



# START RIO...GO ANYWHERE

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### ***Rio Hondo College, Community Partner Collect Bags and Toys for Area Foster Youths***

**WHITTIER** – Rio Hondo College students, faculty and staff have donated close to 250 backpacks and suitcases for foster children and youths as part of the College’s third annual Case of Hope Drive.

The donations, which included gifts from community members, far exceeded the 150 bags donated in 2015, and came with an added surprise: a donation of 200 toys by a Rio Hondo College graduate.

“It is heartwarming to see this amazing sense of giving at all levels of the Rio Hondo College community,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “This is an event that truly captures the spirit of the holidays.”

The event was sponsored by the Rio Hondo College Guardian Scholars Program, which partnered on the drive with the Rio Hondo College Foster/Kinship Care Education Program, Rio Hondo Associated Students, Student Life & Leadership and the Concept 7 Foster Family Agency.

Many of the bags and toys were handed out at a Dec. 3 lunch at the Rio Café attended by about 130 guests, including 90 foster children and youths. Guests enjoyed Christmas songs performed by a student violinist, guest speakers and activities.

Jocelyn Ortega, 24, a former Rio Hondo College student and former foster youth, returned as a guest speaker and surprised the children with a donation of 200 toys.

“I’ve spent many lonely Christmases ... wishing more than anything that somebody out there was thinking about me,” Ortega said. “The most important thing is that we remind the foster youth that no matter where they are or what they go through, they are remembered.”

The Dec. 3 program also included among its guest speakers Rio Hondo College Foundation Board of Directors President John Peel, who is executive director of Concept 7 Foster Family Agency.

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“Our Case of Hope program keeps getting bigger each year,” said Marisela Saenz, interim counselor/coordinator for Rio Hondo College’s Guardian Scholars Program, which oversees the bag drive. “It’s amazing to see what an impact we can have on our community.”

The bag drive was launched in 2014 to help foster youths and children, who often have no bags when they shift homes or leave the system, forcing them to abandon their possessions. Saenz’s team for this year’s drive included intern Paola Mejia and a team of staff and students.

Rio Hondo College enrolls about 135 students in foster care or in transition – a number that grows annually. Since the College began providing specialized services, more than 400 foster youths or former foster youths have received assistance.

Guardian Scholars has partnered on the drive with the Rio Hondo College Foster/Kinship Care Education Program, Rio Hondo Associated Students, Student Life & Leadership and the Concept 7 Foster Family Agency.

“Events like these help to highlight the ‘community’ in community college,” Board of Trustees President Mary Ann Pacheco said. “It’s important for Rio Hondo College to connect with youths from all segments of our population, to help support them and inspire them to seek paths to success, including higher education.”

## **PHOTOS**

**RHC\_Case\_1:** Rio Hondo College students, faculty and staff donated close to 250 backpacks and suitcases for foster children and youths as part of the College’s third annual Case of Hope Drive. The bags were assembled for a giveaway during the annual Case of Hope lunch, held Dec. 3.

**RHC\_Case\_2:** Rio Hondo College community members donated nearly 250 backpacks and bags for foster youth and children as part of the third annual Case of Hope Drive. This year, a Rio Hondo College graduate and former foster child surprised the group with a donation of 200 toys for foster children.

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