



► From left: **Amanda Taylor** (CRI), Amanda's daughter, **Hayley Steidinger** (MED Institute), and Hayley's boyfriend spent a morning pulling Queen Anne's Lace at Mulvey Pond in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Collaborating for a good cause

Cook's West Lafayette companies come together to support their community



In 2021, employees from our Cook companies in West Lafayette, Indiana—Cook Biotech, Cook Research Incorporated (CRI), Cook Advanced Technologies (CAT), and MED Institute—were eager to get back out in our community to volunteer after the Covid-19 pause.

Motivated by Cook's Equity Task Force (ETF) initiative, our Cook companies decided to come together and collaborate on activities that would give back to our community. So, early in 2021, a team of representatives from each company met to plan volunteer opportunities. We focused on three pillars: community health, social enterprise, and youth education.

We began by sending out a survey to understand our employees' interests. We learned that many of our employees are interested in local non-profit organizations Habitat for Humanity, Food Finders Food Bank, and Lafayette Adult Resource Academy.

Habitat for Humanity

The mission of Habitat for Humanity is to help families build and improve the places they call home. Habitat believes affordable housing plays a critical role in strong and stable communities.

However, the work this organization does goes beyond building homes. They also have a retail store called the ReStore that takes in donated items from people in the community and sells the items to help defer the cost of their home builds. During our interactions, we learned that they had a need for many volunteers. Our Cook employees completed many volunteer shifts, including work at the ReStore, cleaning incoming items, and organizing the store. We also coordinated a furniture drive for employees to donate furniture they no longer needed to help stock the ReStore.

In addition, we completed outdoor neighborhood revitalization projects like picking up trash, landscaping, and planting community gardens. The community gardens not only serve as a food resource for those in need, but they also offer opportunity for connection and friendship.

At the end of our volunteer commitment, the Habitat staff hosted a luncheon for us that felt like a family gathering. We were able to surprise them with a donation to help support their mission.

Food Finders Food Bank

Food Finders Food Bank is an organization we have worked with for many years. Their Food Finders pantry serves the greater Lafayette community plus 16 counties in west central Indiana. This year, the need was greater than ever. As soon as Food Finders resumed volunteer activities, Cook employees returned to their monthly activities of sorting food and stocking shelves at the food pantry.

Food Finders also holds an annual autumn Hunger Hike to raise money for the fight against hunger. Our companies donated money to support the cause and several Cook employees participated in the walk. The Cook Biotech community involvement action team organized a West Lafayette Cook community flower sale in the spring, raising over \$500 for Food Finders.

Lafayette Adult Resource Academy (LARA)

LARA is focused on helping young adults earn their high school diploma. These students can work part-time at Cook Biotech during their high school equivalency (HSE) program. When they complete that, they are qualified to apply to a Cook company. We currently have one student in the program. Additionally, computer monitors and laptops were donated to help

support LARA's goal of setting up a computer lab as a resource for the students.

Other opportunities

In addition to Food Finders, we have other monthly opportunities for our employees to volunteer at Lafayette Transitional Housing Center and Lafayette Urban Ministry. We also continue to investigate and implement opportunities to reach students, English as a second language learners, job seekers, and minority small business owners, and to provide hands-on STEM activities in the community.

Overall, our efforts have been very successful, and we have established new relationships with these important organizations in our community. We discovered and shared more opportunities and involved more Cook employees than ever before. They have had important roles in supporting and giving back to our community and have donated many volunteer hours in 2021. We are looking forward to an even more successful and collaborative year in 2022.

"Working together has helped coordinate and increase our impact in the community," said Umesh Patel, president of Cook Biotech. "We are looking forward to discovering more opportunities and ways for our employees to give back to the Greater Lafayette community."

• **Brooke Corcoran** (BCorcoran@MEDInstitute.com) is the Marketing Communications manager at MED Institute.

Check out the following pages for more stories about the Cook West Lafayette companies' community engagement efforts.

Everyone deserves a decent place to live

West Lafayette companies partner with their local Habitat for Humanity

For Sara Bridwell, executive project manager for Cook Advanced Technologies (CAT) in West Lafayette, Indiana, Habitat for Humanity embraces many of the same values that Cook believes in. Their mission starts with everyone deserving a decent place to live, which not only means a dwelling, but also a community—a community that is safe, clean, flourishing, and so much more. In late 2019, inspired by this connection with Cook's values, she joined in early discussions between Cook and Habitat for Humanity representatives about how Cook could help with their mission.

