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WKU student starts 'micro pantry' program in city

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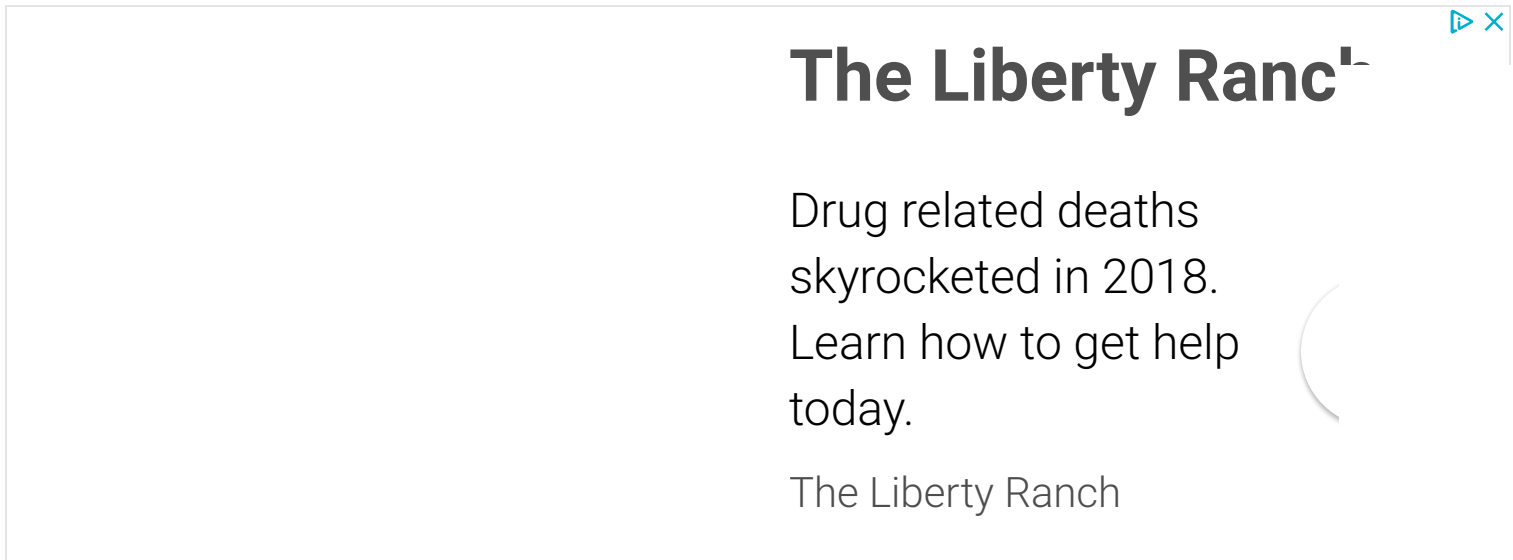


Katie Van Zile of the Higgins Center for Nonprofits examines the contents of the Bowling Green Micro Pantry, which stands in the center's parking lot on Collett Avenue. Weeks ago, the remodeled-newspaper-rack pantry provides non-perishable food for those in need. Photo by Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com

Maybe late at night or in the wee hours of the morning when no other avenues are available, a single parent or a down-on-their-luck person living on the streets will visit a bright-yellow

metal box once used for selling newspapers and find what they need to make it through the day.

If they do, they can thank 19-year-old Western Kentucky University sophomore Jason Lowe.



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Through the efforts of Lowe and his partnership with the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth nonprofit organization, such staples as fruit cups, canned vegetables and meats, and even hygiene items like toilet paper and toothbrushes can be found at the Bowling Green Micro Pantry that has been launched with the first location outside the Higgins Center for Nonprofits on Collett Avenue.

The single yellow box at the Higgins Center – the first of many that Lowe hopes to place throughout the community – on Wednesday held canned peaches, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and other essentials.

For potential visitors to the box that was donated by the Bowling Green Daily News, its items could be lifesavers. For Lowe, it's a start toward fulfilling a dream that was launched

when he received a Young Leaders for Social Change fellowship through the Southern Partners Fund charitable organization.

