

# RAP FOUNDATION

Health, Mental Health, Juvenile Intervention

## Annual Report

**Fiscal Year 2014-2015**



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**\*Pictured on cover is the celebration of future Oasis Park held  
on September 15, 2015 by Inland Counties United for Change**

## ***Message from Chairman***



It is with a great deal of satisfaction that I continue in my role as Chairman of the Board of the Regional Access Project Foundation.

During the past year, RAP has advanced on several fronts: We have moved our office to the Palm Desert Civic Center at a significant cost savings, and that cost savings will directly lead to more services for our client nonprofit organizations and their clients.

We also added two new directors, Annica Meza Dawe of Brandman University and Brandy Cox of Palo Verde High School, who bring both new expertise and enthusiasm to the board. In addition, Brandy adds a voice from the Palo Verde Valley to the Board for the first time.

The RAP Board also launched a new strategy for more carefully focusing grant funding. Instead of reacting throughout the year to grant requests from various clients, the Board will now identify priorities and proactively issue Requests for Proposals (RFP) dealing with those priorities. A reduced amount of small grant funding will still be available for one-time urgency applications.

Also, the Board initially has identified Mental Health as its top priority and is therefore issuing RFPs focusing on unmet mental health needs, especially as they pertain to youth.

RAP has been fortunate to have the services of a dedicated group of volunteer reviewers who work many hours to read and evaluate grant proposals and RFP responses. Space limitations do not allow the listing of all of these volunteers, but I would be remiss if I did not mention the Board's gratitude for their dedication, expertise and hard work.

I would also like to acknowledge the Board's gratitude to the County of Riverside for its continuing support of our efforts to improve the quality of life for residents in the desert region. Our working relationship with the County and its faith in this organization are crucial to the success of the RAP Mission.

Joseph Hayes  
Chairman



The Regional Access Project Foundation's Vision and Mission are both focused on underserved communities and residents of the desert region of Riverside County:

***The Vision:*** An enhanced quality of life for all inhabitants of eastern Riverside County.

***The Mission:*** The Regional Access Project Foundation provides funding, oversight, technical assistance and guidance to nonprofit, community based organizations or other collaborative groups, which serve the populations of eastern Riverside County in the areas of health, mental health and juvenile intervention.

## STRATEGIES

In May 2014, the Board of Directors adopted a five-year strategic plan. The first year of the **2014-19 Strategic Plan** required a major reassessment of our resources to determine if in fact we had the ability to achieve our objectives and goals. We also recognized the desirability of improving our management policies and procedures to promote greater efficiency, transparency and accountability in our decision making. As a result, RAP invested in the purchase of new technology which better manages Financials and generates Program Reports. It also conducts RAP's Human Resources functions.

In addition, RAP invested a great deal of time in training of all staff in a new Management Information System (MIS). The new MIS allows for the integration of our grant making process with the Technical Assistance Program, as well as the ability to track special events and projects.

In short, RAP made a considerable investment in the future of the organization.

The Board also decided to transition from year-round funding requests in the areas of Health, Mental Health and Juvenile Intervention to a provisional **Mental Health Initiative (MHI)**, with program funding allocated through the RFP process. The majority of year one of the strategic plan was spent in preparing and coordinating this transition. Additionally, the organization recognized that it must continue the multiple-year financial commitments previously made to organizations.

This year-long transition period afforded the RAP team an opportunity to create a plan designed to identify and address unmet needs in mental health services. Extensive effort was given to the process of hosting group meetings with stakeholders and one-on-one consultations with mental health professionals. At the conclusion of the comprehensive study, a list of priorities was created to determine funding focus areas.

With the help of Health Assessment Research Center (HARC), we were able to include an evaluation tool to measure the impact of the resources allocated.

In accordance with the Mental Health Initiative and the new funding methodology, RAP created two RFPs with input and guidance from several partners. The first RFP was directed at Prevention. It concentrated on the population of ages 12 to 24 years and it was aimed at reducing delinquency, violence, suicides, incarceration, and substance abuse by improving Mental Health services. The second RFP, PR Marketing, addressed the negative stigma associated with mental health in the hope that a greater number of persons in need of services will actually access them.

