

For Immediate Release

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Hilary Duff Visits Boca Raton Elementary School Blessings in a Backpack Program Helps Provide Student Education

On May 22, 2008 Hilary Duff visited the children of Boca Raton Elementary School for the official launch of the "Boca Blessings in a Backpack" Program into the local community.

"Every day 60% of children in America go to bed hungry on the weekend" says Stan Curtis, founder of Kentucky Harvest and Blessings in a Backpack. Does this seem like a large number? Absolutely, but in Boca Raton a local church has partnered with a non-profit agency to help tackle the problem. It seems unlikely that in the affluent city of Boca Raton children would be going to bed hungry on the weekends. But the reality is that in one school 64% are at risk.

In response to this overwhelming need Boca Raton Community Church and Boca Helping Hands has adopted the Blessings in a Backpack concept within their community. The goal is to keep needy kids from going hungry on weekends. Kentucky Harvest's Stan Curtis says the plan is "to give each one of the children backpacks to take home over the weekend that's full of food."

The backpack pilot program, which started in January 2008 at a local Boca Raton elementary school, offers students who receive free and reduced lunch from the Palm Beach County School District a backpack filled with food each Friday. The children eat the food over the weekend and return the empty backpacks to the school on Monday.

Since the beginning of the pilot program the school has seen an increase in attendance and a decrease of health issues, decreased number of trips to the nurses' office, from these students. "Commensurate with the research, we know our students will attain academic success with this program. Blessings in a Backpack has done a lot for our children. The gratitude that the parents of the children show, speaks volumes," says Sherron Brown, guidance counselor for the school.

Weekly volunteers from the church gather to assemble the backpacks, loading them up with several pounds of healthful foods.

“Our focus in Outreach ministries is to reach out and touch a life in Jesus’ name. Through the ministry of compassion our goal is to simply feed the children,” added Debbie Woldanski, Boca Raton Community Church volunteer coordinator for the backpack program.

Current funding for the Backpack Program comes from a private donor. “In the future as we expand this program to encompass other schools in the community we are looking for additional donors to step forward such as civic groups, churches and local corporations,” says Linda Gove, Executive Director of Boca Helping Hands.

For more information regarding “Boca Blessings in a Backpack” program or to learn how you or your organization can become involved, please contact Rev. Bill Mitchell, Pastor of Outreach Ministries at Boca Raton Community Church at 561.395.2400 ext. 349.

Hilary Duff, 20, TV's Lizzie McGuire, worked with hunger-relief group, USA Harvest, to launch Blessings in a Backpack in July 2005 at two schools in Louisville. Duff funds weekend meals for about 1,000 kids at a Los Angeles grade school. For more information on the USA Harvest, visit www.usaharvest.com or www.blessingsinabackpack.com.

Boca Helping Hands is a not-for-profit Boca Raton community-based organization with the mission of providing compassionate service through food and assistance programs to families, children and individuals to instill dignity and break the cycle of dependence. For more information on Boca Helping Hands, call 561.417.0913 or www.bocahelpinghands.org.

Boca Raton Community Church is a non-denominational church whose Outreach Mission is to reach out and touch a life in Jesus’ name. For more information on Boca Raton Community Church, call 561.395.2400 ext. 349 or visit their website at www.bocacommunity.org.