

Summer Meals at Charleston County Public Library

by Devon Andrews, Manager of Programming and Outreach, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC

Like most public libraries, Charleston County Public Library branches see an influx of kids and teens during the summer months. While many of them are there to check out books and movies and attend the fun and engaging programs that branches offer, library staff notice more immediate needs as well. With schools closed, families that rely on their school cafeteria for nourishment may find themselves struggling to locate other dependable sources of food in the community. Because families already count on public libraries as a welcoming and free resource year-round, they are a natural place in the community to offer free meals to families. This is where summer feeding programs can help.



Our library branches have participated in a summer feeding program for the past several years, offering free meals from June to August to anyone under 18, but we knew that there was room to improve the program and make it more streamlined. For families trying to figure out where they can find food over the summer, we wanted to make our operations easy and consistent.

We were brainstorming ways that we could improve the program, including offering summer feeding five days a week at all of our participating branches, when we were approached by the Charleston County School District's Office of Nutrition Services who oversees summer feeding efforts at meal sites throughout the county.



They had the wonderful idea to deliver hot lunch five days a week at seven of our nine summer feeding branches. The meals would be prepared in their cafeterias, then loaded onto vans and delivered to the branches. The school district's staff served the meals and kept count of how many meals were served at each location each day. Because the serving times needed to fit within the timeframe of lunchtime hours, and to allow for the vans to have time to travel from one location to the next, the vans could only stay at each location for increments of 15 minutes, so CCPL's Communications Team and the individual branches worked to heavily advertise those serving times via flyers, the web/email, and social media. To make it a welcoming environment for families, library staff set up tables outside by the van where they could distribute information about CCPL's Summer Reading program and give away free promotional items such as pencils and stickers.

Because Charleston County has such a large geographic footprint, two of our more rural branches at either end of the county did not fit in with this lunch delivery plan, but we knew that there was still a need to be addressed. We approached the Lowcountry Food Bank about offering snacks on all of the weekdays that the branches were open and thankfully, they were able to help! Both locations are small branches that operate on part-time hours and are not consistently open each weekday morning or during lunchtime hours, so snacks seemed like the best option to allow for food to be served at the same time each day of the week. Library staff picked up the snacks from the food bank each week, and our library couriers delivered them along with the branches' regular shipment of books and other library

materials.

Thanks to Charleston County School District and the Lowcountry Food Bank, we were able to serve over 8,000 meals over the summer! We had a wonderful experience building these partnerships and are excited to see things grow and improve so that we can feed even more families in Charleston County in the years to come.