RAP embraces the “Collective Impact Initiative,” defined by the Stanford Social Innovation Review as “the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration.” We are working alongside—and combining resources with-- public, private and nonprofit entities to address shared issues and achieve specific goals. RAP joined the Inland Empire Funders Alliance, and the Southern California Grantmakers to enhance the opportunities to develop new relationships with organizations which might have an interest in funding programs in eastern Riverside County. Locally, we are pleased to be a founding member of the “Collaborating for Clients” (C4C) partnership along with the following organizations: FIND Food Bank; the Desert Healthcare District, The United Way of the Desert and the University of Southern California’s Sol Price School of Public Policy. The C4C collaborative will focus on community issues affecting families dealing with financial instability.

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

RAP has worked diligently to improve our communication with the nonprofits we serve and with the entire eastern Riverside County community. Quarterly Newsletters provided updates of RAP activities and changes to the Grant process and TAP services. We also utilize Constant Contact email blasts to provide information about events and services available to the nonprofit community through RAP or other organizations.

**Conferences** – The Annual Communications Conference took a year off in 2014. However, it will return in October 2015 bigger and better than the original edition. The “Making Change, Creating Impact” conference will feature respected nonprofit sector speakers, workshops providing valuable insight by panelists, and networking opportunities throughout the day.

- After attending the Southern California Grantmakers Annual Conference in October 2014, RAP staff recognized the value of expanding on the CalNonprofits’ California Counts Report to focus specifically on Riverside County. We contracted with The Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research at the University of San Diego, utilizing grants from several different regional partners, to produce the localized report. Now, we look forward to providing this valuable information to community leaders, funders, and policy makers. This will illustrate the many contributions made by nonprofits and their important role in enhancing the quality of life. Moreover, we believe that this information will be valuable in forming future collaborations and identifying unmet needs.
- RAP was also pleased to be able to serve on the Planning Committee and to co-sponsor the “**Safe Schools Summit**” held in December 2014, along with the Riverside County Office of Education, Riverside County Department of Mental Health, the Desert Healthcare District and Fourth District Supervisor John J. Benoit. This successful event was attended by almost 300 school professionals and parents. Speakers included: Dr. Michele Borba, internationally recognized expert and author on children, teens parenting, bullying and moral development; Darrell Scott, founder of Rachel’s Challenge, author, and advocate for decreasing violence in schools; and Jerry Tello, internationally recognized expert in the areas of family strengthening, community mobilization and culturally based violence prevention/intervention.

## GRANTS

The **Mental Health Initiative (MHI)**, established as the first priority of the new focused funding strategy, was introduced in 2014 and will continue until 2019. The RAP board determined that critical mental health issues meant that a provisional funding priority should be established over RAP's other two focus areas, health and juvenile intervention. A great deal of time was and is still being invested by staff in creating and implementing the processes needed to support this new direction. Major changes included having to adopt a system of determining the key goals and objectives for the Request for Proposals (RFPs) released to the nonprofit community. A process was created to take into account the valuable input we received from hosting community meetings, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings with mental health professionals. We created a new review process, continuing to utilize volunteers with expertise and interest in reviewing applications, while allowing our RAP Board members to increase their role in the review process.

