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**Blessings in a Backpack**

**Feeding the Future of TOWN**

**Mission**

Blessings in a Backpack (Blessings) mobilizes communities, individuals and resources to provide food on the weekends for elementary school children across America who might otherwise go hungry. Blessings envisions a world where every school-aged child in America has adequate nourishment to learn and grow. As a leader in the movement to end childhood hunger, Blessings strives to ensure children don't go hungry on the weekends by empowering individuals and communities to take action.

**Organization’s Goals and Accomplishments**

*Please list the goals and accomplishments of the organization.*

Incorporated in 2008 in Kentucky with a goal of providing weekend nutrition to children who face food insecurity, Blessings has grown to a national organization that, with the help of thousands of volunteers working at over 1,000 schools throughout the country, is distributing over 9.6 million pounds of food to more than 87,000 children. This equals over 3.2 million hunger-free weekends for children living with food insecurity. This food helps keep hunger at bay so these children can return to school on Monday, nourished and ready to learn.

Blessings’ sole program is the distribution of bags full of food to children facing weekend hunger. Activities include:

\*Recruiting, training and retaining volunteers

\*Securing food, packing bags, and distributing bags full of food each school week to food insecure children

\*Completing program management and evaluation documents

\*Developing and managing strategic relationships with a myriad of partners, including schools, food providers, community groups, corporations, professional athletes and individuals

Organizational highlights include:

\* During the 2015-2016 school year, Blessings provided more than 3.2 million hunger-free weekends to children facing food insecurity.

\* Northwestern University Dance Marathon selected Blessings to be its 2016 beneficiary, resulting in a gift of over $930,000, the second largest in the event’s 42-year history.

\* A social media campaign fundraiser, spearheaded by NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt, Jr. in the spring of 2016 resulted in a $160,000 donation to Blessings.

\* Blessings was recognized in national media outlets, including CNN, NBC, the Golf Channel, the Chicago Tribune, and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, with total publicity value of nearly $3.2 million in 2014.

\* Blessings received the prestigious 2016 Jefferson Award presented for outstanding community service engagement.

\* Blessings was selected as the recipient of the National Association of Broadcasters’ public service campaign for 2017. This honor will involve a national PSA campaign in January 2017. Service to America Leadership Award honoree Actress Sharon Stone chose Blessings as her charity of choice to receive recognition.

\* People Magazine: Blessings was chosen by People Magazine to partner with them in the People First Help Feed a Child 2012 Charity of the Year initiative.

\* The United States Conference of Mayors passed a resolution declaring every third Thursday of September to be “Blessings in a Backpack Day.” Over 90 mayors have participated in the past two events.

**Project Description**

*Provide a brief description of how funding will be used.*

According to the USDA’s “Household Food Security in the United States in 2013,” 15.8 million American children left school on Fridays, uncertain if they would have food to eat that weekend. In TOWN OR COUNTY NAME, ### children, or ##% of the child population, are income-eligible for nutrition assistance programs. During the school week, most of these children depend on the federal free and reduced price meal program their school offers. Sometimes, the meals at school are the only ones they get. When the school closes its doors on Friday afternoon, many of these children go home to empty cupboards and hunger pangs for 65 hours until they return to school on Monday morning. Who will feed them this weekend?

We will. “Feeding the Future of ENTER TOWN/COUNTY/REGION HERE”” will provide hunger-free weekends to ### children facing food insecurity during the coming school year. Program activities include:

\* Training, supporting and retaining volunteers as they work to purchase groceries and pack bags

\* Providing bags full of food to ### elementary students each week

\* Developing and managing relationships with partners, including schools, food providers, community groups, businesses, and volunteers

\* Engaging the community in Blessings’ work through volunteer opportunities and funding partnerships

Each week during the school year, food is transported to the school where a volunteer team packs bags of food and gives them to the teachers to distribute discreetly on Friday. Menu items are child-appropriate and vary depending on each site’s food partner and the community being served. Examples include: oatmeal, granola bars, pasta, canned vegetables, raisins and fresh fruit when possible. On Monday mornings, after a hunger-free weekend, children return to school, ready to learn.

**Measure of Progress**

*Briefly describe how you measure progress for this program.*

Blessings’ desired goal for “Feeding the Future of TOWN” is that ### children facing food insecurity in TOWN have weekend nutrition for a 38-week school year. Blessings works towards this goal through the following measurable indicators:

 \*### food insecure children in TOWN have access to nutrition on the weekends during the school year due to receiving backpacks full of food from Blessings.

 \*### volunteers in TOWN are impacting the issue of childhood hunger.

Progress toward these goals are monitored through a variety of tools, including backpack distribution reports, semester reports, volunteer surveys and staff management reports. These tools will be used to analyze the project’s progress towards its goals and its impact, make modifications for future activities, and communicate the project’s results with its funding partners and the greater community.

The impact of the hunger-free weekends provided by Blessings and its dedicated volunteers and community partners goes beyond easing hunger pangs. Providing consistent nutrition to children allows them to come to school every Monday, focused and ready to learn, and fosters a feeling among the children served that their community cares about them. Consistent nutrition is necessary for children to participate at school. Better test scores, expanded reading skills, improved health and increased attendance have all been attributed to consistent childhood nutrition,such as what Blessings helps provide. Without the burden of hunger, children can concentrate on the joys of childhood. In addition to no longer feeling weekend hunger, children fed by Blessings have reported the following impact on their lives:

* 78% feel cared for by their community.
* 60% report improved school attendance and fewer behavioral issues.
* 59% find it is easier to learn at school.