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Bridge to Basics Names Jay Zemke Its First Executive Director, Prepares for Next Phase of Growth

Rapidly growing Minnesota hygiene bank brings experienced nonprofit leader and corporate partnership builder on board to expand access to essential products.

(St. Paul, MN) – Bridge to Basics, an East Metro-founded nonprofit addressing hygiene insecurity across Minnesota, today announced the appointment of Jay Zemke as its first Executive Director. The leadership milestone marks a new chapter for the growing organization as it strengthens its operations, expands partnerships, and increases access to essential hygiene products for communities across the state.

Founded in spring 2024, Bridge to Basics has quickly become an important part of the community safety net, currently distributing 100,000 essential products monthly to more than 40,000 individuals and distributing over 1.3 million items to date. Through a centralized supply and distribution model serving more than 75 nonprofit partners, including food shelves, schools, health partners and shelters, the organization helps its partners save an estimated 1,300 hours of volunteer labor and $130,000 in direct purchasing costs annually. These savings allow frontline organizations to direct more of their resources toward serving individuals and families.

Zemke brings more than three decades of executive leadership spanning the nonprofit, corporate, and marketing sectors. Most recently, he served as Executive Director of Free Bikes 4 Kidz MN, leading programs supported by thousands of volunteers and community partners to distribute thousands of bicycles annually. He previously served as President and CEO of Lutheran Braille Workers.

Earlier in his career, Zemke developed strategic relationships with nationally recognized companies and helped create national marketing programs involving leading retail partners, including Target, Walmart, CVS, and Walgreens. His corporate experience includes partnerships with brands such as 3M, General Mills, Sony PlayStation, Hasbro, Under Armour, and Adidas. Throughout his career, he has combined relationship building, strategic marketing, and organizational leadership to bring partners together around shared goals.

"Attracting a leader of Jay’s caliber is a powerful validation of the infrastructure and impact our community has built over the last two and a half years," said Rana Khoury and Kristie

Thibodeau, Cofounders of Bridge to Basics. "Jay brings a valuable combination of corporate partnership development and hands-on nonprofit leadership. His experience will help us strengthen our operations, grow our network of supporters, and expand access to essential hygiene products for the Minnesota communities that need them most."

As Executive Director, Zemke will lead organizational strategy, fundraising, operational development, and partnership expansion. His priorities include building sustainable corporate and philanthropic relationships, strengthening the organization's distribution infrastructure, and positioning Bridge to Basics for continued growth.

"Soap, shampoo, toothpaste, diapers, and other personal care essentials are basic human needs, yet many of these products remain out of reach for families struggling to make ends meet," said Zemke. "Bridge to Basics has built an effective model that helps close this gap by getting essential products to people through the nonprofit organizations they already know and trust. My focus is to build the partnerships, philanthropic support, and sustainable infrastructure needed to reach more communities and ensure that no neighbor has to go without the essentials needed for health, confidence and dignity."

About Bridge to Basics

Bridge to Basics is Minnesota's first and only hygiene bank, serving as a behind-the-scenes supply partner for nonprofit organizations, schools, and social service agencies. The organization sources, warehouses, and distributes essential personal care products, including diapers, incontinence products, toilet paper, dental care products, and deodorant, at no cost to its nonprofit partners. By helping keep these essential supplies available, Bridge to Basics enables community organizations to better support the health, dignity, and opportunity of the neighbors they serve. Learn more at https://bridgetobasics.org/.