



Best Practices: Boys & Girls Clubs Currently Benefiting from Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs

OREGON: Quality Food and Outreach Draws Kids to Boys & Girls Club

Overview:

The Blazers Boys and Girls Club in Portland, OR uses both the Afterschool Snack Program and the Summer Food Service Program to provide their students with exceptionally healthy and kid friendly snacks and meals year-round. They started the summer program under the sponsorship of the Portland School District but after receiving grant money and private donations to build commercial kitchens at two of their sites, the Club now sponsors the program itself and serves approximately 400 kids a day.

Finances:

The Portland Club is able to cover all costs including food, staff, and utilities through the federal reimbursements they receive from the state agency. By using the federal nutrition programs, the Club does not have to continually fundraise or rely on donations to provide the much needed snacks and meals. Scott Langen, Resource Development Manger at the Blazers Club, suggests the following tips to keep your Boys & Girls Club's meal program in the black:

Tip: Pay attention to what food the children like to eat. Quality, kid-friendly food will attract more children to your program and in turn, give you a larger reimbursement. When more children receive meals, it benefits their health and nutrition and helps your Club run a more cost effective program.

Tip: Serve snacks and meals during your program's peak participation time. For example, one of the Portland Clubs has the highest participation rate at 3:00pm while another peaks at 4:30pm. Both Clubs serve afterschool snacks during their peak operating times to ensure that as many kids as possible receive healthy snacks. The Club also receives a larger reimbursement for the higher number of meals served.

Tip: Use your area food bank to purchase food when possible. The Blazers Boys and Girls Club utilizes products from the Oregon Food Bank, which allows them to stretch their food dollars. This does, however, require flexible menu planning, as the Club doesn't always know what type of products they will be receiving.

Going the extra mile:

In addition to providing healthy snacks and meals to the children in the program, the Portland Boys & Girls Club provides nutrition education. Cooking classes teach children how to measure and what appropriate serving sizes should be. Simulation exercises teach children how to stretch food dollars. For example, children are given a hypothetical five dollars and asked to figure out how far the money would go at a grocery store as compared to a fast food restaurant. The Club's summer camp program holds special ethnic food themed weeks, highlighting a different country or type of ethnic food each week. One week it focused on different types of bread served around the world. Additionally, staff has paired meals with activities such as a new gardening project at one of their sites where students help grow herbs that are incorporated into their snacks and meals.

Recognizing the importance of the Afterschool Snack Program and Summer Food Service Program for the children, the Blazers Boys and Girls Club ran a capital campaign to build commercial kitchens at two of their Clubs. The updated kitchens now give the Club the capacity to prepare its own meals. Undertaking such a campaign was challenging but has been well worth it. Now the Club has control over the type and quality of food it serves.

The Blazers Club is also fortunate enough to have two professional chefs on staff. Their culinary expertise has helped the Club prepare kid friendly, healthy meals that fall within the budget limitations of the federal reimbursements.

Advice for Clubs new to the federal nutrition programs:

Use the nutrition programs as an opportunity to do additional outreach to the community about the snacks, meals and programming your Club provides. When the Blazers Boys and Girls Club finished renovating their kitchen and began preparing their own meals, it invited parents, children, community members and the press to a kick-off event to raise awareness of its meal program. People attended the event or heard about it through their friends and family and started sending their children. Additionally, the Boys & Girls Club marketed to the larger community. It posted flyers at schools, churches, and housing complexes and canvassed the neighborhood. Due to their kick-off event and extensive outreach, the Club's participation rate went from 50 to 300 students in a couple of weeks.

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