Brooke Corcoran, Marketing Communications manager for MED Institute in West Lafayette, shared the same belief that Habitat for Humanity's mission of bringing the community together to build homes, community, and hope was on par with Cook's dedication to improving communities. This belief inspired her in 2020 to join in planning and coordinating Cook's volunteer efforts, even becoming a volunteer herself. The conversations soon turned into



▲ Cook employees gathered to plant a community garden at a local apartment complex. Front row, from left: **Jesse Roll** (CAT) and son **Ethan**, **Brooke Corcoran** (MED Institute), **Andrea Agree** (MED Institute), **Britt Brown** (Biotech). Pictured in the back row are the apartment grounds maintenance team and the Grow Local lead.

“This partnership has helped us start thinking about the needs in our community and how we can support those needs.”

– *Brooke Corcoran, Marketing Communications manager for MED Institute*

a partnership and an establishment of volunteer projects for 2021 for all four of the West Lafayette Cook companies.

“Our 2021 initiatives involved employees committing to a four-hour window to assist with neighborhood revitalization, a home build, or assistance at the Habitat ReStore location,” Sara explained.

Brooke and Sara both served as liaisons between Habitat for Humanity and Cook's volunteers,

serving as main contacts, coordinators, and volunteers. Brooke authored a motivational email to West Lafayette employees, including a link to sign up to volunteer. They had a monumental task to coordinate employee schedules with Habitat's volunteering needs.

“I was in constant communication with the Habitat coordinators,” Sara said. “Their job site changes based on needs and even weather conditions, so sometimes we didn't know what we would be doing, but we always had volunteers available.”

The volunteer effort spanned the month of May with up to 30 West Lafayette employees devoting a total of 120 volunteer hours.

Neighborhood revitalization

One of the Habitat for Humanity volunteer projects was to plant a community garden in a local neighborhood. From fresh-tilled soil, volunteers planted 19 40-foot

rows of vegetables and a fence for cucumbers to vine and grow. Volunteers laid straw to protect the plantings and weeded and watered the garden after planting. Residents and volunteers continue to maintain the garden.

Sara wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty planting and working hard along with the residents and volunteers. As she worked, she realized the garden was not only a food source for fresh vegetables for the neighborhood, it was also a place for residents to come out of their houses and connect with one another.

"I learned so much about gardening in general, as well as the importance that it brings to each neighborhood," she said. "Not only does it serve as a food source, but also provides a social outlet for many neighbors, who otherwise might not know each other."

Like Sara, Brooke worked with volunteers to build a community garden at a local apartment complex. She met the apartment staff and children in the neighborhood coming out of their apartments to investigate the activity.

"They were so excited and grateful," Brooke said. "It was just two hours out of my evening and look at the positive impact it made. It was so important to them to have access to fresh foods."

"We would like to continue our volunteer efforts with Habitat. They have so many areas where our employees can assist. There is a task for everyone, no matter your abilities."

– *Sara Bridwell, executive project manager for CAT in West Lafayette, Indiana*

In addition to the community gardens, Cook volunteers worked on other landscaping projects, including a retaining wall around a Habitat for Humanity home, and lawn maintenance surrounding the Habitat community center in Lafayette.

Habitat ReStore

Volunteers also contributed to Habitat for Humanity's ReStore location, which is a retail store that receives donated items from the community and resells them. Proceeds from the store are donated to the Habitat home builds in the local area. From reorganizing the store's showroom to cleaning incoming items, volunteers put in many hours. During the time that Cook employees were volunteering, an apartment complex on the Purdue University campus donated old cabinetry left from a remodeling project. Hundreds of cabinets needed to be cleaned and carried to the ReStore showroom, and Cook volunteers were in the trenches helping out.

Brooke and Sara, along with Cook colleagues **Melissa Kubat** (CRI) and **Britt Brown** (CBI), coordinated a furniture drive for the ReStore location one Saturday morning in July. Cook's West Lafayette employees cumulatively donated enough furniture and house goods to fill a box truck.



▲ *Sara Bridwell (CAT) cleans chairs at Habitat for Humanity's ReStore in West Lafayette.*

Inspired for the future

"This partnership has helped us start thinking about the needs in our community and how we can support those needs," Brooke said. "Cook's Equity Task Force has also been very encouraging of our volunteer efforts, and our West Lafayette Cook company presidents have been actively immersed and engaged. It's nice to see our executive leadership involved in volunteering."

With such a strong spirit of volunteerism stemming from the employees across all of the West Lafayette Cook companies, plans are in the works for future volunteer projects with Habitat for Humanity.

