

Faith-Based Organizations Can Help End Childhood Summer Hunger

Summer should be a fun and carefree part of childhood, but, all too often, summer vacation is when children do not have enough nutritious food to eat. When school lets out in the summer, millions of low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks they receive during the regular school year. Many families will struggle to provide enough nutritious food for their children during the summer months, especially as more people feel the impact of the current recession.

But, there is a program that fills the hunger gap – and faith-based organizations can play an important part in making sure that hungry children have access to healthy food during the summer. The Summer Food Service Program provides federal funding to faith-based organizations and other public and private nonprofits to serve healthy meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer.

There are a number of ways that your organization can help feed hungry children in the summer.

- **Sponsor the Summer Food Program:** Faith-based organizations can administer a summer food program (also known as sponsoring a program). The sponsor provides meals and snacks at one or multiple sites, such as parks, summer programs, pools, community centers, faith-based organizations or any other place where children gather during the summer. Sponsors receive a reimbursement for each meal that they serve. If you have the capacity to sponsor the summer food program, you will be filling a very important need in your community and allowing smaller sites to provide food to children.
- **Operate Summer Food Sites:** Churches, temples, mosques, and other faith-based organizations can open up their facilities to feed the children in the community. Bible Schools and other faith-based summer programs can participate as sites and feed the children who attend the program. To qualify as a site, the facility must be located in a low-income neighborhood (at least 50 percent or more of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals) or must serve primarily low-income children (at least 50 percent of the children must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals). Summer camps and sites serving primarily migrant children also can participate, but under slightly different rules.
- **Spread the Word about Summer Food:** Making sure families and kids are aware of existing sites is a very important way to help them get the food they need. You can include information about summer food in your bulletins or in your newsletters. Religious leaders can speak about the need and the program during sermons. Volunteers can post Summer Food flyers around their communities. And, your organization's pantry or soup kitchen can help direct parents to free summer meals for their children, easing some of the growing demand being placed on pantries and kitchens during these difficult economic times.

Get Started Today! To learn more about how your organization can get involved in the summer food program and help feed hungry children, contact your state child nutrition agency. A directory of agencies is provided online at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm. For additional information visit, www.frac.org/afterschool/summer.html.