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Kids Aid

The Backpack Program



Summer 2020 >>>

A community solution to *helping kids be kids*

Hope NOT Hunger

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A special thanks to...

- » **Our volunteers that stayed safe at home.**
- » **Our donors for making it possible to provide extra food to our kids.**
- » **Our new volunteers, for jumping in during the unknown to make sure kids didn't go without food.**
- » **Our community partner agencies for your continued collaboration.**

We appreciate you.

COVID-19 Impact and Our Response

When the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) hit Mesa County, kids in School District 51 (D51) had just started Spring Break. Overnight, grocery store shelves became bare, toilet paper was valued like gold, businesses closed, jobs were lost, and kids and teachers moved to an online learning model. A lot of change happened in a little amount of time—and **The Backpack Program was there through it all.**

Typically, we deliver food at the week's end, but when we saw how quickly the shelves were being emptied we knew we had to respond sooner. We added an extra distribution day the Monday after Spring Break, which resulted in **759 kids receiving an extra bag of food for the week!**

School closures also significantly reduced the number of sites available for food delivery. We quickly got to work looking for opportunities to bring the food to kids in new ways. Now we're connected with 12 preschool and day care centers; they provide a new location kids can pick up food and we now reaching new families we haven't served before.

We also collaborated with D51 staff, the City of Fruita, Riverside Educational Center, Grand Junction Mutual Aid, Foster Alumni Mentors, and Partners to set up new pick-up sites. With approval from D51, teachers and staff members delivered our bags of food directly to student homes who could not access the D51 sites. What an opportunity to receive food by their favorite people!

COVID-19 Impact & Response Continued

We also partnered with **La Milpa Tortilla Factory** to provide twelve, freshly made tortillas for each bag. If you haven't had the pleasure of a La Milpa tortilla, we highly encourage you to experience their buttery-soft goodness. Thanks to the **#GJStrong** grant we received, a portion of that grant made it possible to provide La Milpa tortillas through the end of the school year.

Normally, there are 9-10 food items in each bag, **through the pandemic food items increased to 14-15!** One special week, we were able to purchase bags of rice to go along with the tortillas, a large can of chicken, and beans to help stretch a nutritious meal a little further. Also included were peanut butter and squeezable jelly.

Following the CDC guidelines, and out of an abundance of caution, most of our volunteers stayed safe at home. **Our volunteers are our family and being without them is something we hope to never have to experience again.** A huge thank you to our community for helping us meet the increased need for food with our decreased volunteer capacity.

A special thank you goes out to our Program Assistant, Kristen Stanfield, for her continued dedication to our program, kids, and community. Overnight, her part-time position needed full-time attention; without skipping a beat, she jumped right in to help us navigate the changes. Without a doubt, Kristen is the definition of a Hunger Hero. **Thank you, Kristen!**

With our increased number of new volunteers, we needed help with training and coordination. Without hesitation, **Crystal Dickerson**, a long-time volunteer, **stepped up.** You might recognize her from the U11 Big Horns Baseball team. This team of compassionate young men have adopted Kids Aid and goes out of their way to help—they sort food at the Grand Valley Interfaith Network food drives and host fundraisers and bake sales to raise money for Kids Aid. A natural fit to support us through the changes, she allowed our small staff be able to focus on the program while keeping the warehouse in tip-top shape. **Thank you, Crystal!**

The support we have received from our community through COVID-19 has been overwhelming in the best ways possible. Our staff is small, and as mighty as we are, we can't do it alone. It is often said that there is magic in the air around Kids Aid; **we know that magic is YOU!**

Record-breaking
first week:
3,151
bags of food!

- ♦ **50% MORE food inside bags**
- ♦ **Two distribution days for D51 & Extended Hours**
 - » 759 kids served on Monday
 - » 1,804 kids served on Friday
- ♦ **Additional distributions:**
 - » 115 food bags & 100 TEFAP boxes from Food Bank of the Rockies to Riverside Educational Center
 - » 106 additional bags distributed to kids by D51 staff
 - » 192 food bags delivered to 12 preschools and day cares
 - » 175 food bags distributed to various community sites
- ♦ **400+ volunteer hours**
- ♦ **1 volunteer hired for temporary warehouse support**
- ♦ **Increased hours for current staff**



GOING GREEN

Introducing Our New Biodegradable Bags!

Our primary focus has always been and will always be, providing emergency relief to food-insecure children in Mesa County. We believe that every kid deserves to be a kid and doesn't deserve to carry the burdens of adult problems. We also recognize that around 80,000 single-use plastic bags leave our warehouse. Now that the industry is catching up to demand, a supplier has come through with a price that is **less than** the cost of our plastic bags. These bags not only save money but also lessen our environmental impact so that our children have a better place to thrive. **Win-win!**

During the school year, five schools, with varying delivery and storage methods, piloted the biodegradable bags and reported positive reviews. We have officially switched to these green beauties. Gathered from a follow-up survey, **98% of families that provided feedback on the bags were happy with the switch.** As biodegradable industry evolves, we will continue to find the best bags for the important job of carrying food, *and hope*, to our kids.



FEEDBACK/SURVEY

The switch from plastic to biodegradable bags has also provided an opportunity to connect with our kids and their families, asking for feedback on the new bags *and* on the food inside of them. It's important to us to know that we are providing food that the kids need, enjoy, and have nutritional value. We also asked how The Backpack Program has impacted their lives. Here's some of what we heard about The Backpack Program's impact on their lives:

"The food helps us to supplement our food stamps so that we can make it through the month."

"It has helped stretch a tiny food budget and provided items my children would eat."

"It's been very helpful to us during a difficult financial time especially since many of these foods were hard to find in grocery stores during the pandemic."

"Both my husband and I suffered reduced hours or job loss with Covid 19. The backpack program was vital for our family. It helped us to keep our children fed while working on getting back on our feet."

Thank you for positively changing the lives of the kids in our community.



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/KidsAid



#KidsAidColorado

ELEVATE KIDS: THE COLORADO TRAIL RUN CHALLENGE

In July, the **Doug and Melinda McCaw** are running 490 miles of the Colorado Trail in 18 days! Yes, you read that correctly. Both have traveled the Colorado Trail three times. These super-humans are **using their fourth adventure on the trail as an opportunity to raise money for local kids!** Their goal? \$100,000! Beneficiaries of this fundraiser include their daughter's school, Intermountain Adventist Academy, and The Backpack Program. Follow their journey at **helpelevatekids.com**. If you'd like to support their efforts, you can donate directly to Kids Aid, selecting the Colorado Trail Run Challenge option. ALL of the donations raised for The Backpack Program will go directly to serving our kids. **Thank you, Doug and Melinda!**

"To help people takes strength; to inspire people takes wisdom; to rule over them takes virtue, but *to elevate them takes love.*" - Matshona Dhliwayo

The Colorado Trail is a 490-mile trail that starts in Waterton Canyon outside of Denver, CO and ends in Durango, CO. The trail crosses the Continental Divide multiple times. At its highest point the elevation is 13,271 ft. Over the course of the trail the total elevation gain is about 87,000 feet.



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