



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

For interview availability, see the end of this press release.

### **Middleton-Based Meals Matter Receives Global Youth Award for Outstanding Fundraising Efforts**

**MADISON, March 18, 2026** – WayForward Resources, the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, and Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Madison Chapter are excited to announce that Meals Matter is the recipient of the 2026 William R. Simms Award for Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy, Group, sponsored by Carter through the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy.

The award honors young people from throughout the world with a proven record of exceptional generosity, who demonstrate outstanding civic and charitable responsibility, and whose philanthropy encourages others to engage at the community, national, and international levels. Nominated by the AFP Greater Madison Chapter, the award will be presented to representatives Rohan Dileep and Beatrice Norman, Middleton High School seniors and co-presidents of the founding chapter, Middleton Meals Matter, and also Meals Matter executive board members.

“This recognition means so much to us, not only because it celebrates our organization’s impact, but because it shines a light on the urgent issue of food insecurity that so many families face every day,” said Dileep and Norman. “While we are incredibly proud of our accomplishments, we also recognize the reality that food insecurity is a growing global issue. Our successes are worth celebrating, but they also remind us that the need is greater than ever, and our mission is far from finished.”

Meals Matter’s story began in 2024 with Middleton High School students Noah Duckett and Wyatt Ehrhardt. After reaching out to WayForward Resources, “We learned that food insecurity was a huge problem,” Ehrhardt says. “Noah and I immediately wanted to help, so we partnered with WayForward to collect and donate nonperishable food items.” Soon after, they founded Middleton Meals Matter, a student-led organization with a vision “to create a community where no one goes hungry, and everyone has access to nutritious, wholesome meals.”

Duckett and Ehrhardt remain involved from college while new student leaders take charge locally. They created a sustainable structure that allows new students to assume local leadership while continuing to expand the program’s reach. Today, Middleton Meals Matter includes 19 chapters under the Meals Matter umbrella, spanning high schools across the United States and South Korea, working toward a shared vision. The group is applying for official 501(c)(3) status to establish long-term sustainability and increase the potential for future growth.

Through monthly large-scale grocery-store food drives, each requiring volunteer coordination, logistics planning, community outreach, and partnerships with local businesses, neighborhood collections, school events, and creative hunger-awareness campaigns, Middleton Meals Matter – now one chapter within the larger Meals Matter umbrella – has collected 69,478 pounds of food valued at more than \$132,000, along with \$15,610 in funds for WayForward Resources. Their work also supports Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin, Sun Prairie Emergency Food Pantry, and the Caring Closet at Middleton High School. Additionally, Middleton Meal Matter engages younger students in hunger-awareness education and volunteering at their drives, and speaks at public events to encourage broad-based participation.

Ellen Carlson, President and CEO of WayForward Resources, said, “The donation of food and funds from Middleton Meals Matter couldn’t come at a better time. WayForward Resources is seeing record demand for food at our food pantry, with four times as many visits as we had just four years ago. Add to that SNAP cuts, and we have what could be a very dire situation. These significant donations of food that arrive nearly every month—and sometimes more than once a month—help us keep a variety of nutritious food on our shelves. But their impact goes beyond that. The energy and dedication of these high school students has also inspired people throughout the community to get involved as they share the message that anyone can and should be part of building a stronger community.”

“We’re immensely proud of Middleton Meals Matter co-founders Wyatt Ehrhardt and Noah Duckett and current co-presidents Rohan Dileep and Bea Norman for carrying on their work and expanding their reach even further,” said MCPASD Superintendent Dr. Dana Monogue. “Our students’ strong leadership and advocacy have inspired students throughout our District, our state and around the world. Equally important is the tremendous impact they’re making in our communities in fighting food insecurity.”

"The future of our community depends on our ability to engage and empower the next generation of leaders who view civic engagement not just as a duty, but as a catalyst for real-world problem-solving. Meals Matter is an inspirational example of this. At AFP Greater Madison, we are committed to fostering an environment where this passion for impact is met with the professional tools and mentorship needed to turn bold ideas into a lasting legacy of service," said Mary Salisbury, AFP Greater Madison President.

Dileep and Norman will accept the award in San Diego on April 28 during AFP ICON 2026, the world's largest gathering of fundraising professionals. Meals Matter was also recognized as the 2025 Youth in Philanthropy honoree at the Greater Madison National Philanthropy Day celebration in November. WayForward Resources nominated Meals Matter for this award, which was presented by the AFP Greater Madison Chapter. The group received a standing ovation in response to their inspiring acceptance remarks and work.

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**WayForward Resources** focuses on creating food security and housing stability. Located in Middleton, their food pantry and clothing center are open five days a week to anyone in Dane County. WayForward's housing stability programs provide case management, referrals, and financial assistance to community members living in the Middleton-Cross Plains School District and part of the west side of Madison. Learn more at [wayforwardresources.org](http://wayforwardresources.org).

**Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Madison Chapter** is dedicated to elevating the profession of fundraising and empowering philanthropic leaders across South Central Wisconsin. As a local affiliate of AFP Global, we provide our members with high-quality professional development, networking opportunities, and advocacy for ethical fundraising practices. Learn more at [afpmadison.org](http://afpmadison.org).

**Middleton-Cross Plains School District (MCPASD)** serves 7,126 students across 12 schools in Middleton, Cross Plains, and surrounding communities. For many years, MCPASD has been recognized by Niche as one of the highest-rated school districts in the state, a reflection of its commitment to academic excellence, student support, and community partnerships. Learn more at [mcpasd.k12.wi.us](http://mcpasd.k12.wi.us).

**Meals Matter** is a student-led organization dedicated to combating food insecurity while instilling lasting commitment to volunteerism in youth through activism and action. We support and oversee chapters to ensure effective, community-driven efforts—empowering students to lead food drives, organize events, and strengthen communities so no one goes hungry, no matter where they live. Learn more at [meals-matter.org](http://meals-matter.org).

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