

## Central Arkansas Library System Helps Young People with Food While School's Out

By Kay Kay DeRossette, Project Coordinator, Be Mighty Little Rock



Let's eat, play, and learn this summer with Be Mighty Little Rock - a program connecting kids & teens 18 and under to

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Over the past year, Be Mighty Little Rock created an unprecedented partnership of organizations across the City of Little Rock to help kids, teens, and their families. The Central Arkansas Library System (CALs) administered the program, and with the help of crucial partners, Be Mighty connected kids and teens with nutritious meals throughout the summer months.

Be Mighty meal sites serve young people all year round, but summer months are a special high-risk time for food insecurity. Kids who ordinarily get much of their nutrition through school meals during the school year may face challenges during the summer that leave them hungry. In 2019, summer meals were served at sixteen schools, eleven libraries, five community centers, several Boys and Girls Clubs, and one park.

To get the project started while school was still in session, CALs worked with the Little Rock School District to send an informational text about free summer meals to all parents of district students. In addition, Central Arkansas Water placed an insert featuring summer meal information in water bills sent to 90,000 households.

Because transportation challenges can prevent many young people from reaching meal sites, CALs received a grant from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) to provide kids and teens



free transportation during summer months. The grant supported a partnership between CALS and Rock Region METRO to distribute free bus passes to Summer Reading Club participants. Those bus passes enabled many families to travel to the meal sites where food was being served. To hear from the families about their positive experiences, see this [video](#) from NRPA.

CALS has been serving summer meals for several years now, but in 2019, the Be Mighty campaign connected the meals with Summer Reading Club for the first time. Be Mighty hosted activities during the annual summer reading kickoff event

known as CALS Kidstock. At the event, elected officials helped families prepare healthy snacks like trail mix and smoothies, while a photo booth with fruit and vegetable cut-outs made for a funny and popular attraction. And throughout the project months, CALS staff partnered with meal sites to deliver 24 hours of NRPA's Commit to Health nutrition literacy curriculum to kids.



To conclude the summer project, Be Mighty partnered with Little Rock Parks and Recreation to host an end-of-summer celebration at War Memorial Splash Pad. The event featured a cookout, sprinklers, the Little Rock Fire Department, and team sports, games, and dances. It was the perfect way to end an epic summer for the Be Mighty kids.

## **Results**

- CALS distributed 1,200 Be Mighty METRO passes that provided kids, teens, and caregivers unlimited rides on any Rock Region METRO Route from June 1-July 31, resulting in 16,792 rides.
- Participation at Central Arkansas Library System summer meal sites increased 50 percent from 2018 to 2019. Not only did CALS see an increase in summer meal participation, but afterschool meal numbers for fall 2019 are up 46 percent compared to fall 2018.
- Participation at Little Rock School District summer meal sites increased 17 percent from 2018 to 2019.

CALS Youth Services Coordinator Ellen Samples was delighted by the results.

“It was great to serve 50 percent more summer meals and know how many kids and teens benefitted from the project,” Samples said. “But we heard even more from our families about the difference this Be Mighty program made in their lives. Many were able to shop at healthy grocery stores because of their transportation assistance. Their kids started choosing nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables. And families said their children were so much happier because of active, fun programs that kept them moving. The campaign surpassed all our expectations and did all we had hoped for our local youth.”

Be Mighty Little Rock was created with the help and support of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, as well as other major partners mentioned here. CALS is planning future collaborative projects based on these new partnerships.

For more information, visit [BeMightyLittleRock.org](http://BeMightyLittleRock.org) or contact Kay Kay DeRossette at [kderossette@cals.org](mailto:kderossette@cals.org).