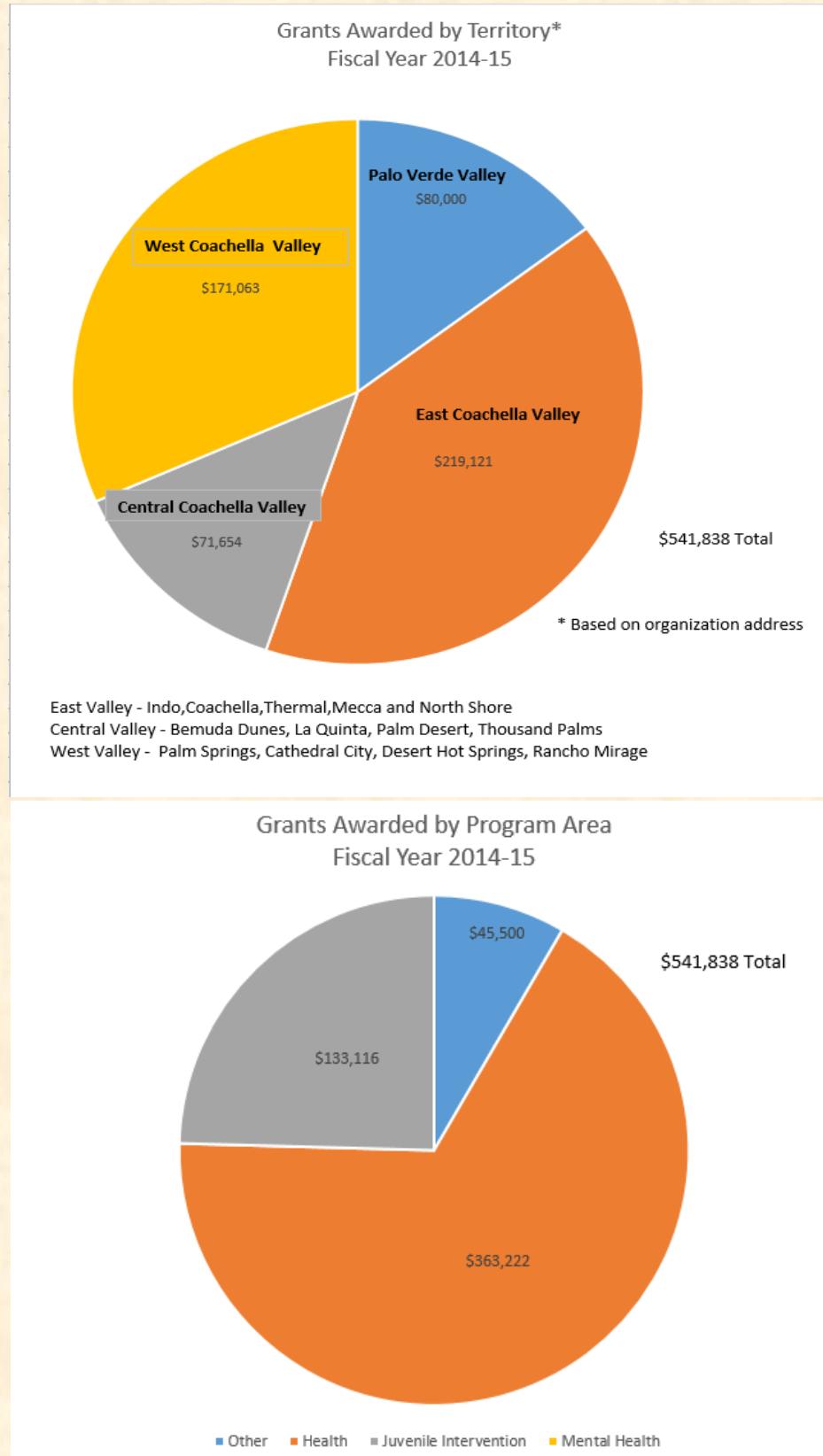
While maintaining the focus on the MHI, RAP continues to fund critical existing programs in remote communities with hard to reach populations. However, we have also increased our efforts to provide increased support to help these nonprofits achieve a greater level of financial sustainability.

### ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED IN FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

Boys and Girls Club of Cathedral City  
Boys and Girls Club of Coachella Valley  
Community Action Partnership of Riverside County  
YMCA Child Care/Jean Benson Center  
Desert Sands Unified School District  
East Coachella Valley Water Project  
Hope Lutheran Church Foundation  
Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help School  
Our Lady of Soledad Catholic Church  
World Affairs Council of the Desert  
Peter Pendleton Elementary School  
The Cathedral Center/Senior Center  
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians  
United Methodist Church/Desert Hot Springs  
Desert Community Foundation/East Coachella Valley Schools Fund  
Our Savior's Community Church/The Christmas Shop  
Guide Dogs of the Desert  
Health Career Connection

## ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED IN FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

Old Town Artisan Studio  
Kounkey Design Initiative  
Boys and Girls Club of Mecca  
Desert Recreation District  
Desert Healthcare Foundation  
Colorado River Senior Center  
National Community Renaissance  
Palo Verde Senior Citizens Ctr.  
Blythe Police Assistance League  
St. Theresa's Catholic Church  
Coachella Valley Housing Coalition  
Palm Springs Unified School District  
Riverside County Office on Aging  
COFEM  
COD Foundation  
Joslyn Center  
HealthCorps  
Raices Cultura  
Pueblo Unido CDC  
Hidden Harvest  
Desert Art Center  
FIND Food Bank  
Martha's Kitchen  
Galilee Center  
S.C.R.A.P. Gallery  
New American Media  
American Cancer Society  
Futurenomic Resources