"We would like to continue our volunteer efforts with Habitat. They have so many areas where our employees can assist," Sara said. "There is a task for everyone, no matter your abilities."

• **Terrie Nicodemus** (*Teresa.Nicodemus@CookMedical.com*) is a written content specialist in Corporate Marketing and Communications.



It takes a village

Cook Biotech starts HSE program to address a community need

Most people are familiar with the proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," which posits that by surrounding a child with a supportive community of people, the odds that they will live a healthy and productive life are increased.

But who's to say that same philosophy couldn't also apply to adults?

That's essentially the approach Cook Biotech is taking with the high school equivalency (HSE) program they started in 2021.

Modeled after the HSE program started at Cook Inc. in Bloomington a couple of years ago, Biotech will pay for a student's HSE classes and employ them part-time while they are working toward their diploma. Once they achieve that goal, they can be offered a full-time position with the company.

The initial motivation for Cook Inc. was an inability to fill the open positions in manufacturing, which require applicants to have completed high school. Biotech has not faced that challenge. But like Cook Inc. in Bloomington, they wanted to help address a need in the West Lafayette, Indiana, community that they, along with three other Cook companies—Cook Advanced Technology (CAT), Cook Research Incorporated (CRI), and MED Institute—call home.

"Our thought was that we've got quite a few individuals in the area who don't have their high school diploma," said **Brandon Ahnert**, a senior trainer and recruiter in Human Resources at Biotech, who has been with the company for six years. "That's a limiting factor for those people when it comes to their upward mobility. So, we thought, how can we help these folks?"

Partnering up

Brandon was part of the team that was tasked with setting up Biotech's HSE program. Seeking to partner with existing resources in their community, the first organization they reached out to was the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy (LARA).

"In this area, LARA is the main place providing the training and also administering the tests for folks to get their HSE," Brandon said.

The next step was to identify the issues that were keeping people from earning their high school diploma and then find other local organizations that could help Biotech in addressing those needs with "wrap-around" services.

"There are different things holding people back," Brandon said. "Some had to drop out of high school to work and don't know how to get back on the path to earning their diploma. Some need transportation to get to class. If you're experiencing food insecurity, homelessness, or domestic violence, how can you focus on school?"

The Greater Lafayette Area YWCA offered counseling for the job candidates. Since they would be working while attending HSE classes, Biotech partnered with Ivy Tech, who provided information on how to be a good employee—time management, basic work skills, etc.

Indiana's State Earn and Learn (SEAL) program also proved to be an invaluable repository of information for Brandon and the Biotech team.

"They really focus on aligning a lot of the resources that are out there helping these different groups and they have that 30,000-foot view of what is going on in different areas," he said. "They were great in doing a lot of the run-downs of different organizations."

It was through SEAL that Biotech connected with Food Finders and the Salvation Army to assist folks facing food and housing insecurity.

Not only did all of these organizations offer to provide much needed resources for the HSE job candidates, some of the organizations were responsible for recommending the first batch of individuals to enter Biotech's HSE program.

Lessons learned

Since March of 2021, Biotech has brought in four employees who worked in Wet or Dry Production while trying to earn their HSE.

Unfortunately, as of late December, no one has successfully completed the program. But they are determined to keep trying.

While he is a bit frustrated and disappointed, Brandon said Biotech has learned a lot from these experiences—and these lessons will help improve their program going forward.





▲ **Brandon Ahnert**

The biggest takeaway has been one that Brandon anticipates becoming part of his work with all employees going forward, not just those in the HSE program.

"This program needs to be very individualized, because every case, every person, is different and they have different needs," he said.

"That was new to me. Before, I was like, 'Let's put this program out there and anybody can do it.' But there's certain people—whether they have a learning disability, or they have different social things that they need to learn—it really came down to looking at the person as an individual and what that person needs to be successful."

There is little doubt in Brandon's mind that Biotech's HSE program can be a game changer for many folks in the West Lafayette area. They just need to get that first person to earn their diploma and a full-time job at the company to show others that it can be done.

And even though none of the first four candidates became Biotech employees or earned their HSE, they were exposed to and given access to many resources in their community that they are still able to access.

"This is more of an opportunity to help our community and help give people in our community the resources they need to hopefully achieve their degree. That's really what we want to do. That is our main motivator."

– *Brandon Ahnert, senior trainer and recruiter in HR at Cook Biotech*

Ultimately, that is the goal of Biotech's program—as well as all of the other volunteer efforts being undertaken by employees at Cook's West Lafayette companies—to expose people in their community who are struggling to opportunities they didn't previously have.

