

Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

March 21, 2020

A DAY I'LL NEVER FORGET.

First, some background color.

On late Monday of this week, just five days ago, we decided to open a "Pop-Up Drive Through" food distribution to serve as a safety net for the residents of our community - residents who had been recently laid off or who had been relying on a local pantry for food assistance already.

We contacted the Honda Center & Anaheim Duck's organizations to request the use of their parking lot and were welcomed by a responsive team eager to help facilitate our working plan. We decided on Anaheim and this specific venue because of its iconic and easily recognizable status and its central location to all major freeways. Running our distribution hours from 9:00 a.m. - noon, we estimated we would serve between 500 and 1,000 families with three bags of shelf stable food. This would be the first time we would provide distribution in a mobile format at this scale and we began our preparation with only 4 days to organize our distribution strategy.

Guided by recommendations from health authorities about COVID-19 distancing and health precautions, we decided to turn this into a drive-through format where cars could pull up, pop their trunk and limited staff and volunteers wearing face masks and gloves could place these bags safely into these vehicles and get them on their way with minimal contact. On Wednesday, our team walked the Honda Center parking lot with their operations team to game plan traffic control and distribution flow. Anaheim Police was also notified that we were planning a distribution for today.

We also decided to prepare for 2,000 cars and by Thursday ramped up to be able to serve 4,000. We did not publicize our plan other than at our COVID-19 status update and planning call with our network of pantries on Tuesday morning. 211OC, a referral organization who was quickly ramping up to meet the current demand of the crisis we now find ourselves in was also notified. We recruited field volunteers for today, scheduled staff and packed thousands of bags of food in our distribution center with only team members, as our distribution center volunteer experience was suspended Monday in order to harden our defense as a Food Bank.

It was still dark this morning when we mobilized two tractor-trailers packed with food and supplies, portable hand washing stations, face masks, gloves, and equipment needed to facilitate a mobile distribution site of this magnitude. Team members and field volunteers began to rise to meet the call of our community and make their way to a 7:00 a.m. pre-event meeting and orientation. Trucks began arriving at at 5:00 a.m. and staff shortly thereafter. I turned left on Douglass at 6:45 a.m. to find dozens of cars staging in line before they would turn right behind the Honda Center and toward our distribution point. Immediately I realized that we needed to hold traffic so I placed my pick-up truck in a way that would allow the stream of cars already surging my way to be managed. A two-way radio was quickly run over to me and five volunteers followed. We began to stage four lines of cars 100-plus deep, while the team at the distribution point scrambled to open early - it was only 7:30 a.m.

We opened at approximately 7:45 a.m. as traffic was now backing up onto Katella and we began to stage cars through a maze of cones towards the food station. Three HABIT Burger trucks arrived to also

provide a hot meal to every occupant of every car while they patiently waited in what we knew would be long lines. Just before 8:00 a.m., I called Woody from our team to notify the Anaheim Police watch commander that we would need support. I managed these four lines moving groups of 10-12 cars in rotation onto the parking field of the Honda Center until 9:00 a.m. or so. By that time, news vans and the welcome sight of Anaheim Police officers working alongside us were in view.

As I left my truck in place and made my way quickly to the distribution point on foot, I was able to take it all in for a moment. I was blown away by the scale of this event. Where are all these people coming from? How did they hear about this so fast? Hundreds of cars winding their way forward patiently waiting for food. Crazy. Faces that I'd seen and or said hello to 45 minutes ago or longer! Families who drove together, parents with young children in the back seat reading or playing with toys, seniors alone and together, college students.

It is in that moment that I realized we're only at the beginning of real crisis, and it's not just COVID-19, its a potential crisis of hunger.

I gathered by the make and model of their newer cars that many of these individuals were clearly laid off just recently and yes, many were obviously working poor families as well. We realized the plan to feed cars while in line was slowing us down, so we pulled the food trucks, but the HABIL staff didn't leave. Without prompt, they jumped into action and joined the food distribution line to work alongside our team. We also had the insight of a police drone that confirmed what we already knew - hundreds of cars slowly making their way towards the Honda Center in long lines stretching as far as we could see. Cars were on Katella from Douglass to Main Street where they turned North, from Douglass to Ball; and the 57 Freeway from Katella to Orangewood including, at all times, the four lines we were running on Douglass to keep the pressure off of surface streets leading to our food distribution.

The entire scene was surreal and filled with sadness for me as I clearly saw the uncertainty in the faces that stared back at me time, and time, and time again. Yet, what I also soaked in was that this revealed the best of us, the patience, gratitude and kindness from strangers waiting in line. Volunteers and staff committed to getting it "just right." An incredible show of compassion, care and support from every member of the Anaheim police department.

This virus has leveled the playing field for all of us. I watched the best of humanity in action on all fronts throughout the day. We have much to do in order to support those that will need us in the weeks and months ahead. We can and will get through this together. Only together will we emerge as a stronger and even better community on the other side. To do that, we need to keep food flowing through this unprecedented time of need.

## THE NUMBERS

The wait for three bags of food today was as long as 2-3 hours.  
We served 2,728 households from 7:45 a.m. until 1:30 p.m.  
We accomplished today with only 30 volunteers and 15 staff.  
Approximately 15-20 Anaheim Police officers and traffic control supported us.

We are scheduling a meeting with Anaheim Police and the Honda Center team early next week to regroup and plan for next Saturday, where we already expect to receive as many as 10,000 people needing food now that the word is out.

## THE HEROES

Quinn Mackin - Honda Center

Carlos - Raymond Handling Solutions

David Gonzalez, Traffic Supervisor

Sergeant Leist

Sergeant Kirkpatrick

Sergeant Blair

Anaheim Police Department

Jamesa and Team HABIT Burger

The media that captured and told the story of today's events

Second Harvest Volunteers

Team Second Harvest

With gratitude, appreciation, humility and pride.

Harald