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Contact: Joe Shumate, Communications Officer
C: 310-903-7480 | joseph@sdhunger.org

Hunger Free Kids COVID Response Team

San Diego Hunger Coalition leads collaborative action to feed children during coronavirus

San Diego, April 15, 2020 – In response to currently escalating food insecurity, precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, San Diego Hunger Coalition has created the Hunger Free Kids COVID-19 Response Team to address the immediate needs of school districts throughout San Diego County as they work to keep our children nourished during the current crisis. The Hunger Coalition has joined forces with the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (led by UC San Diego's Center for Community Health), the Chronic Disease & Health Equity Unit of the County of San Diego's Public Health Department, and Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) which leads the San Diego Farm to School Task Force.

The San Diego Foundation Taps San Diego Hunger Coalition

The San Diego Foundation has asked San Diego Hunger Coalition to assume a leadership role in utilizing funds donated to the \$8 million COVID-19 Community Response Fund that have been earmarked for child nutrition assistance. The Hunger Coalition is responsible for identifying needs, soliciting requests, and awarding grants to school districts from a \$300,000 fund provided by The San Diego Foundation. Multiple small grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000, administered by the Hunger Coalition, will help meal programs obtain the equipment, supplies, and safety standards required to will help school districts safely feed as many low-income children as they can reach.

San Diego Schools' Role in Hunger Relief

One of the biggest sources of food assistance for low-income families is the federal Free & Reduced Price Meal Program. According to a 2019 San Diego Hunger Coalition food assistance landscape assessment, federal youth meal programs account for 23% of all food assistance in San Diego County. This is double the output of all of the region's food banks and pantries. With school closures, this vital flow of nutritious meals has slowed to a mere trickle.

"We have seen incredible courage and innovation on the part of school district nutrition service directors countywide," says Anahid Brakke, Executive Director of the San Diego Hunger Coalition, *"They have sprung into action and are now distributing pre-bagged meals, drive-thru style to parents in their cars, with no additional funding or guidance from the state and federal government."*

The Hunger Coalition says the money is there for food, however, school districts are facing incredible challenges in getting these available meals to families who need them because they don't have the funding for the new equipment and supplies needed to transition from lunchroom to curbside meal service. The San Diego Foundation's funds, stewarded by San Diego Hunger Coalition, will address these needs and jump-start the flow of federally funded school meals back into San Diego's hunger relief system.

"We applaud the San Diego Foundation's insight in directing funds to our region's school districts to aid them in this transition," says Brakke, *"This investment of philanthropic dollars will be leveraged ten-fold as federal school nutrition programs start rolling again."*

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San Diego Hunger Coalition is currently serving as an information clearing house and a collaborative and communications hub for hunger relief during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our team is available for interviews, information, and to facilitate connections with any of our over 150 local hunger relief partners and their clients. School meal site visits may be coordinated with enough lead time.

Continually updated information on the current crisis is available at sdhunger.org/covid19

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