

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Feeding the Gulf Coast Continues Serving FREE Meals for Children, 18 and Younger

February 4, 2021 – Feeding the Gulf Coast is partnering with local community organizations to offer free meals to children, ages 18 and younger, through a nutrition program supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"We know that parents do not always have the resources to provide healthy meals for their kids," said Eugenie Sellier, Child Nutrition Programs Director at Feeding the Gulf Coast. "We are partnering with sites locally to provide meals for kids on a daily basis. Our goal is to ensure that all children have access to nutritious food."

Over 35,140 children are food-insecure in our Mississippi coastal service area. The far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 have created an increased struggle for families who are trying to balance a new normal while children deal with the complexities of school, some virtually, others in person or a mixture of the two.

COVID-19 presented a crisis of increased demand, declines in donations of food, and disruptions to the charitable food assistance system's operating model, creating an economic crisis unlike anything since the Great Depression. We continue to see elevated need now, and for some, the recovery will take years. 1 In 5 of our neighbors here along the Gulf Coast may struggle with hunger this year, which includes 1 in 3 children.

The food bank's child nutrition programs have a significant impact on children and families across the Central Gulf Coast. Last year, Feeding the Gulf Coast served over 1,330,500 meals and snacks to over 17,000 children across the Central Gulf Coast at area churches, schools, parks and community centers. Additionally, Feeding the Gulf Coast was able to address the increased need by distributing over 31.6 million meals in 2020. The food bank continues to work hard to address food insecurity in our community.

"We know that the hardships faced by many in the area have only grown as COVID-19 continues to present problems in 2021," says Michael Ledger, President & CEO of Feeding the Gulf Coast. "The food bank is thankful for our many pantry partners and Child Nutrition site partners who have linked arms with us as we work to meet the needs of communities. We are truly grateful for many volunteers and supporters who have helped us remain dedicated to our mission."

The "Find Help" feature available at www.feedingthegulfcoast.org is the best source of information for families and individuals seeking assistance. Individuals can also call (888) 704-FOOD. Parents can also text 'FOOD' to 877-877 for child meal sites near them.

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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 2020, the food bank distributed over 31.6 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.