

Summer Food @ the Caroline County Public Library (Maryland)

by Amanda Courie, Youth Services Manager, Caroline County Public Library

The Caroline County Public Library, located on Maryland's Eastern Shore, serves a rural county of 33,000 people with three branches. Since the summer of 2016, we have participated in the USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to provide healthy food to our young community members during summer break.



We had noticed for many years that the library played a major role in the lives of young people during the summer months. In addition to our more traditional customers, i.e. families visiting for programming and the Summer Reading Game, many children and teens spend a lot of time in the library using our Teen Zone and MakerSpace areas. We knew from speaking with these youth that most of them participated in the Free and Reduced-Price Meal (FARMs) program during the school year. It was clear that these young people would benefit from the availability of nutritious food over the summer months.

Building on our existing partnership with our local school system, we were first able to offer a daily snack at our Central Library in Denton in 2016. We were then able to expand the program to provide a full lunch in 2017 and 2018. Immediately after implementing the program, we noticed benefits. Taking a break to have a nutritious snack or meal provided children and teens an opportunity to not only nourish their bodies, but to connect with library staff. We experienced a drop in the need to correct behavior issues and to send children out of the library. Our staff was able to engage young people more easily in drop-in educational and creative projects, and to build mentoring relationships which have lasted over the years. It is our firm belief that summer food programs are a model of the transformative mission of the modern public library.

The good news is that, with a strong community partner, these programs are easy to implement even in small library systems like ours. Our partnership with our local school system, which already provides summer meals to three summer camps held on elementary school campuses, is the key to our success. Caroline County Public Schools

is the local affiliate of the USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). As such, they handle all of the food procurement, preparation, and financial reimbursement. Their experienced staff ensures that the meals we provide meet the USDA's nutritional guidelines. They prepare bagged lunches which are ready to serve and contain all required components. Library staff is responsible for picking up the meals from a nearby location, serving the meals, and submitting daily paperwork tracking how many meals are served.

The library qualifies as a site for the SFSP program because the elementary school in our immediate service area is a Title I school, as designated by the federal government. Title I schools serve a high number of families who are low-income, and receive additional funding to provide services to their students and families. Under the regulations of the SFSP, all youth age 18 and under are eligible to participate in the program. No proof of income is required.

We are looking forward to continuing our Summer Food program at our Denton location in 2019, and in the future to expanding the program to our smaller branches. In 2018, we saw a large growth in the program due to increased local marketing efforts of the library and our partners. In our small community, we served nearly 1,000 meals over the course of the 10-week program. We encourage any interested library to consider adding this program to their summer offerings. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about implementing a summer food program at your library.

Amanda Courie, Youth Services Manager, Caroline County Public Library,
acourie@carolib.org; 410-479-1343