"It seems like we've uncovered a lot of the local resources for folks," Brandon said. "We can connect them with people who can really dive into, 'What are the things you need help with?' This is more of an opportunity to help our community and help give people in our community the resources they need to hopefully achieve their degree. That's really what we want to do. That is our main motivator."

• **Jon Hancuff** (*Jon.Hancuff@CookMedical.com*) is the manager of Global Content and Channel Strategy for Corporate Marketing and Communications.

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Growing together

Cook West Lafayette employees help to end hunger in their community

Andrew Isch saw a need to do something about food insecurity in his community. Andrew is the manager of the MedSurg research team at Cook Research Inc. (CRI) in West Lafayette, Indiana. He has been with the company for 17 years and, after living in the area for as long as he has, he began to feel more in tune with the community and realized the impact of food insecurity. So, when the opportunity to help out through Cook came up, he jumped on it.

Community Connection

CRI has been working with Food Finders since 2013. Inspired by a community involvement group at Cook Biotech, they decided to form their own group at the end of 2012 and, according to Andrew, their work with Food Finders was their first foray into reoccurring volunteer events. The team at CRI collaborates with Cook Biotech, Cook Advanced Technologies (CAT), and MED Institute on a monthly basis to ensure they are all on the same page. Andrew explained that it is a group effort.

When the collaboration began, Food Finders had a big warehouse where they stored the food and then used a mobile pantry program to take food to various locations in need. Cook employees helped them sort the foods housed at the warehouse to prepare them for distribution.



▲ A look at Food Finders' fresh market facility in West Lafayette, Indiana.

"It has really helped to engage our employees with the community and make them feel more connected with where they live," Andrew said. "A lot of people that we work with aren't from here, so it makes that sense of community a little more meaningful to people that just move here for a job."

Food Finders later expanded to include a few other buildings in the city's downtown area, but at the beginning of 2020, they realized that their setup was not large enough to handle the amount of food insecurity in the area. To remedy this issue,





▲ Andrew Isch

they acquired an out-of-business grocery store that became a fresh market location for those facing food insecurity to visit.

"We've grown with them as they have expanded to help distribute even more food to those food insecure members of our community," Andrew said.

Since the beginning of their collaboration in 2013, Cook employees volunteer with Food Finders the second Wednesday of every month. Unfortunately, they had to take most of 2020 off due to the COVID-19 pandemic but were able to resume volunteer work in May of 2021.

According to Andrew, at their December 2021 volunteer day, one of the volunteer coordinators said that the new fresh market pantry had been serving 500 to 600 food insecure clients per day during the prior weeks.

Cook employees began volunteering at the new location once volunteer work resumed in May 2021. Their responsibilities have also changed; now instead of just sorting food for distribution, they are also stocking the shelves of the pantry like they would at an actual grocery store.



▲ Cook employees gathered to volunteer at Food Finders Fresh Market location to sort food. Pictured are first row, from left: **Linda Newell** (Lesley's mom), **Ted Heise** (MED), **Lesley Piper** (CRI), and **Jennifer Forkin** (CRI). Second row, from left: **Andrew Isch** (CRI), **Laura Hiles** (MED), **Shaun Leahy** (CRI), **Lakmini Wilson** (CRI), **Michele Spray** (CRI), **Kim Koning** (MED), and **Hayley Steidinger** (MED).

Cooking for a cause

In addition to their work with Food Finders, Cook West Lafayette employees also have two other food insecurity programs that they participate in. Twice a month, a group of employees use CRI's kitchen to prepare meals to take to Lafayette Urban Ministry's emergency shelter, which provides short-term, overnight shelter, meals, and showers for those experiencing homelessness. The food is donated by CRI and, according to Andrew, even through the pandemic they have been preparing up to 40 meals per night.

"They made an awesome Thanksgiving meal," Andrew said. "The same meal that we got served at our cafeteria, got served to the patrons at the shelter that next night."

Employees also participate in a program that is run through Cook Biotech with the Lafayette Transitional Housing Center (LTHC),

which is for anyone experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis in the area. Once a month, employees prepare food at the center for the people who are staying there. Andrew said that they have also held food drives and fundraisers to provide funding for the Lafayette Urban Ministry and LTHC.

"It makes me feel like we are actually making some sort of difference in somebody else's life," Andrew said. "Food insecurity can come in a lot of different forms based on someone's employment or their family situation, and anything that we, as people who have good jobs in this community, can do to help someone through hardship is worth it to me."

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