



# START RIO...GO ANYWHERE

## MEDIA RELEASE

**3600 Workman Mill Road / Whittier, CA 90601**

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CONTACT: Ruthie Retana  
(562) 463-3145

### ***Rio Hondo College Students Donate 175 Bags, Suitcases and Backpacks to Foster Youths***

*Distribution lunch is inaugural effort by new campus group Leaders for Change*

**WHITTIER, Calif.** – A push to benefit foster youths generated more than 175 backpacks, suitcases and other luggage during the Rio Hondo College Leaders for Change’s first Case of Hope collection drive.

More than 70 of the bags were distributed Saturday, Dec. 6, at a special lunch event held at Rio Hondo College by the club, which formed this fall. More than 100 additional bags are scheduled to be given away this week in response to requests from foster youths and caretakers.

Many foster youths transitioning from home to home often carry their belongings in trash bags and must leave behind treasured personal possessions. In addition, youths who “age out” of foster care aren’t provided luggage when they must leave their foster homes.

“We want to provide children and youth in foster care with something, even if it’s small, that they can keep with them, something stable of their own that can hold their stuff,” said Leaders for Change President Erika Murillo, a former foster youth.

“We want to make the transition from home to home a little easier,” said Murillo, a second-year student double majoring in Nursing and Social Work.

The idea came from club member Rachel Chavez, a second-year Rio Hondo Drug Studies and Human Services double major who is interning with Concept 7 Foster Family Agency in Whittier.

“Through my internship, I learned about the social stigmas associated with foster youth and thought about how awful it would be to leave home or show up at a new home with just a trash bag full of personal belongings,” Chavez said.

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“I tried to put myself in their shoes and couldn’t imagine the psychological trauma they’d already gone through and dealing with that indignity on top of it when a piece of travel gear could alleviate that – it seemed so simple,” she said.

Leaders for Change club members collaborated with the staff of Rio Hondo’s Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) and Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success (YESS) programs, which provide foster youth with priority registration, counseling and life skills workshops, youth mentors, computer and printer services and other support.

They also reached out to the Rio Hondo Associated Student Body, surrounding public school districts and community organizations to get the word out through each group’s networks and through social media.

Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said the drive is emblematic of how Rio Hondo students view their role in the community.

“I’m very proud of our students for seeing this need and addressing it so swiftly and effectively,” Dreyfuss said. “Many of these students are in Rio Hondo study programs that will take them into careers in social service and child welfare. This experience underscores the lessons in compassion that are as much a part of our vocational training as academics.”

**Photos:**

**Case 1:** More than 175 backpacks/suitcases were collected during the first-ever Case of Hope drive, with more than 70 distributed on Saturday, Dec. 6. Approximately 175 requests for bags were received by organizers, the Rio Hondo College Leaders for Change Club.

**Case2:** Rio Hondo students & Leaders for Change Club members, Foster Care Program Specialist Marisela Saenz along with guest speakers Dee Hankins, a former foster youth/motivational speaker, and John Peel, CEO of Concept 7 Foster Family Agency.

**Case3, Case4:** Foster youths receiving donated backpacks/suitcases during the Saturday, Dec. 6 luncheon and distribution event.

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