## **Thermal Senior Center Appreciation Luncheon – June 24, 2015**



Isabel Galvan, Hilda Silva, Gloria Tapia,  
Juanita Linares, Felix Beltran



Antonia Buenrostro, Hilaria Escobedo

## **Galilee Center – July 23, 2015**



Catarino Lizarraga and Guadalupe Torrez providing  
a guided tour to Leticia De Lara. RAP CEO



Food Distribution Warehouse

## **The HUE Event – April 25, 2015**



Youth bands getting ready to entertain



Future artists enjoying the day

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

The Technical Assistance Program (TAP) provides capacity-building services to nonprofits in order to assist them in their effort to achieve financial sustainability. As was the case with the Grants Program, TAP services have undergone some changes as a result of the MHI. TAP continued to offer the immensely popular Nonprofit Management Certificate in partnership with the University of Riverside, and it also provided workshops which included: Grant Writing – Two day Workshop, Grant Seeking Resources, Human Resources – Employee Law Update, and Foundation Search Online Training.

TAP also maintained use of the Foundation Search, Library resource materials and continued to provide meeting space for nonprofits. However, consulting services to nonprofits were primarily offered to only those addressing mental health issues.

The RAP Board's plan to enhance the TAP program is to provide additional TAP services to a greater number of organizations. This work will continue into the next fiscal year.

### **ORGANIZATIONS IN RECEIPT OF TAP SERVICES IN FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015**

Safehouse of the Desert  
United Cerebral Palsy Inland Empire  
American Women for Intl. Understanding  
Friends of the Desert Mountains  
The Child & Family Counseling Center  
Esperanza Youth & Family Center  
Desert Alliance for Community Empowerment  
Inland Congregation United for Change  
Riverside County Childcare Consortium  
Association of Fundraising professionals  
Desert Community Foundation  
La Quinta HS Black Hawks Brigade  
Bermuda Dunes Childcare Center  
Soroptimist of the Desert  
Desert Best Friends Closet  
Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo  
Desert Alliance for Community Empowerment  
Health Assessment Research Center  
Desert Friends of the Developmentally Disabled  
CV Resource Conservation District  
Community Action Partnership Riverside County  
Food Now

## **ORGANIZATIONS IN RECEIPT OF TAP SERVICES IN FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015**

House of Gratitude  
Protected Families  
Lilac  
The Narrow Door  
Centro Religare  
Futurenomic Resources  
Incight  
Bridges of Hope  
Ears 4 Me  
Animals Samaritans  
Borrego Health  
Tolerance Education Center  
Acts for MS  
The Salvation Army  
Desert Arc  
Refuge Ranch  
Sheltering Wings  
Desert Hot Springs Task Force  
Dr. Carreon Foundation  
Desert Aids Project  
Sober Living Network  
Children's Discovery Museum  
Women Leader's Forum  
United Cerebral Palsy  
Palm Desert Historical Society  
Desert Cancer Foundation  
All Desert Wellness Center  
Desert Music Academy  
Desert Recreation District  
YMCA  
CV Rescue Mission  
Tools 4 Tomorrow  
Sky Valley Community Center  
World Affair's Council  
Colorado River Senior Center  
Stroke Recovery Center  
Galilee Center  
CV Economic Partnership  
General Patton Museum  
United Way of the Desert

## La Quinta Blackhawks Event 2015



## UCR Nonprofit Management Certificate Program Graduation Ceremony July 10, 2015



## Grant writing workshop June 08, 2015



## **Desert Connect**

Desert Connect served an important role in participating and facilitating community meetings focusing on mental health. In addition, Desert Connect continued to work on the following special projects, which increased RAP's exposure to the overall community:

