



## **Backgrounder**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 28, 2019

### **Our Story**

Filling in the Blanks was founded by mothers and community activists, Shawnee Knight and Tina Kramer, who created the nonprofit as a way to marry their loves of community, children, food and charity. In 2013, Knight and Kramer created Filling in the Blanks which has now expanded to include 27 schools throughout Fairfield and Westchester Counties and has delivered over 130,000 weekend meals to children in low-income households.

### **Our Founders**

Shawnee Knight is a passionate chef, community activist, board member, wife and mother. Classically trained at the French Culinary Institute of NYC, co-founding Filling in the Blanks has allowed her to marry her love of food, community and charity. What began as a small weekend backpack program has grown into an organization based on Knight's strong sense of social responsibility to nurture the community's needy children and inspire others to do the same. Shawnee is a member of the Stamford Food Collaborative, a United Way program, whose mission is to improve access to food, quality of food and sustainability of food for all members of Stamford. She is also a member of the Stamford Public Schools Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, which focuses on ways to improve the educational well-being of the district's students. When she's not serving on committees and boards in the area of New Canaan, CT, Knight enjoys spending time with her husband of 15 years and her two boys.

Filling in the Blanks allows Tina to combine her passion for community service and love of children. Through her deep-rooted connections in the community, she has rallied families and children to help raise funds and pack thousands of bags of food for children in need. Tina has served on various charitable boards and committees over the past 14 years. Tina is a member of the Stamford Food Collaborative, a United Way program, whose mission is to improve access to food, quality of food and sustainability of food for all members of Stamford. She is also a member of the Stamford Public Schools Strategic Planning Advisory Committee and the Stamford Cradle to Career Committee, which focuses on ways to improve the education and well-being of the district's students. Tina received her B.A. from the University of Connecticut. Tina is a wife and mother to three children who play an integral role in the success Filling in the Blanks.

## **Our Mission**

The mission of Filling in the Blanks is to fight childhood hunger by providing children in need with meals on the weekends. In Fairfield County, 33,000 children live in food insecure households. Most of the children in our program get breakfast and lunch from school every weekday and without Filling in the Blanks would go hungry over the weekend. Filling in the Blanks plays a unique role in fighting childhood hunger by bridging that weekend meal gap for children. By removing the obstacle of food insecurity, Filling in the Blanks strives to help children experience increased academic achievement and increase opportunities for success in their lives.

## **Our Impact**

Filling in the Blanks has delivered over 130,000 weekend meals to over 1,600 children in 27 schools throughout Fairfield and Westchester Counties weekly. However, the numbers only tell one part of the story; by getting weekend food directly into the hands of the children, Filling in the Blanks helps kids be kids, nourishing them over the weekend so they can go to school Mondays ready to learn and setting them on a path for future success in their lives. In addition to the weekend meals Filling in the Blanks has launched a Mobil Food Pantry, which goes into the community on a monthly basis delivering fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy and other staples. This has allowed Filling in the blanks to deliver over 6500 pounds of fresh food monthly.

*“Our sincere thanks to Shawnee Knight and Tina Kramer... Never doubt that removing one small worry from a child’s life can change his entire outlook.”*

### **Sara Arnold**

*Social Worker, Roxbury Elementary School*

*“We have been very lucky to partner with Filling in the Blanks for the past three years at our schools and summer camps. The relief and food security that this program offers to our families is life changing.”*

### **Mike Duggan**

*Executive Director, Domus*

*“Filling in the Blanks enables us to address the very serious issue of weekend hunger, and we would not be able to do so without this wonderful organization... Ms. Kramer and Ms. Knight were there, and they continue to come through week after week.”*

### **Mark Bonasera, Ed.D.**

*Principal, Roxbury Elementary School*

## **Our Recipients**

The majority of our recipients qualify for the free or reduced priced school meal programs. Nearly half of the low-income households in Connecticut do not qualify for federal assistance because their earnings are too high for the income requirements. Many of our recipients fall within the ALICE population, these are asset limited, income constrained and employed families who are working but cannot meet basic needs such as housing, childcare, food, healthcare and transportation, often forcing them to sacrifice nutritious meals. For many of our recipients, before Filling in the Blanks their last good meal was Friday at school and their next good meal was Monday morning.

## **Our Volunteers**

Our volunteers are as young as 7-years-old and as old as 80. By encouraging all members of the community to get involved, Filling in the Blanks is able to maximize the benefit for both our recipients and our volunteers. Volunteering at Filling in the Blanks is more than just writing a check, our volunteers are essential in packing and delivering food and supplies to over 1,000 children in 18 schools weekly. There are many ways to get involved with Filling in the Blanks, in addition to helping pack and deliver meals; our volunteers have scheduled food drives, held fundraisers and joined event committees.

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### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Shawnee Knight

Co-Founder, Director

(203) 750 – 0019

[info@fillingintheblanks.org](mailto:info@fillingintheblanks.org)