Feeding the Gulf Coast's Child Nutrition Team Serves Over 100,000 Meals Since Schools Closed

Mobile, May 7, 2020 (Issuewire.com**)** - When schools closed early in March, kids in need would have missed much-needed meals along the Central Gulf Coast. However, Feeding the Gulf Coast quickly sprang into action to organize and start their Summer Meals Program, a process that typically takes several months. With only three days to plan this year, Feeding the Gulf Coast started the program on March 19 so that kids in need in our area had a place to receive a healthy meal. To date, their child nutrition team has served over 100,000 meals in response to schools closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Each summer we operate the Summer Meals Program," said Eugenie Sellier, Child Nutrition Programs Director at Feeding the Gulf Coast. The program typically kicks off at the end of May, but with schools closing early, we knew that we needed to quickly set up the program to ensure that children in need had access to meals. We are partnering with over 60 sites to provide 5,000 meals on a daily basis."

Site partners have stated that the program has been a blessing for kids who might not receive meals without the program. "When the program began in March, we were excited to see how we might make an impact in our community by providing the drive-thru meals for hungry children," said Bellview Assembly of God volunteer, Dianne Roark. "What a delightful surprise! Parents and grandparents drive through with grins, while the children in the back seat may be bouncing with joy to receive the snacks and lunches! I am touched by the sincere thank you's from both the adults, and the little ones as they drive by to go home to eat the [meals provided through Feeding the Gulf Coast]. Thank you for letting us play a part in this much-needed intervention!"

Feeding the Gulf Coast received a grant to help support the program from No Kid Hungry, a national campaign run by Share Our Strength, a nonprofit working to solve problems of hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world. According to their studies, 43% of low-income families say they have a harder time making ends meet during the summer. "With jobs and wages lost and school meals disappearing for millions of kids, families are shouldering much of the burden during the coronavirus pandemic. No Kid Hungry is proud to partner with Feeding the Gulf Coast to ensure kids can continue to get the nutrition they need during this ongoing crisis," said Eleni Towns, Associate Director of No Kid Hungry.

No Kid Hungry runs a texting service to help parents and caregivers find free summer meal sites in their neighborhood. Parents and caregivers seeking meals for children, ages 18 and younger, can text the word "FOOD" (or "COMIDA") to 877-877 to find emergency food distribution sites near them.

Feeding America estimates that an additional 17.1 million people will be food insecure in 2020 as a result of this crisis – for a total of 54.3 million people, or 1 in every 6 people. This is a 46% increase over the 37.2 million people who were food insecure prior to the COVID-19 crisis (in 2018). The 54.3 million people figure includes 18.0 million children.

As families are faced with an increased need for food due to school closures, inability to work, or facing self-quarantine requirements, those seeking assistance can visit www.feedingamerica.org to find their local food bank.

During this time of uncertainty and crisis, Feeding the Gulf Coast remains dedicated to serving the

community. Working with community partners, the food bank will continue to be an organization of hope and support for families facing hunger.

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About Feeding the Gulf Coast
Feeding the Gulf Coast, formerly Bay Area Food Bank, serves a 24-county area spanning the Florida panhandle, south Alabama, and south Mississippi. In 2019, the food bank distributed over 24 million meals to over 400 church pantries, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit organizations throughout its service area. The food bank also operates multiple hunger-relief and nutrition programs, including Summer Meals, Afterschool Meal, Backpack, Disaster Relief, Mobile Pantry and Produce Drop Distributions and Nutrition Education. Feeding the Gulf Coast is a United Way member agency and a member of Feeding America. For more information, visit **www.feedingthegulfcoast.org**.

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About Feeding America

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs, we provide meals to more than 40 million people each year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry. Individuals, charities, businesses and government all have a role in ending hunger. Donate. Volunteer. Advocate. Educate. Together we can solve hunger.

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About No Kid Hungry

No child should go hungry in America. But millions don’t know where their next meal is coming from. No Kid Hungry is ending childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all kids the healthy food they need to thrive. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign by Share Our Strength, an organization working to end hunger and poverty.

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