



## News Release

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### **City Hope Partners with Maryland Avenue Elementary School to Develop Student Leaders**

Children can be profoundly impacted by dysfunction, crisis, and trauma in their family as well as in the community as a whole. While on a school campus, it is often students' friends who are the first to know something is bothering a classmate. This is where Maryland Avenue Elementary's partnership with City Hope comes in.

City Hope, led by Executive Director, Dani Womack, is a non-profit organization located in East County San Diego. City Hope proudly partners with the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District by providing a trained volunteer on school campuses. The volunteer provides extra emotional support for students experiencing a specific crisis or trauma, or who might be navigating an ongoing challenging situation.

The City Hope Student Team training equips and empowers student leaders on campus. Student leaders learn how to assist and support fellow students during a difficult time. Sometimes it might be as simple as sitting with someone at lunch who would otherwise sit by themselves. Additionally, these City Hope Student Teams are trained and prepared to assist their fellow students in feeling supportive, safe, connected to needed resources, and otherwise empowered to face or navigate through a given situation.

Once formed, the City Hope Student Team works hand in hand with the adult City Hope Volunteer assigned to the campus. The Director of School Support and the Executive Director are involved as well; the student team will not handle situations beyond what would be appropriate for them. The student team seeks to build community, connection, and compassion on the campus for the students they serve. The goal is to normalize and navigate the situation with others versus remaining in isolation – often an offer of presence and compassion can make all the difference.

Students from Maryland's Leadership Squad, a group started last year who also engage in projects like campus recycling and a food drive at Thanksgiving, met with City Hope. "Our kiddos today had some really good questions," Womack shared, "It was incredible to see, as the training went on, the students beginning to understand the potential they have to really help others." Students also engaged in role-playing to practice the skills presented. The Maryland Avenue Leadership Squad, as they have come to call themselves, is comprised of 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> graders who want to make a positive impact on their campus -- and beyond.

