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EZRA H. BAKER INNOVATION SCHOOL

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To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Tanya Roza and I am the School Social Worker at the Ezra H. Baker Innovation School in Dennis, Massachusetts. We are a pre-K through Grade 3 school with over 400 students. I have served in this capacity for 18 years, and see that the number of families that are struggling has only increased over the years. This is a letter to explain what Cape Kid Meals has done for our school, and to encourage organizations, foundations, and institutions to partner with them to prevent hunger in impoverished communities on Cape Cod.

David Johnson approached me during the 2014-2015 school year to discuss ways his parish could help in the community. He explained that they had made missions to Haiti, but wanted a project in his community and wondered if there was a need and what that need was. I explained to him that in the town I work, 62% of our students met the federal poverty guidelines for free and reduced breakfast or lunch. Many of our children come from single parent homes, are in foster care, homeless and living in motels and shelters, and have other major stress factors that impact their ability to self-regulate, feel safe and learn. When I explained this to David, he felt that many people who live “on the other side of town” simply don’t realize the poverty in parts of this community.

In the past, we’ve noticed that some of our children who come from “food insecure” homes were taking their half-eaten sandwiches or extra sandwiches from school home to their siblings. About six years ago, each one of the schools in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District gained access to a pantry in which we could keep donated non-perishables. This was a great addition, as families would often call me saying they won’t get their food stamps until the following week, that they’d already used their two turns at the food pantry, etc. and were nervous about how they were going to feed their families.

Around this time, I had read an article in People Magazine about an organization called “Blessings in a Backpack” that some schools were partnering with and having great success. Essentially, children who qualify for free lunch are given a quart sized bag of food on Fridays to help get them through the weekend. I looked into the program and it required such a substantial financial commitment that I had to table the idea. When David came to meet with me, I immediately thought about this organization and encouraged him to look into it. In our conversation, he said that many people who live “on the other side of town” simply don’t realize the poverty in parts of this community and he was absolutely right.

He made the commitment right away, and began bringing 30+ bags of food every Friday. Cape Kid Meals tries to provide the healthiest non-perishables available, avoiding ramen noodles and junk food. In addition, they pack two pieces of fresh fruit into every bag. For some of our students, fresh fruit is a precious commodity.

At this point, Cape Kid Meals delivers approximately 65 bags per week to our school and approximately the same to the Nathaniel H. Wixon School, our district's 5th and 6th grade school. Children *never* forget they are getting a bag, and often remind me on Fridays. Once a child was absent and her father came in for her bag because they truly needed it over the weekend.

Here are some things our teachers have said about the Blessings in a Backpack Program:

"I have students who ask for bags of food weekly. They are very appreciative when they are able to get one." Raquel, Kindergarten Teacher

"This has been a Godsend for many of our neediest families. Such a relief to know that there will at least be something for them to eat over the weekend." Shannon, Grade 3 Teacher

"About a month ago a grandparent spoke to me at the grocery store and said how thankful she was to have the snacks for the weekend. She is helping raise her two grandchildren with not much money coming in. She was so very grateful for the blessings they receive each week." Shyer, Assistant Teacher, who helps deliver the bags *every* week.

Being able to help alleviate the food anxiety that children have, so they can focus on being a child and learning to read and write, is truly a gift, and I cannot say enough about David Johnson and Cape Kid Meals. Please call at the above number if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Tanya Roza
School Social Worker