- The “Rethink Your Drinks Campaign” to provide water as a replacement for sugary drinks has been extremely successful. This partnership with the Riverside County Public Health Department and the California Endowment’s Building Health Communities has resulted in the installation of 24 water stations in local schools and 10 additional stations at Boys & Girls Clubs and community centers.
- The volunteer Connect project with Riverside County Office on Aging was created by RAP to increase the number of volunteers by including people who are younger than 55 years of age. Volunteer Connect held a Recruitment Fair on April 25, 2014 at Cal State San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus and attracted many prospective volunteers.
- Desert Connect continued to incubate the “Healing Circles,” a Youth Leadership Pilot Project. Adult mentor volunteers completed trainings, attended seminars and hosted several weekend youth retreats in Mecca, Coachella and Desert Hot Springs.
- The Desert Connect Team organized the Riverside County Give BIG online donation campaign workshops, recruitment, and “day of giving” celebration on November 13, 2014.
- RAP was well represented at Family Resource Fairs, the September 2014 Flying Doctors, The CareForce Health Clinic held on April 2015 at the Fullenwider Auditorium at Indio Fairgrounds, the Rotary Math day held at John Glenn Middle School on May 2, 2015, and the HUE held on April 25, 2015 in the city of Coachella and the June 13, 2015 Blythe Safety Event.

## **BRITA Hydration Station Unveiling at Coachella Valley High School June 11, 2015**



J. Ferreira, L. Aceves, E. Esqueda, R. Gutierrez, T. Arredondo, V. Uribe, G Portante, B. Sanchez

## **Coachella Valley Youth Leadership January 2014**



# Financials

## Balance Sheet

<b>June 30, 2015</b>	<b>Statement of Financial Position</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2014 For Comparative Purposes Only</b>
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$692,480	\$728,435
Cash Held for Others	724	1,250
Investments - Mutual Funds	1,066,725	1,069,069
Beneficial Interest in Assets Held by Community Foundations	2,238,990	2,251,022
Grants Receivable	7,104	13,108
County Tax Increment Funding Receivable	785,384	815,248
Employee Advances	-	19,461
Other Assets	-	4,066
Prepaid Expenses	24,126	6,741
Property and Equipment, Net	22,065	28,101
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>4,837,598</b>	<b>4,936,501</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts Payable	12,541	47,801
Accrued Payroll Expenses	44,328	29,963
Grants Payable to Other Exempt Entities	18,250	2,759
Agency Funds Held for Others	724	1,250
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>75,843</b>	<b>81,773</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Unrestricted	4,580,840	4,616,696
Temporarily Restricted	180,915	238,032
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>4,761,755</b>	<b>4,854,728</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$4,837,598</b>	<b>\$4,936,501</b>

## Profit and Loss

Year Ended June 30, 2015		Statement of Activities				
		Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total	2014 For Comparative Purposes Only
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUES</b>						
Contributions		\$2,600	\$85,482	-	\$88,082	\$26,720
County Tax Increment Revenue	1,388,818		-	-	1,388,818	1,413,535
Grants	97,308		21,500	-	118,808	602,896
Investment Income - Realized	135,580		-	-	135,580	121,224
Investment Gains (Losses) -						
Unrealized	(114,556)		-	-	(114,556)	230,516
Other Income, Gains (Losses)	(1,939)		-	-	(1,939)	3,213
Net Assets Released from Restrictions:						
Restrictions Satisfied by Payments	164,099		(164,099)	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE\$</b>	<b>1,671,910</b>		<b>(57,117)</b>	-	<b>1,614,793</b>	<b>2,398,104</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>						
Building Healthy Communities						
Program Services:						
Grant Allocations to Exempt Entities	525,908		-	-	525,908	676,936
Technical Assistance Program	240,718		-	-	240,718	376,242
Building Healthy Communities	234,073		-	-	234,073	426,065
Desert Connect Program	268,805		-	-	268,805	207,160
Other Programs	<u>103,092</u>		-	-	<u>103,092</u>	<u>207,713</u>
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>1,372,596</b>				<b>1,372,596</b>	<b>1,894,116</b>
Support Services:						
Management and General	335,170		-	-	335,170	235,042
Fund-raising	<u>              </u>		-	-	<u>              </u>	<u>              </u>
<b>Total Support Services</b>	<b>335,170</b>				<b>335,170</b>	<b>235,042</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>1,707,766</b>				<b>1,707,766</b>	<b>2,129,158</b>
<b>CHANGE IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>(35,856)</b>		<b>(57,117)</b>	-	<b>(92,973)</b>	<b>268,946</b>
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	4,616,696		238,032	-	4,854,728	4,585,782
<b>NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR</b>	<b>\$4,580,840</b>		<b>\$180,915</b>	-	<b>\$4,761,755</b>	<b>\$4,854,728</b>

