



## **Children experiencing homelessness are given the opportunity to learn to swim and are provided with breakfast and to-go meals**

*Rising Tide Effect in partnership with The Rockaway Hotel, Food Bank For New York City, and Delta Sigma Theta's Health Task Force, are removing all barriers to entry for TWELVE young people in need during the month of August and expanding their access to nutritious meals.*

For most, learning to swim is an essential life skill acquired at a young age alongside reading and riding a bike. However, for many from socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds, learning to swim is a privilege that is often out of reach.

Drowning disproportionately affects both children and adults from lower income populations and in communities that have little to no resources to adapt to the risks around them. The statistics are bleak: drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury globally and is the leading cause of death in the United States for children aged one to four years old. Seventy-nine percent of children in households with incomes less than \$50,000 have few-to-no swimming skills. Beyond the safety implications, the ability to enjoy and thrive in the water (i.e. water sports) tends to be reserved for those with the resources to learn how to swim, creating a deeper divide in our already inequitable society.

This August, RTE continues its programming at The Rockaway Hotel with a special focus on serving children who are experiencing homelessness. They have partnered with Food Bank For New York City to provide each young individual with free nutritious to-go meals after each lesson. While summer can be a very difficult time for many families being that school is out, acquiring food for these children and their families becomes even harder since many homeless shelters do not have cooking facilities. As such, being able to provide these young individuals with a healthy meal will alleviate a families' worry of needing to figure out how and where their next meal will come from. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., a sorority dedicated to public service with an emphasis on programs that assist the African American community, for swimming gear and equipment (i.e. suits, caps, goggles and towels).

The Rising Tide Effect (RTE), founded by Kaitlin Krause in 2020, is a non-profit organization on a mission to teach the critical skill of swimming to underserved communities. RTE strives to not only eliminate drowning and water-related injuries but also to incite joy by providing free

swimming lessons and free water safety education to those who would otherwise not have access to it. Swimming is a basic but vital skill that can be lifesaving and life-enriching. “The power of sport extends way beyond the pool, providing frameworks for not only education and safety but also personal development, through swimming.”

The Rockaways in the Queens borough of New York City, historically a racially and economically divided community, is unfortunately no stranger to such tragedies. The average age of a person drowning in the local waterways is 16 and typically occurs where there is no lifeguard present. The only way to prevent and lower these numbers is by making swimming lessons and water safety education accessible to all.

As The Rockaway Hotel was first opening, its owners were thinking of ways to utilize their pool in the ecosystem of making a change. Having the only functioning pool on the peninsula at the time, as a hotel and as a community hub, they prioritized a swimming initiative, allowing the non-profit organization to offer free swimming lessons in the early morning before the guests come down to the pool for the day.

RTE strategically partners with local businesses and organizations to teach swimming and water safety to its students while also providing nutritious, balanced meals. With the Swim Initiative at The Rockaway Hotel in its second summer, RTE has been able to teach over 120 students to swim and educate 800 residents about water safety. “Drownings are 95% preventable – this type of work in the Rockaways both in and out of the water, for an ocean facing community, is essential.” said Krause, who is the organization’s Director.

“As part of Food Bank’s mission, we strive to be innovative in our approach to supporting and empowering communities and families to not only have access to nutritious food but other resources and opportunities that will give them more independence,” said **Dr. Camesha Grant, Vice President of Community Connections and Reach**. “This community-wide partnership will provide meals paired with a summer swim program and the experience will help save lives and give children the opportunity to expand their abilities.”

The collaboration is a direct result of Krause’s conversation with Camesha Grant, seeking to expand food access to underprivileged children and their families. The results are a partnership with Food Bank For NYC and Delta Sigma Theta supporting to remove barriers to entry and helping provide an opportunity to children who otherwise would not have it. “The Queens Alumnae Chapter is excited to partner on this important initiative to teach children with limited access and resources the valuable knowledge of swimming,” said **Queens Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., President Charelle Hassell-Gilbert**, “we could not be more thrilled to support our youth in gaining a this critical, lifesaving skill.”

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## **Partnership**

In an effort to provide equitable access to the program for swimmers living across the Rockaway peninsula, the Swim Initiative at The Rockaway Hotel has partnered with a number of nonprofits, city programs and community groups including Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy, St John's Residence for Boys, National Parks, Millennium Development and Waterside School.

## **About Food Bank For New York City**

Food Bank For New York City has been fighting hunger on the ground since 1983. By partnering with over 800 soup kitchens, food pantries, and campus partners across the five boroughs, Food Bank is able to make a direct impact in the communities that need it most, providing some 1.2 billion meals to New Yorkers since its founding. But food alone can't solve hunger. That's why Food Bank employs a two-prong approach of Community Nourishment programming (to provide immediate and reliable access to food today) with Economic Empowerment programming (to equip people with the tools they need to achieve food security into tomorrow and beyond). All of these services – from grab-and-go pantry bags to hot meals, tax filing assistance, SNAP enrollment, nutrition education, and financial empowerment workshops – are free and available to anyone who needs them. To learn more about Food Bank's mission to dignify, nourish, and empower ALL New Yorkers facing food insecurity, visit [foodbanknyc.org](http://foodbanknyc.org).