

Bridging the Gap Project Helps Northern Michigan Families Meet the Essentials — and Builds a Stronger Community Along the Way

BOYNE CITY, Mich. — 10/18/2026 — When a family is struggling, the gap between making ends meet and going without can be surprisingly small.

Sometimes that gap is a box of groceries. Sometimes it is personal hygiene supplies, household necessities, a backpack for a child heading back to school, or a little extra help during a difficult season.

That is where **Bridging the Gap Project** comes in.

Based in Northern Michigan, Bridging the Gap Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individuals and families access food and other essential resources while strengthening the network of community support available to residents throughout **Charlevoix, Antrim, and Emmet Counties**.

The organization's work grew from a simple community effort known as **Stiggs Feed A Friend**, which began in 2020. As the needs of local families continued to evolve, so did the organization. Today, Bridging the Gap Project provides assistance designed to address immediate needs while building longer-term connections within the community.

“Our mission is simple: help people today while working toward a stronger tomorrow,” said Natasha Hizelberger, Executive Director. “We believe that everyone deserves access to the basic necessities of life, and we believe that Northern Michigan communities are strongest when we take care of one another.”

Meeting Families Where They Are

One of the organization's core programs is its **Weekly Family Food Box Program**, which provides families with food intended to help throughout the week. The program goes beyond simply distributing food by offering recipes and menu-planning assistance to help families make the most of what they receive.

Bridging the Gap Project also helps provide **hygiene products, household essentials, emergency supplies, pet food and other necessities** based on community needs and available resources. In addition they are partnered with the Good Samaritan - Mom and Tots program which provides support for pregnant woman, mother and children up to five.

The organization's seasonal programs extend that mission to special times of the year, including its **Back-to-School Backpack Project, Christmas Peace Box Project, and Easter Dinner Project**.

Through these efforts, the organization has been able to provide tangible assistance to local children and families, including **68 fully stocked backpacks** through its Back-to-School initiative and **100 Christmas Peace Boxes** through its holiday program.

Stepping Up When Northern Michigan Needed Help

The organization's ability to respond quickly became particularly evident during the **2025 Northern Michigan ice storm**, when communities across the region faced widespread power outages, damaged infrastructure, impassable roads, and other challenges. Michigan officials ultimately declared a state of emergency covering 10 counties in the initial response, with the affected area later expanding.

During the emergency response, Bridging the Gap Project reports assisting **1,643 individuals, families, and emergency shelters over 43 days**.

That experience reinforced the organization's belief that community support cannot be limited to a single type of assistance.

“When an emergency happens, people don't just need one thing,” said Natasha. “They may need food, household supplies, personal care items, information, or simply someone willing to help. Our goal is to be part of that safety net and help bridge the gaps when people need it most.”

The Community Makes the Difference

Bridging the Gap Project's work depends on the involvement of the Northern Michigan community.

The organization welcomes support from individuals, businesses, farms, food producers, churches, civic organizations, schools, nonprofits, and other community partners.

Support can include **food and essential-item donations, financial contributions, volunteer time, business partnerships, and donations of appropriate surplus goods**.

Every contribution helps the organization respond to families facing food insecurity and other challenges while continuing to develop programs that strengthen the community.

“None of this happens because of one organization,” said Natasha. “It happens because people care about their neighbors. Every donor, volunteer, business, partner, and person who reaches out for help is part of this effort.”

Helping Today. Strengthening Tomorrow.

Bridging the Gap Project's philosophy is captured in its guiding message:

Helping today. Strengthening tomorrow.

The organization invites Northern Michigan residents and community partners to learn more about its programs, volunteer opportunities, donation needs, and ways to become involved.

For more information, visit www.bridgingthegaprojectmi.org.



About Bridging the Gap Project

Bridging the Gap Project is a Northern Michigan nonprofit serving individuals and families in **Charlevoix, Antrim, and Emmet Counties**. The organization provides food, essential supplies, emergency assistance, and seasonal programs designed to help meet immediate needs while strengthening community connections.

From its beginnings with Stiggs Feed A Friend in 2020 to its response during the 2025 Northern Michigan ice storm, Bridging the Gap Project has grown through the support of volunteers, donors, community organizations, and local partners.

Helping today. Strengthening tomorrow.

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