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**Miracle Messages and Union Square BID to launch “Miracle Friends”
First-of-its-kind Phone-Based “buddy system” designed to re-united people
experiencing homelessness with support network**

3 December 2020 -- San Francisco, CA: Even *E.T.* could phone home with the help of his buddy Elliot. But, what if you had no home to phone? What if you had no buddy? This Holiday Season, a newly launched pilot program from the esteemed nonprofit **Miracle Messages** (www.miraclemessages.org) partnering with the **Union Square BID** (www.visitunionsquaresf.com) seeks to match volunteers with unhoused individual through a first-of-its-kind phone-based buddy system for individuals experiencing homelessness in and around Union Square called “**Miracle Friends Union Square.**” The initiative will kick off, virtually, on **Thursday, December 3 at 11am (PST)** via a *Facebook* training. Those individuals interested in volunteering for the effort should go to: <https://www.facebook.com/events/783157075851858/>

“The need is especially acute because of COVID and especially poignant during the Holidays,” said **Karin Flood, Executive Director of the Union Square BID.** “The goal of the program is to provide general companionship and social support for people experiencing the isolation of homelessness of which, sadly, there is a great deal here in the heart of San Francisco.”



Launched as a pilot program in late April 2020, Miracle Friends has matched 130 volunteers with unhoused individuals who have been moved into hotels during the pandemic. As the program expands in the coming months, additional participants will be added from current and future sites. To date, more than 250 volunteers have applied for training and matching through Miracle Friends. The program is currently active at numerous hotel sites and an affordable housing site for senior citizens in San Francisco, as well as sites in San Mateo County, Santa Cruz County, Sonoma County, and many others.

“Our goal is to match at least 50 unhoused individuals located in and around Union Square with trained volunteers for weekly phone calls and text messages, to provide general companionship and social support during COVID-19, and beyond,” explains **Kevin F. Adler, Founder and CEO of Miracle Messages**. “Also, our flagship Miracle Messages reunion service will also be included in the training and support that volunteer friends receive through the Miracle Friends buddy system, in case any unhoused friends near Union Square are interested in reconnecting with their loved ones.”

Miracle Friends is currently operating in San Francisco in partnership with the **San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Urban Alchemy, Five Keys, Catholic Charities, Larkin Street Youth Services, Episcopal Community Services, Downtown Streets Team**, and other local providers.

“Our neighbors experiencing homelessness are not problems to be solved, but people to be loved,” says Adler. “This partnership with the Union Square BID is part of our broader commitment to end relational poverty on our streets and show up for our unhoused neighbors with the same level of compassion and respect that we would want someone to show up for our own parents, siblings, children, or even ourselves.”

So, how does it work? Miracle Friends is 100% phone based. Volunteers can be based anywhere. If selected to participate, a volunteer is matched with an unhoused friend at a participating partner site, as well as a mentor from the Miracle Messages community. Through a partnership with cloud-based phone system **Dialpad** (www.dialpad.com) volunteers are assigned a new, secure, virtual phone number to make calls and text with their friend. The time commitment for volunteers is two to three hours a week, which includes the one-to-one calls, call logs, weekly group check-ins, and ongoing training and communication.

"Dialpad is committed to helping people maintain connections from anywhere, and we understand the importance of communication in times of need," said **Craig Walker, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Dialpad**. "We are proud to continue our work with Miracle Messages by offering our services to help those experiencing homelessness to stay connected during these trying times."

The process goes like this: The first step is to get in touch with the team at Miracle Friends by emailing friends@miraclemessages.org. Once a partner site is approved for the program, on-site case managers distribute copies of Miracle Friends' client-facing flyer at the hotel, and then collect sign-ups and/or releases of information consent forms from interested participants. Once the matches have been made, volunteers complete a check-in log to share their conversation notes with mentors, and flag any potential issues for on-site staff at the partner site to follow-up.

"Miracle Messages offer a humane way to help end homelessness, to reconnect families, strengthen local social support systems, shatter stigmas, and empower people everywhere to get involved," says Adler, who started Miracle Messages in honor of his uncle, who lived on-and-off the streets for 30 years in Santa Cruz before he died. "We



are on a mission to end relational poverty on the streets, and in the process, inspire people everywhere to embrace their homeless neighbors not as problems to be solved, but as people to be loved. “

Miracle Messages is a San Francisco-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that helps people isolated by homelessness rebuild their social support systems. Miracle Messages’ award-winning reunion service has helped more than 325 people experiencing homelessness reconnect with their loved ones, through short messages and a global network of volunteer “digital detectives.” Miracle Friends builds on the volunteer base and core values of Miracle Messages’ reunion service: that everyone is someone’s somebody. For a complete list of cities and counties where Miracle Friends is currently being piloted, please visit miraclefriends.org.

The Union Square Business Improvement District (BID) serves members and creates a high-quality visitor experience by managing and activating public spaces, attracting new investment, and advocating for the District’s future success. Union Square is the vibrant heart of San Francisco and an international destination where visitors come to enjoy exceptional retail experiences, luxury hotels, world-class cultural institutions, and great public spaces found only in the City by the Bay. A lively 27-block community surrounding Union Square Park in the heart of San Francisco makes up the Union Square BID. It is generally bordered on the north by Bush Street, on the east by Kearny Street, on the south by Market Street and on the west Taylor Street. Within this service area there are approximately 600 parcels. The original USBID was founded in 1999 and focused primarily on cleaning and safety issues. Today’s expanded USBID continues to recognize the need for providing cleaning and maintenance and critical public safety services, though has since added destination marketing, advocacy, beautification and capital improvement programs to enhance the experience of the Union Square area and contribute to a safer and more vibrant community.