

Coyote Canyon School Matching Grant Project

Many families living in the Bullhead City, AZ area live well below the poverty line, with some even being homeless. For the children of these families, hunger is a constant companion. In fact, for many kids, the school district's free breakfast and lunch programs provide their only meals of the day. Many of these children may have very little — or even nothing at all — to eat on weekends. How can children be successful in school when they are struggling with hunger?

Communities in Schools of Southern Nevada, a 501(c)(3) organization, believes that every child deserves a healthy start and a healthy future. This is only possible, though, when children receive the nourishment their growing bodies need. That remarkable organization's WeekEND Hunger Program was established to feed the needy hungry children who depend on the school cafeteria for their nourishment. Every Friday, backpacks are filled with "child-friendly food" (food that requires no preparation or adult assistance to eat) and are sent home with those children who have been identified by the school as needing help. Empty backpacks are returned the following school day to be refilled and sent home again the next Friday. In many cases, this is the only food that these deprived children will eat all weekend.

The program had been brought to several nearby schools, with remarkable results. The children served were deemed to be healthier, happier and performed better in school, according to the school principal and nurse.

The available resources, however, had not permitted the expansion of the program to serve two of Bullhead City's neediest schools: Coyote Canyon and Desert Valley. The Bullhead City Rotary Club recognized that these schools badly need this WeekEND Hunger Program, but also recognized that there is no "quick-fix" or "band-aid" which can be applied to solve this problem with a one-time intervention. Through a Matching Grant project, the Bullhead City Club, in partnership with the Valle de Cuernavaca Rotary Club in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, along with Communities in Schools organization, has assumed the responsibility for implementing this highly-effective program in one of these schools — the Coyote Canyon School (K-2). The club expects to serve 35 students this year in this school of approximately 700 with this weekend backpack food program.

The Bullhead City club recognizes the need to help sustain the annual 10-month WeekEND Hunger Program at the Coyote Canyon School, partially through continued financial support by the club in succeeding years, and by helping to enlist additional individual and business financial support from within the community that will eventually make the Coyote School Program self-sustaining, so the Rotary funding can be utilized to help initiate programs to meet other needs. Bullhead City Rotary anticipates needing to support 50% of the Coyote Canyon School project in its second year of operation, and in declining amounts in subsequent years.



Experience has proven that the children who benefit from the WeekEND Hunger Backpack Program are happier, healthier and perform better in school.



PDG Art Harrington and Bullhead City Club President Sharon Harrington help distribute backpacks to the children.