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English III

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Feeding Hope

Under the scorching rays of what a typical Sunday looks like at a Stand4 Food distribution, Janet Abbey carefully orchestrates her distribution day to fit the needs of her clients. She is not just carrying bags of groceries, but the weight of countless others who depend on Janet's Bi-Weekly food distributions across the South Bay. Janet's food distribution program has become a beacon of hope, not just for the nourishment it provides for those in need but also for the community. It rallies the spirit of affection and camaraderie, bringing the communities her food drives serve closer together.

Janet holds a soft spot in her heart for those who are in need. The community-centered approach of her food distribution program actively involves volunteers by fostering engagement and collaboration to address food insecurity together. Janet's work through Stand4 is crucial today because people heavily depend on her food distributions. If it weren't for Janet, many of these individuals facing food insecurity would have no one to seek help from. Moreover, Janet's food Distributions not only serves the community but it brings the community closer together. Under In the words of Stand4's website, "Our discipleship program attracts and engages a diverse community of individuals... This community includes students, adults and families from across the social and cultural spectrum". People are socioeconomically divided within our communities, the wealthy and middle class tend to stick to their own while the poor also tend to

stick to their own. Through Janet and Stand4's distributions they are able to all come together united with one mission to serve and provide to vulnerable groups in the south Bay Area.

For most people, the covid-19 pandemic was a disaster. For Janet, Covid posed an even bigger threat than just social distancing. Before the pandemic, Stand4 did all of their food distributions in person, personally delivering food into each individual trunk by hand. She was able to watch smiles brighten as the food baskets were placed meticulously into each trunk. Things couldn't have been going better for Janet and Stand4 until everything came to a halt. Social distancing and masks made it even harder for Janet to distribute. Most people weren't even safe walking outside, let alone picking up food from a distribution. Janet worked around this by completely changing the distribution process; instead of directly loading the groceries into the cars, they took a hands-off approach by starting the dignity store. Stand4 would set up the boxes filled to the brim with fresh groceries all organized like you would see at your average market, and the people in need would come by and pick up what they needed like shopping for groceries. It is crucial that Janet instills a pattern of consistency into these Stand4 food drives. According to UT Southwestern Medical Center "Food banks should be used more consistently rather than only during emergencies to better address food insecurity and related health issues." People experiencing food insecurity are typically in unfortunate circumstances already; having to worry about how they are going to eat that night is just one more thing they shouldn't have to worry about. Additionally, encouraging a reliable schedule for these Stand4 food drives also cultivates a sense of trust and dependability within the community.

Janet, originally from England, made the move to California 13 years ago because of her husband's job opportunity in the Silicon Valley's tech industry. Initially after arriving in the U.S. she discovered a newfound passion for community outreach work and became focused on

helping those in need. Janet quickly realized that she wanted to leave a bigger impact and more aid to the disadvantaged. This is when she decided to launch Stand4 14 years ago, providing food, clothes, basic essentials, housing, and whatever people need. Since starting Stand4 in 2010 they have collectively served over nine cities and fed over 500,000 people in the South Bay Area.

One key aspect of Stand4's journey has been their emphasis on building relationships with communities and local organizations. Collaborating with different groups ensures that all of their efforts are aligned with the specific needs of the local community they serve. Moreover, Janet and her team have prioritized dignity in their approach. She understands the importance of respecting her customers, "It's very important to us because we believe that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity, regardless of their circumstances" (Abbey). A specific instance of Janet's selfless commitment to treating her customers with dignity occurred during one of her mountain view distributions last October. I can recall when an old toyota sienna pulled up to the distribution with a cracked back window. As soon as Janet and I peered into their window to ask how many families they needed to feed we noticed an old distressed man who politely responded "one family only." I then smoothly picked up a box of groceries and slid the box carefully and precisely into the trunk of the van making sure not to spill any of the produce, Janet then handed me one more box to put into the trunk just for "good measure" Janet said. Upon noticing that Janet handed me an additional box intended for him, the man in need was overwhelmed with gratitude, and his eyes started to swell up with tears. Janets charitable deed exemplifies her selfless nature and her willingness to put others in front of herself when she sees someone in need. Instead of choosing to limit her customer to only one box, she saw the seemingly desperate situation he was in and she chose to empathize with him and give him two boxes instead of one.

Most people attending food drives, like the ones organized by Janet, are experiencing homelessness, further highlighting the critical need for food drives. For individuals like Janet, who have dedicated themselves to alleviating the struggles of the homeless community, providing food is just one aspect of their mission. People experiencing homelessness heavily rely on these food drives in their daily lives to stay nourished and supported. As Janet has witnessed first hand through her tireless efforts, these drives offer more than just assistance. They also provide a lifeline for those grappling with the harsh realities of homelessness. According to the National Library of Medicine “Homeless individuals face barriers to resources and services, making initiatives like food drives crucial for immediate relief and long-term solutions to homelessness. ” Beyond food, they grapple with loneliness, health issues, and a lack of fundamental items like clothing. These additional burdens only amplify the urgency for assistance. Any support provided is truly helpful to those who are experiencing what it's like to be homeless.

Janet's future plans involve expanding Stand4's impact beyond emergency response to long-term community development. She also wants to continue building sustainable relationships with local organizations and communities to address issues like food insecurity and homelessness. Janet's approach emphasizes dignity, empowerment, and choice, aiming to not only provide immediate aid but also to support individuals in taking ownership of their lives. Through collaboration and listening to community needs, Janet aims to create lasting change and make a significant difference in the lives of those Stand4 serves. Furthermore, Janet intends to enhance Stand4's fundraising efforts to ensure sustained support for their initiatives. She envisions making more partnerships with corporate organizations and schools to increase their impact and reach more individuals in need. By prioritizing sustainability and collaboration, Janet

is dedicated to leading Stand4 towards a future where communities thrive and individuals are empowered to build better futures for themselves.

Janet Abbey's work, driven by her passion for supporting the community and youth empowerment, has shed light on the transformative impact compassion can leave. "Our goal is not just to provide food, but to provide an experience where people feel valued and where people feel like they have a choice. They have a say in what they're receiving. It's not just a handout. It's not just charity. It's about empowerment. It's about giving people the tools and the resources that they need to take ownership of their own lives."