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A Weekend Safety Net:

How Got Your Back San Diego Is Nourishing Children and Strengthening Our Community

BY ROSE SCHLICK

In neighborhoods across North County, there are children who look just like every other student walking out of school on a Friday afternoon. What many people do not realize is that some of those children are heading home unsure of when they will eat again. For more than 16 years, Got Your Back San Diego has been working quietly and consistently to change that reality for local families.

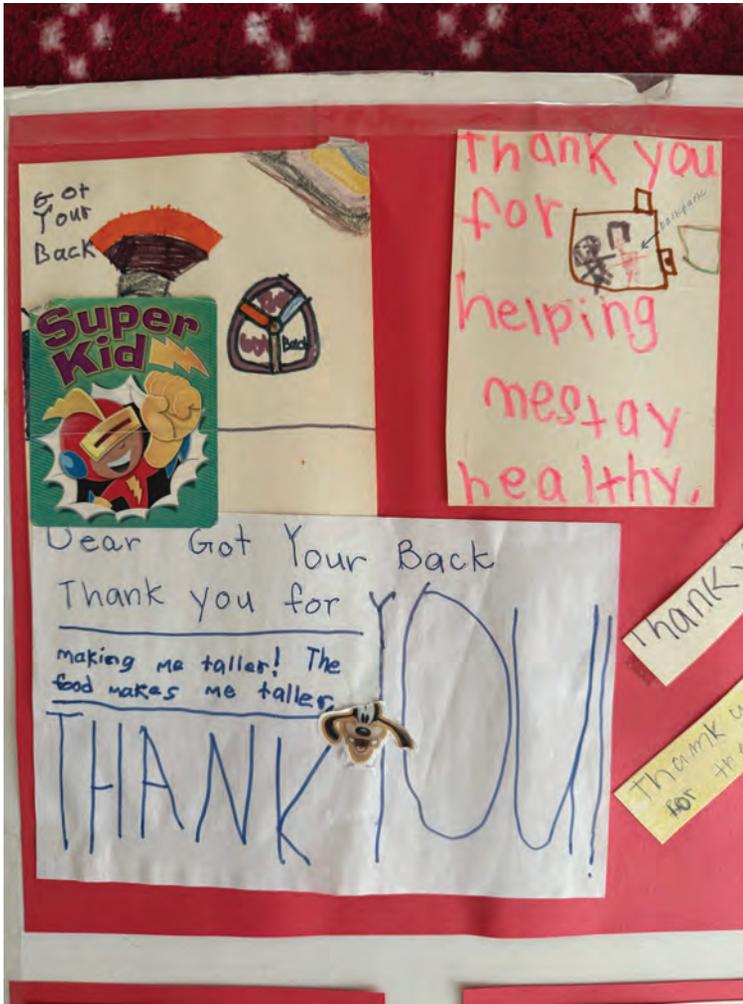
Founded by Bill and Sue McLeod, the organization was not born out of a business plan or a desire to start a nonprofit. Instead, it grew naturally from a life rooted in hospitality and care. Their home was always a place where people gathered, shared meals, and found stability. Children gravitated there, knowing they would be welcomed, fed, and safe. Over time, that same spirit extended far beyond their front door and into the wider community.

The turning point came after learning about weekend hunger among schoolchildren. While homelessness was a visible issue, the idea that children with homes might still go without food for days at a time was eye opening. After speaking with educators and visiting local schools, it became clear that the problem existed in nearly every district. Rather than looking away, the McLeods chose to act.



What began as a leap of faith has become a lifeline for hundreds of elementary school students in Oceanside, Vista, and Carlsbad. Each school week, children identified by school staff receive a discreet backpack filled with food to sustain them through the weekend. The bags include multiple meals, snacks, and basic hygiene items. The goal is simple but powerful: ensure children are nourished when school cafeterias are closed.

The impact of that support reaches far beyond the weekend. Teachers have shared that students who once struggled with anxiety and fatigue on Fridays now show noticeable improvements. Children who eat consistently are better rested, more focused, and better able to keep up with schoolwork. Regular access to food supports healthy growth, emotional stability, and confidence. Knowing that food is waiting at home offers comfort and security that every child deserves.



Support from local businesses and organizations has also played a critical role. Community partners host food drives, raise funds, and help spread awareness about food insecurity in areas where many people assume it does not exist. These efforts help keep shelves stocked week after week and ensure the program can continue throughout the school year.

Along the way, Got Your Back San Diego has expanded its reach in meaningful ways. Seasonal initiatives have provided children with brand new blankets, holiday gifts, and school supplies. In some cases, donated backpacks and supplies have even reached children beyond our borders through trusted partners serving orphanages in other countries. These moments often arise unexpectedly, guided by generosity and opportunity.

At its core, Got Your Back San Diego is built on the belief that hunger is not just a lack of food but a source of stress and trauma for children. By ensuring students are fed, the organization is helping them feel seen, valued, and cared for. Sixteen years in, the mission remains unchanged. No child should face the weekend hungry, and together, our community is proving that compassion makes a lasting difference.

Over the years, Got Your Back San Diego has heard countless stories that affirm the importance of this work. Some come from families currently receiving support, while others arrive unexpectedly from young adults who once depended on the program themselves. Many share the same message: without that weekly bag of food, weekends would have been filled with hunger and stress. Those moments serve as powerful reminders that even small acts of care can shape a child's future.

The organization operates with a small but dedicated team and a steady stream of volunteers. The warehouse is a welcoming place where people from all walks of life come together to pack bags, organize supplies, and give their time. Volunteers often express gratitude for the opportunity to help, even though the organization depends on their generosity to function. That shared sense of purpose has created a strong and connected community around the mission.

