

Immediate Release
Monday, September 24, 2018

The Generosity of Houstonians is Unmatched

Bayou City Blessings Announces Expansion into Southwest Houston

Now serving 1300 Houstonian kids every week

Memorial— Monday, September 24, 2018 — Friday, during the first Advisory board meeting of the year, Bayou City Blessings in a Backpack (BCB) announced immediate expansion of its program into Southwest Houston. BCB, provides weekend food to Houstonian kids who are at risk of being hungry while away from school, whether that is over the weekend, or a school holiday. “It is directly due to the generosity of Houstonians that we can expand and welcome an additional two schools and 125 children into our program,” Clair Silliman, Board Member. The Southwest Houston chapter of Blessings in a Backpack started in 2014 with 80 kids. Program Coordinator Cheryl Tyler and her husband Lloyd started the program in their home and currently pack food in their garage. Having personally experienced food insecurity, Cheryl was determined to make a difference in the lives of the children who live around her. She has done just that. “We are thrilled to invite Cheryl and the schools she serves into our program and work together to build the volunteer capacity in Southwest Houston to hopefully grow these programs,” Melissa Peter, Program Coordinator. Cheryl will serve on the BCB Advisory Board as well as continue to coordinate efforts in the Southwest Houston region.

Positive Impact & Growth

The Bayou City Blessings chapter of Blessings in a Backpack launched in 2012 serving 60 kids and has grown to 1300 in less than 6 years. It serves the entire school populations of Blackshear (Third Ward) and Spring Shadows (North Spring Branch) Elementary schools, as

well as 15 students at Stratford High School. “Since our program has met its first goal of feeding the entirety of our first two elementary schools, we have decided to grow and look to how we can impact more children in Houston. Welcoming the Southwest Houston Chapter into our program is a natural expansion,” Kim Robinson, Assistant Program Coordinator. Bayou City Blessings will now include Foerster and Grissom Elementary schools in Southwest Houston. “It is important to Bayou City Blessings to serve as a partner to the schools and their administrations. We feed hearts, minds, and bellies,” Melissa Peter, Program Coordinator. “Thank you, Houston, for your support. Your donations and time are what allow us to grow and serve more children each week,” Mike Fiuzat, Board Member.

Bayou City Blessings Quick Facts

- It only takes \$100 to feed one child for the school year.
- Once a child is brought into the program, Bayou City Blessings pledges to serve that child for three years.
- Bayou City Blessings in a Backpack is a member of the Harris County Department of Education Choice Partners Co-Op which allows the purchase of food items specifically designated for children (meeting all nutritional standards) at a pre-negotiated group rate. Our participation in this Co-Op insures best practice (quality and price) in food purchasing.
- Children receive a bag of food each Friday. The bag includes at a minimum two proteins, two breakfast items, two fruits, and a snack. They also receive a new backpack at the beginning of each school year.
- Food bag items are carefully selected to meet nutrition standards as well as to not add too much weight to the backpack as the food must be carried home by the child. We try to send

combinations home that can be used towards larger meals (i.e. canned tuna with macaroni & cheese or cereal with shelf stable milk).

-Bayou City Blessings in a Backpack is a chapter of the national organization Blessings in a Backpack.

-Bayou City Blessings is 100% volunteer run.

-Bayou City Blessings has received grants from Children's Fund, the Junior League, Super Bowl LI Community Grant, along with many others.

-Bayou City Blessings serves zipcodes 77080, 77004, 77045, 77035, 77079.

-Houston is ranked third in the U.S. for people living with food insecurity, namely children (behind New York City (1) and Los Angeles (2)).

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For more information on BCB:

holyspirithouston.org/bcb
blessingsinabackpack.org

Additional information about BCB & children living with food insecurity in Houston:

BCB:

Students receiving our backpacks qualify for federal Free and Reduced Price Meal programs and are identified, confidentially, by school staff. Food bags are delivered directly to each school, each week during the 38-weeks of school and contain a variety of easy to prepare, healthy food options. Examples of items packed in our bags include: cans of tuna and ravioli,

pasta, macaroni and cheese, raisins, fruit cups, applesauce, cereal bowls, shelf- stable milk, granola bars, crackers and a fresh fruit.

Our weekend food program utilizes innovative approaches in that all the work done in Houston is 100% volunteer based. Program Coordinators, who dedicate approximately 30 hours/week during the program year, are volunteers and lead approximately 50 volunteers per week to acquire and organize inventory, ready inventory for assembly, assemble weekend food bags and deliver classroom bags. While assembly of the weekend food bags is done away from the schools themselves, volunteer delivery teams deliver directly to classroom and counselor doors, taking the burden of implementation away from administration, teachers and parents.

Children living with food insecurity in Houston:

Based on the 2018 report "Map the Meal Gap Child Food Insecurity" (<http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/2016/2016-map-the-meal-gap-child-food-insecurity.pdf>), with 2016 data, there are 284,000 or 23.5% of children living in food insecure households in Harris County alone. Houston, ranks 3rd in the nation behind New York and Los Angeles for number of children living with food insecurity. In our targeted programming, 94.4% of students at Blackshear; 96.8% of students at Foerster; 98.7% of students at Grissom; 85.8% of students at Spring Shadows; and 91% of students at Windsor Village Elementary schools are considered "economically disadvantaged" with many students performing below expectation on state mandated testing. Per Title 1 designation and administrative reporting, 100% of students attending each program school qualifies for federal Free and Reduced Price Meal programming. Furthermore, according to Map the Meal Gap reporting "At school, food-insecure children are at increased risk of falling behind their food-

secure peers both academically and socially; food insecurity is linked to lower reading and mathematics test scores, and they may be more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, including hyperactivity, aggression and anxiety.” Providing a basic need, such as food, helps to eliminate non-academic barriers to education and is a critical piece of helping these children become productive, successful students and community members.

Approximately 284,000 Houston children are considered food insecure meaning they often do not have consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. High levels of childhood food insecurity are linked through research to depressed developmental milestones and poor academic and social performance. Further, the “Map the Meal Gap” report reiterates the research adding “The consequences and costs of food insecurity for all ages make addressing the issue an economic and social imperative. In particular, inadequate nutrition can permanently alter children’s brain architecture and stunt their intellectual capacity, affecting children’s learning, social interaction and productivity.” Families considered “food insecure” are often families forced to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing, transportation or health care, and purchasing nutritionally sound foods. Bayou City Blessings in a Backpack desires to lighten this burden for families, while helping to give each child a better opportunity to experience academic success.