## Statement of Functional Expense

**Year Ended June 30, 2015**

**Statement of Functional Expenses - Program Services**

	Grant Allocations	TAP-Technical Assistance	BHC Program	Desert Connect	Other Programs	Total Program Services	2014 For Comparative Purposes Only
<b>Salaries</b>	<b>\$80,071</b>	<b>\$90,473</b>	<b>\$48,021</b>	<b>\$106,640</b>	<b>\$7,994</b>	<b>\$333,199</b>	<b>\$525,613</b>
<b>Direct Program Costs</b>							
Advertising and Marketing	625	318		975	4,857	6,775	-
Allocated Indirect Costs	-	-	10,434	-	-	10,434	460
Bank and Investment Fees	-	-	17	33	-	50	-
Communications	513	1,071	6,341	1,448	90	9,463	10,403
Computer Services	8,330	3,822	12,175	4,549	100	28,976	21,458
Depreciation Expense	-	1,002			-	1,002	5,380
Employee Benefits	18,954	18,228	(2,512)	27,871	821	63,362	66,024
Equipment Lease and Maintenance	273	7,560	-	423	-	8,256	12,133
Event Expenses	-	-	8,280	3,158	36,130	47,568	51,803
Grants Allocations to Exempt Entities	382,727	-	33,111	72,500	27,500	515,838	644,636
Insurance	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,346
Office Expenses	729	1,927	6,498	7,103	-	16,257	12,034
Other Program Expenses	9,900	24,625	65,364	1,852	17,895	119,636	44,022
Payroll Taxes	7,469	8,184	4,049	10,390	696	30,788	46,087
Postage and Printing	80	-	3,282	78	2,582	6,022	3,133
Professional Services	6,520	3,719	29,096	5,210	-	44,545	137,715
Rent	4,613	34,388	3,500	9,205	500	52,206	102,730
Retirement Plan Expense	2,897	2,398	991	3,406	25	9,717	19,556
TAP Assistance to Other Organizations	-	40,745	-	-	1,672	42,417	110,284
Training, Conferences and Meetings	1,215	1,183	3,765	7,727	250	14,140	35,239
Travel and Mileage	526	541	1,297	5,530	1,933	9,827	33,337
Workers' Compensation Insurance	466	534	364	707	47	2,118	3,723
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>\$525,908</b>	<b>\$240,718</b>	<b>\$234,073</b>	<b>\$268,805</b>	<b>\$103,092</b>	<b>\$1,372,596</b>	<b>\$1,894,116</b>

**Year Ended June 30, 2015**

**Statement of Functional Expenses - Support Services**

	Management & General	Fund Raising	Total Support Services	2014 For Comparative Purposes Only
<b>Salaries</b>	<b>\$126,112</b>	-	<b>\$126,112</b>	<b>\$95,331</b>
<b>Direct Service Costs</b>				
Advertising and Marketing	656	-	656	-
Allocated Indirect Costs	(10,434)	-	(10,434)	(460)
Bank and Investment Fees	33,745	-	33,745	-
Communications	8,272	-	8,272	1,705
Computer Services	13,053	-	13,053	17,454
Depreciation Expense	10,911	-	10,911	4,804
Dues and Subscriptions	-	-	-	3,872
Employee Benefits	39,487	-	39,487	4,284
Equipment Expenditures	-	-	-	1,885
Equipment Lease and Maintenance	1,777	-	1,777	789
Event Expenses	2,000	-	2,000	-
Insurance	11,938	-	11,938	2,474
Office Expenses	18,246	-	18,246	6,153
Other Program Expenses	1,262	-	1,262	-
Payroll Taxes	12,515	-	12,515	7,842
Postage and Printing	240	-	240	1,815
Professional Services	35,541	-	35,541	64,494
Rent	15,495	-	15,495	10,361
Retirement Plan Expense	1,990	-	1,990	2,616
TAP Assistance to Other Organizations	2,498	-	2,498	-
Training, Conferences and Meetings	4,962	-	4,962	6,285
Travel and Mileage	1,899	-	1,899	1,698
Workers' Compensation Insurance	3,005	-	3,005	1,640
<b>Total Support Services</b>	<b>\$335,170</b>	-	<b>\$335,170</b>	<b>\$235,042</b>

## Newspaper Clips

# Brita water stations unveiled at Coachella Valley High

[Paulina Rojas](#), The Desert Sun 6:34 p.m. PDT June 11, 2015

Forget the old rusty water fountains, Coachella Valley High School unveiled a new way for students to stay hydrated.

