

Hillary Wheeler and Culinary Staff of Boys and Girls Clubs of Oceanside Fulfill Spirit and Mission of CACFP

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Oceanside pandemic response demonstrate a no-compromises approach to its mission and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

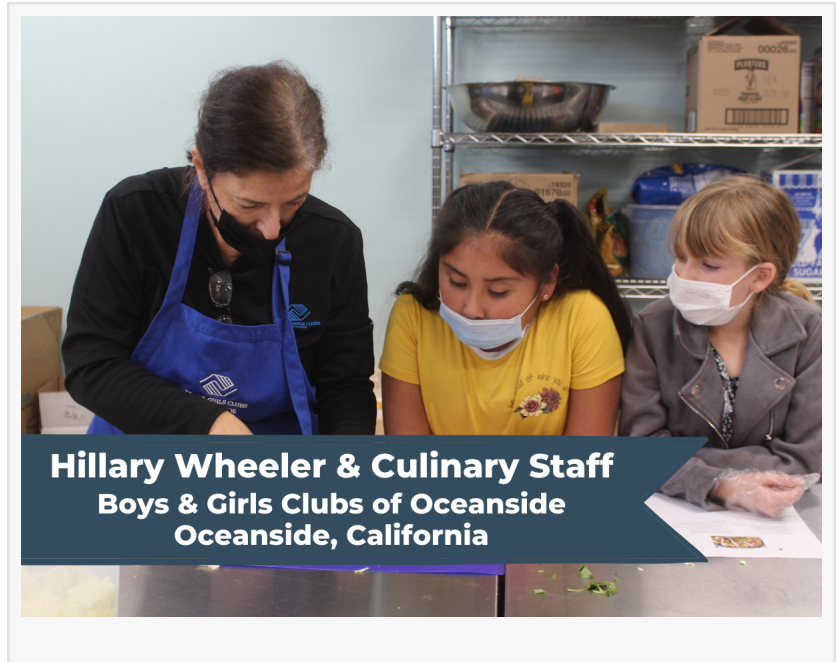
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Under the leadership of Hillary Wheeler, the Culinary Arts Staff at Boys & Girls Clubs of Oceanside takes a holistic approach to wellness and CACFP operations, which was demonstrated in its pandemic response for its community. BGCO is a youth development organization

whose mission is to inspire, develop and enrich young people to reach their fullest potential as confident, responsible, caring members of society. Most of those who benefit from its programs come from marginalized populations that have historically been denied access to services and resources.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Oceanside was a true trailblazing organization even prior to the pandemic. Each weekday, BGCO Culinary Arts Program Specialists make home-cooked meals and snacks onsite for their club program members. Nutrition is integrated throughout BGCO's daily program activities. It offers a farm-to-table program, and youth grow fruits and vegetables in outdoor garden as well as indoors utilizing a hydroponics system. BGCO youth club members interact regularly with the staff nutritionist and chefs.

And then came the pandemic. Not only did Boys & Girls Clubs of Oceanside continue to provide its usual CACFP meal program, but it also found new, innovative ways to keep club members healthy and engaged in learning during the shutdown. BGCO's Culinary Arts Staff was instrumental in bringing new program initiatives to life and ensuring members of the Oceanside community didn't need to worry where their next meal would come from, or that their children



didn't have a safe place to go when schools were closed.

In addition to continuing to provide all-day in-person programs even after stay-at-home orders were lifted in May 2020, BGCO fulfilled a community need and began to utilize its state-of-the-art commercial culinary teaching kitchen to provide 55,000+ home-cooked meals to youth and families in the Oceanside community. The work didn't stop there. BGCO partnered with Blue Shield Promise to host vaccine clinics at its Townsite clubhouse, and BGCO's Culinary Arts Staff made and served home-cooked meals to any community members who came to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

Putting these comprehensive wellness and nutrition initiatives under one roof created a hub of community health. From farm-to-table programs, chef and nutritionist-led cooking classes, home-cooked meals and a vaccine clinic, Boys and Girls Clubs of Oceanside pandemic response demonstrates a no-compromises approach to fulfilling its mission. In doing this work, they were included among the finalists for the Inspire Trailblazer Award. Award winners were named during the 2022 National Child Nutrition Conference.

Since 1986, National CACFP Sponsors Association has served as a national platform for the Child and Adult Care Food Program Community. The mission of [NCA](#) is to bring members information on legislation, regulation and advocacy issues, share resources among the entire CACFP community, and provide an engaging, informative annual conference offering the largest CACFP networking and training opportunities in the nation. CACFP is an indicator of quality care. When children and adults are cared for by providers who participate in the CACFP, they are receiving the best nutrition available.

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