



## USDA Selects Ready, Set, Swim! Coachella Valley as California Success Story

*Local program is one of only four programs in the state recognized for its impact*

**Coachella Valley, CA** (October 10, 2017) – Desert Healthcare District and Foundation (DHCD) and Desert Recreation District (DRD) are pleased to announce that the United States Department of Agriculture has selected Ready, Set, Swim! Coachella Valley as a featured Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) “Success Story” on its website. The program is one of only four programs recognized from the state of California. The full story can be viewed at <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/success-stories>.

Ready, Set, Swim! Coachella Valley was selected for its impact among local youth providing both an active and educational experience focused on nutrition and obesity prevention.

As the USDA article explains, the Ready, Set, Swim! Coachella Valley program is aimed at third grade students throughout the Coachella Valley, and offers a fun and innovative way to combine physical activity, nutrition education, and water safety all in one. Coachella Valley is a great location to offer this interactive program due several factors including the abundance of pools and canals, and sizzling temperatures that often have families with children spending a lot of time in the water during the summer months. In addition to providing children with lifelong water safety skills, Ready, Set Swim! also teaches children about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity.



“Ready, Set, Swim!’s effectiveness stems largely from its community partnerships,” said Herb Schultz, CEO, Desert Healthcare District and Desert Healthcare Foundation. “Through the collaboration and innovation of numerous players in local health and wellness, we have created a program that is not only educational for children, but fun. We are thrilled to be recognized by the USDA for the success of the program and look forward to impacting thousands more local children through its curriculum.” Maria Gonzalez, whose daughter participated in the program, stated, “ My daughter was very scared of swimming prior to the starting program, now she feels more confident and wants to go swimming everyday, she also has asked me for more vegetables and fruits at home for her to eat.”

With the help of the City of Palm Springs and the Desert Healthcare Foundation, funds were raised to implement the program in the 2014/2015 school year. Palm Springs Unified School District (PSUSD), Desert Recreation District, the Boys and Girls Club of Coachella Valley, and the Boys and Girls Club of Palm Springs, provided essential components such as transportation, swim instructors and facilities to make this collective partnership function seamlessly. Student and adult nutrition education was provided using SNAP-Ed materials developed by the California Department of Public Health

Desert Recreation District’s General Manger, Kevin Kalman shared, “we are very proud to be recognized by the USDA for this highly successful collaboration that has impacted so many Coachella Valley youth, giving them lifesaving water-safety skills and an understanding of the impact of a healthy, active lifestyle that will last a lifetime”. Kalman went on to say, “the goal is to make Ready, Set, Swim! a permanent part of the Coachella Valley community fabric ensuring every 3rd grader is water safe. I am enthusiastic about the future of the program as more Coachella Valley agencies are taking notice and wish to become involved paving the way for thousands of additional children to participate in the years to come.”

To date, 1,872 students have graduated from the program in the past three years, with 85-percent of students demonstrating an increase of at least five new skills in their assigned level, from pre-to post test, and 93-percent of the students having demonstrated an increase of at least three new skills in their assigned level from pre-to post test. As of earlier this summer, 14 desert-area elementary schools have participated in Ready, Set, Swim!

### **Desert Recreation District**

[Desert Recreation District](#) (DRD) is the largest park and recreation district in California, covering over 1,800 square miles and serving more than 385,000 residents throughout the greater Coachella Valley. DRD manages, maintains and assists in maintaining over 30 parks and recreation facilities; creates and delivers quality programs, services and classes; and, facilitates leisure opportunities through partnerships – this community collaborative approach allows us to provide barrier-free and safe recreational activities. DRD strives to ensure the public receives personal benefits such as physical fitness, relaxation and revitalization; social benefits in the form of stronger and healthier families and enriching the lives for persons with disabilities, and economic benefits through more productive and healthier citizens and increased tourism.

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### **Desert Healthcare District**

The Desert Healthcare District is a local government agency that has been committed to the health of its 230,000 residents for more than 65 years. The District believes every resident in its territory, the cities of Palm Springs, Desert Hot Springs, Rancho Mirage, Thousand Palms, Cathedral City, Mountain Center and Palm Desert, deserves access to health education, disease prevention and comprehensive diagnostic and treatment services, and the opportunity to participate in District matters through access and input to the board. The District supports positive health system change via incorporating best-practice methodologies where possible; encouraging accurate outcome measurement by benchmarking, monitoring and evaluation; supporting innovative new practices and programs; and fostering collaboration and partnerships.

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