In a collaboration with Brita, the leading maker of water filtration products, Coachella Valley High School has now installed two new hydration stations. The hope is that it will produce a flow of clean drinking water and save hundreds of thousands of plastic bottles from making their way to landfills.

Another side benefit could be the health of the students. The Coachella Valley High School administration is working hard to ensure that its students choose water over sugary drinks. Many, especially those who live in unincorporated areas lack access to clean drinking water.

"We really are telling the kids, you need to drink water and not the sodas," principal Victor Uribe said.



Students line up to use a new Brita hydration station at Coachella Valley High School on Thursday. The hydration stations allow students to access to clean free drinking water. (Photo: Lauren Reyes/The Desert Sun)

Most of the school's water fountains are very old, having two modern ones is sure to impact students' lives positively.

"There is always a line (at the water fountain) even after the bell rings" Uribe said.

Coachella councilwoman Betty Sanchez, who graduated from CVHS was also at the unveiling.

"It's just very exciting, I mean they are getting the best of the best right here," Sanchez said.  
"This is progress in the making."



[Buy Photo](#)

Coachella Valley High School students test out a new Brita hydration station on Thursday. This is the first Brita hydration station on the Coachella Valley High School campus. (Photo: Lauren Reyes/The Desert Sun)

Sanchez believes that it is essential that children and young adults develop healthy habits to ensure that they stay strong and focused.

"We have to encourage our youth, start them young to drink water and see the value in drinking water," she said. "We need to take care of our health in general, there is a big cost to being unhealthy."

More water stations are scheduled to be installed at the school in the future through the ongoing collaboration between the Regional Access Project Foundation and Mission: Readiness. Both organizations advocate for projects that invest in the youth.

Paulina Rojas covers the east valley for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at (760)-778-4586, paulina.rojas@desertsun.com or via Twitter @PerpetuallyPau.



[Buy Photo](#)

Students use Brita hydration station to access free clean drinking water at Coachella Valley High School. The non-profit organization, Mission: Readiness, along with the Regional Access Project Foundation coordinated the donation of Coachella Valley High School's first Brita hydration station as part of the 'Rethink your Drink' campaign on June 11, 2015. (Photo: Lauren Reyes/The Desert Sun)

# Palo Verde Valley Times

& Quartzsite Times

5/8/2015 3:09:00 PM

## GUEST COLUMN: 'Food Insecurity' War in valley waged by area non-profits

Denys Arcuri  
Marketing/Communications Volunteer,  
Regional Access Project Foundation

"Food **Insecurity**" is a term used to describe the problem of a substantial number of desert residents in Riverside County: obtaining enough **food** for health and comfort. Nowhere is the problem more difficult to describe-and to solve-than right here in the Palo Verde Valley.



*Photo special to the Times*

Colorado River Senior/Community Center on North Highway 95

The Regional Access Project Foundation in Palm Desert, Harmony Kitchen in Blythe, and the Colorado River Senior Center north of Blythe, have formed a partnership to combat the **food insecurity** problem on a daily basis. They are aided in the struggle by a group of supporter organizations, which include the county's Office on Aging, the office of Fourth District Supervisor John J. Benoit, the Blythe **Food Pantry**, and local churches, businesses, **food** stores, restaurants and individual residents. Even with this help, resources are stretched thin and the specter of hunger remains ever present.

To understand fully the ramifications of dealing with this issue as it currently exists, it's necessary to have an understanding of how the main partners are struggling to deal with the problem, along with their limitations.

First off, the Regional Access Project, more commonly known as RAP, is a very unusual non-profit. Not only does it have a one-of-a-kind (unique in the Golden State) revenue-sharing agreement with the County of Riverside, it also provides "pass through" grants to struggling nonprofits in the desert region as well as technical assistance to help these grass roots organizations operate more efficiently.

The technical assistance part of the equation is because the name of the game for RAP is "self-sustainability." It only makes sense that, with its limited resources, if RAP is able to nurture startup organizations and enable them to stand on their own, then it will be able to move those resources to yet another struggling and/or startup grass roots nonprofit.

And so, as a rule, RAP funds organizations for only three years and the expectation is that during this time they will be able to replace RAP funds with alternative funding.

