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Future Hunger Relief Leaders Connect Kids to Summer Meals

AmeriCorp VISTAs lead action to feed children during the summer months.

Local nonprofits, national advocates highlight importance of free summer meal programs for kids.

Hunger Free America CEO Joel Berg stopping at summer meals site as part of cross-county journey visiting hunger relief organizations.

San Diego, CA – Leaders from local nonprofit organizations will gather on **July 29, 2021**, at 12 noon to raise awareness of summer child hunger, the resources and tools available to parents to find summer meals, and the incredible AmeriCorps volunteers dedicating their time and talents to eliminating child hunger in San Diego County. Representatives from San Diego Hunger Coalition and YMCA of San Diego County will be joined by national anti-hunger advocate Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, as part of his coast-to-coast journey to meet those working on the nation's front lines of hunger relief. San Diego is Mr. Berg's first stop on the West Coast after having driven all the way from the East Coast.

“Even with the pandemic easing, hunger still ravages virtually every rural and suburban town and urban neighborhood in the nation, which is why I am traveling across the country to meet with those working on the front lines of hunger and resilient families facing food hardship from coast-to-coast,” said Berg. *“My goal is to energize the work to enact the public policies needed to end U.S. hunger once and for all. I am especially pleased to visit federally funded summer meals sites for kids. After all, to be well read, you must be well fed.”*

Four AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) members currently serving as part of Hunger Free America's Anti-Hunger Corps will be present for comments and interviews. The VISTA members are a part of the San Diego Hunger Coalition team. They are creating new resources and innovative approaches to hunger relief with a focus on youth meals, especially while schools are closed for the summer.

Media Invitation

Press Conference with Joel Berg, CEO, Hunger Free America

When: Thursday, July 29, 2021, 12:00 pm

Where: Jackie Robinson Family YMCA, 151 YMCA Way, San Diego CA 92102

Speakers: Joel Berg, CEO, Hunger Free America; Anahid Brakke, CEO, San Diego Hunger Coalition; Anna Arancibia, Executive Director, Jackie Robinson Family YMCA

About AmeriCorps VISTA

[The AmeriCorps VISTA program](#), founded in 1965, is an anti-poverty program that provides opportunities for Americans over the age of 18, from a diverse range of backgrounds, to share their talents and passions with nonprofits and public agencies dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty. VISTA members provide additional capacity to create or expand anti-poverty programs while gaining valuable on-the-job training and professional experience.

[Hunger Free America](#) sponsors two AmeriCorps national service programs: the year-long Anti-Hunger Corps and the Summer Associate Program. Their programs place VISTA members with anti-hunger nonprofits across the country. San Diego Hunger Coalition currently hosts four VISTA members: [Ervin Gonzalez](#), [Ashley Jeznach](#), [Mara Miranda](#), and

[Anneliese Pettitt](#). The VISTA members work with the Hunger Coalition Team to discover opportunities to strengthen San Diego's food safety net and lead hunger relief through community-based action. They are fighting summer hunger by developing and maintaining a year-round youth meal finder tool, creating fresh communications that are community-informed and relevant to younger audiences, and facilitating connections between community partners and San Diego residents to get more meals to kids. The Hunger Coalition's VISTA members' bios are available at sdhunger.org/staff.

About Summer Meals

[San Diego Hunger Coalition's research](#) shows that currently 2 in 5 children live in households that are experiencing or at risk of food insecurity. This is up from pre-pandemic estimates of 1 in 5. School meals provide critical nutrition for children and are a major source of food assistance. Due to the pandemic, free school meals have been extended to every child and youth ages 18 and younger [through June 30, 2022](#). While schools are closed for the summer, meals continue to be available through [summer meal sites across the county](#).

San Diego Hunger Coalition's Hunger Free Kids program, powered by dedicated VISTA members, has created tools and connections to make it easier for families to get summer meals. Ashley Jeznach and Ervin Gonzalez, Hunger Free Kids VISTAs, developed and maintain an [online youth meal finder tool](#) that provides the locations of youth meals across the county and contains the most up-to-date information. This work was made possible by the VISTA members fostering relationships and trust with San Diego County school districts that provide updated youth meal information monthly.

The Hunger Free Kids team also facilitates connections between community organizations to expand access to summer meals. The YMCA of San Diego County currently is working with Grossmont Union High School District, Santee School District, Heaven's Windows, and San Diego Unified School District provided summer meals to YMCA day camp participants.

Local YMCAs helping to address childhood hunger include [Cameron Family YMCA](#), [Copley-Price Family YMCA](#), [Jackie Robinson Family YMCA](#), [YMCA Camp Surf](#), [McGrath Family YMCA](#) and [Ryan Family YMCA](#).

The Y is serving students who come from low-income families who live in vulnerable communities. They served over **33,380** meals and snacks this summer ensuring children have access to the nutrition they need to thrive.

Youth Meals are Available

Many schools and community sites currently offer grab-and-go summer meals while schools are closed for the summer. These vital summer meal programs are underutilized due to lack of awareness or misconceptions about eligibility. Summer meals are:

- Free of charge
- Require no registration or identification
- Available for all youth and children ages 18 and younger
- Will not affect immigration status

San Diego Hunger Coalition's youth meal finder tool is updated on a monthly basis and will be available year round to help families find nearby youth meals. The tool is located at sdhunger.org/kidsmeals.

The youth meal finder tool was created and is maintained by the San Diego Hunger Coalition's AmeriCorps VISTA members.

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For more information, please contact Joe Shumate, Director of Communications, at joseph@sdhunger.org.

San Diego Hunger Coalition leads coordinated action to end hunger in San Diego County supported by research, education, and advocacy. San Diego Hunger Coalition's vision is a Hunger Free San Diego where anyone facing hunger has access to adequate food assistance to see them through their time of need.

