We get to cook in their kitchen and their members help out when we make breakfasts for STARR testing.

**Q: How do you encourage students to eat with more of a Plant Slant?**

A: The kids love fruit – especially bananas, oranges and strawberries. But we could definitely use donations of individually packaged plant-based foods and nuts for the pantry and the food bags.



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