Harmony Kitchen has been receiving substantial grants from RAP for six out of the last seven years, and the Colorado River Senior Center has relied on RAP for 14 years.

"RAP Foundation is a very important part of our outreach program," says John Ewing, Executive Director of the Colorado River Senior Center. "They fund our kitchen staff, which prepares all of our meals, including our Meals on Wheels program."

Ted Arneson, President of the Harmony Kitchen Board of Directors, also points to RAP's help as being fundamental to the survival and success of the Blythe program.

"RAP has played an important role in the success of Blythe Harmony Kitchen," he says. "They have provided both financial support and technical guidance for the Kitchen."

But with this good news is also the bad.

Since RAP's mission is to make organizations self-sustaining so that it can move resources to new problem areas, this continuing reliance on RAP for funding takes away from its ability to help other organizations.

"We're kind of caught between a rock and a hard place," says RAP's Executive Director, Leticia De Lara. "On the one hand, we're stretched thin on our resources and we'd like to help as many startup organizations in the desert as possible. On the other hand, we recognize the vital nature of the services of both the Harmony Kitchen and the Colorado River Senior Center. We also recognize that the more remote a community is, the more challenging it is to solve the problems.

"It's difficult to imagine abandoning the Colorado River Senior Center or Harmony Kitchen, so the solution would seem to be to continue efforts to make them self-sustaining. Mainly, that takes money. And if that money were to materialize, it would most likely come from the greater Blythe community.

"No one source is likely to be able to provide the kind of help we need in providing nutrition for everyone who falls short of being able to provide adequately for themselves."

Arneson says Harmony Kitchen services the needs of four basic groups of people: Senior citizens with low income (but who have their own home), the homeless, older residents who live in Blythe and only occasionally need help, and young people who are drifting from job to job. The latter category are normally only temporarily in Blythe, and, of course, the homeless population dwindles with the onset of summer heat.

Harmony Kitchen utilizes every tool at its disposal to obtain quality **food** and to provide a hot lunch to anyone who comes into the Kitchen Monday through Friday. A "take-away bag" of usable **food** is issued on Friday, to help make it through the weekend. The program is operated by two part-time employees and a number of volunteers.

Arneson notes that agricultural interests, **food** stores, restaurants, community organizations and local churches have also been a continuing means of keeping the **food** coming through the doors of the Kitchen, and he notes the crucial role that RAP has played in keeping the doors open.

"RAP has provided financial support to help the organization upgrade the equipment in the Kitchen with the purchase of stoves, refrigerators and freezers. In addition, they have helped fund major products in the Kitchen to keep it up-to-date, safe and clean, as well as funding part-time help to insure the **food** is properly gathered, stored and used.

"RAP has had a major impact, and there have been times had they not stepped forward to provide help, that the Blythe Harmony Kitchen would not be operating today."

Meanwhile, 27 miles upriver, the needs are somewhat similar, but targeted to the senior community, in an area even more remote from population centers and resources than Harmony Kitchen.

Ewing notes that many in the community are home-bound seniors who need the resources of Meals on Wheels, which serves the needs of those who are homebound.

"Our clients who have **food insecurity** are those who are financially handicapped, homebound, medically disadvantaged and the elderly," Ewing says. "Some of these people only temporarily need help-those who have lost a job or are recovering from an illness, for example. For others, the need is ongoing.

"We partner with the USDA on our commodity program, which takes care of many who have **food insecurity** challenge. The commodities help supplement their **food** supplies at home.

"RAP also funds our supplement commodities program when the USDA cannot supply us with a balanced supply of **food** stuffs. They also help fund our Health Fairs, supplying funding for our clients who do not have an insurance program for the doctor's visit and any tests or shots that need to be administered.

"RAP's funding has made our community a better place for all, and, most importantly, it has helped those who could not otherwise afford it in better health and better fed."

Call it the War on **Food Insecurity**. It is enjoined. And it looks like it will continue to be a difficult struggle.

The Regional Access Project is a 501© 3 nonprofit organization which focused on unmet needs in the desert region of Riverside County, including the Palo Verde Valley, and also the impoverished, remote areas of the Coachella Valley, such as Mecca, Thermal, Oasis and others. RAP focuses on issues in Health, Mental Health and Juvenile Intervention.

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