

Hi! My name is Caralyn LoConte, and I am a junior at The Ursuline School. Combating food insecurity has always been a major concern of mine. My work started at a young age creating Thanksgiving meals for young children in the Westcop program and collecting nutritious food for my elementary school's social worker. I learned quickly that food makes people happy.

During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, I realized our community was experiencing a significant shortage in food. Delivery trucks were not arriving in the New Rochelle area, known as the epicenter of the pandemic, and a lot of people were unemployed due to the shutdown. When my parish, Saints John and Paul (SJP) started food drives for HOPE Community Services, I knew I wanted to help. Every other Sunday I volunteered by hosting food drives at SJP, loading up 10+ large SUVs with the collected food, and was part of the caravan to deliver the food to HOPE. As a family, we routinely made and delivered brown bag lunches for the homeless at St. Trinity Church in downtown New Rochelle. As the economy started to resume and restrictions were uplifted, the impact remained. HOPE Community Services was experiencing a 2100% increase in the need for food.

I have spent the past 3 summers at HOPE's food pantry bagging non-perishable items for weekly handouts and stocking shelves with food from shipments and donations. I noticed at HOPE the one good that they never seemed to have enough stock of was cereal. At The Ursuline School, I have been given a very special role. I am Co-Chair of The Cereal Effect. The Cereal Effect was an initiative that started three years ago as I was a Freshman. The purpose is to combat child hunger in New Rochelle. As studies have shown, a child is more likely to be attentive, happier, and willing to learn if they have a healthy breakfast before going to school. The problem is that more than 50% of children in New Rochelle go to school hungry. I want to help change this. As a part of the leadership team, we started this initiative by promoting these efforts among The Ursuline Community. Current students, graduates, Administration, faculty and staff came together with donated boxes of cereal to line the hallways into a "domino effect". This created an impression that carried with students the following year. Our goal was to collect 1,250 boxes of cereal in honor of the

school's 125th anniversary. We surpassed this goal thanks to the support of families and local businesses. Our marketing efforts expanded, as did the hearts of our community and local organizations. This past September, The Cereal Effect collected over 3,000 boxes of cereal for HOPE Community Services, double the amount from the previous year. Every child HOPE Community Services supports received a box of cereal to start the school year with. Since inception, we have collected almost 6,000 boxes of cereal.

"Serviam" is not only The Ursuline School's motto "I will serve", it is a need in our community. Since middle school, I have volunteered over 400 hours of service. Being a part of my community is important to me and I am grateful for the friendships I have made and the lessons I have learned from it.