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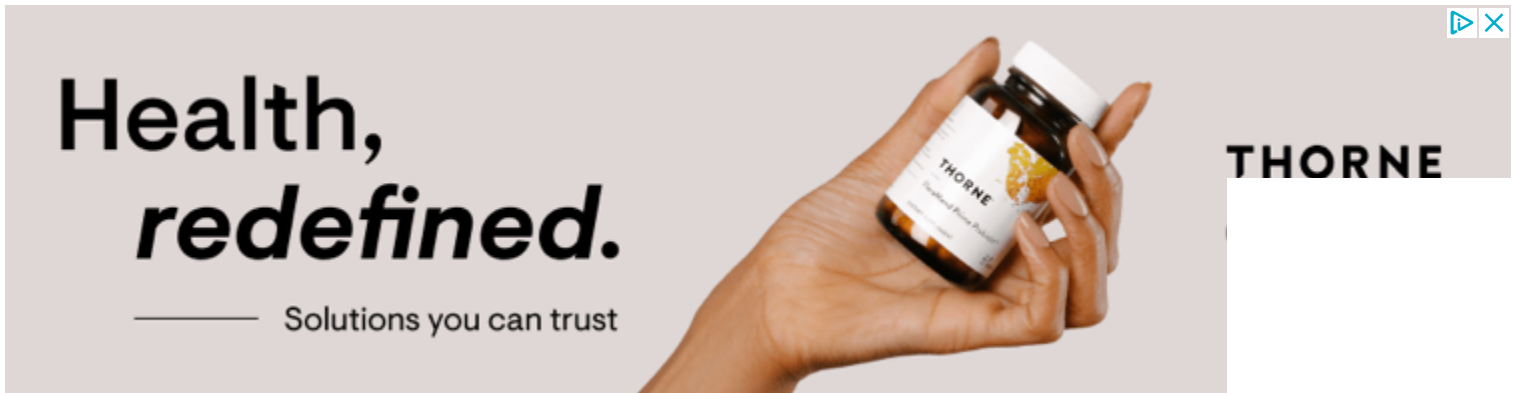
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“The main goal is to address food insecurity in Bowling Green and provide a place where people can get supplies 24 hours a day,” said Lowe, a Glasgow native.

His SPF fellowship provides a stipend for living expenses and some funding for his micro pantry project, but Lowe has relied on social media and online fundraising tools to take the project from dream to reality.

“I’ve raised about \$500 so far,” Lowe said. “There’s definitely a lot of community support for this. A lot of people are donating items directly to the box, but they can give financially too.”

Lowe is getting donations through the venmo.com online payment website, and he’s getting help from Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, a grassroots community organization that supports many progressive causes.



“We’re really happy to support Jason as he takes on this project,” said Laura Harper Knight, community organizer for KFTC’s Bowling Green office. “Anything we can do to alleviate food insecurity in Bowling Green, we’re here for it.”

Katie Van Zile, social media manager for the Higgins Center that houses the local KFTC chapter, said she was happy to help when asked about starting the micro pantry on the center’s property.

“The KFTC reached out to us about this being the location for the micro pantry,” Van Zile said. “With the nonprofit center’s mission, it just made sense.

“Food insecurity is something we’re worried about. There can be many hoops to jump through to get government help, but this (micro pantry) is accessible anytime.”

The single location at the Higgins Center won’t solve the city’s food insecurity problems, but Lowe already has plans to expand.

He said the Daily News donated four newspaper boxes that he is converting into micro pantries by painting them and removing the locks and spring mechanisms.

He already has a home for a second box: Natcher Elementary School on Cave Mill Road.

Karen Manley, Family Resource Center coordinator at Natcher, heard about the micro pantry on social media and got in touch with Lowe.

“I liked the fact that it was re-purposing old equipment and providing a service for people who really need it,” Manley said. “I told him (Lowe) that I have food and other items to stock it.

“I think it’s great when we can partner with grassroots organizations such as his.”

She isn’t yet sure about the location on the school’s grounds, but Manley hopes to have the micro pantry launched next week.

Lowe is hoping that will be a catalyst for further expansion.

“I’m going to talk to other family resource centers about partnerships,” he said. “I’ve been talking to the city (of Bowling Green) about putting some of the boxes at parks or other locations. The city seems supportive.”

Although his SPF fellowship only lasts through the end of this year, Lowe sees the micro pantries as a long-term project.

“I intend to be involved in it as long as I’m at WKU,” he said.

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