

Feeding children in the time of COVID-19

By Adria Ricke, Director, Globe Public Library, AZ

At the 2016 Arizona State Library Annual Conference, the Globe Public Library found out about the USDA Summer Lunch Buddies Program. We learned that the program exists to provide free and healthy meals to any child 18 and younger in the summer, when many children face food insecurity. By summer 2017, the Globe Public Library reached out to the local representative, Cindy Cothrun of Destiny School, and we became a serving site every summer from then on.



We did not expect to serve food again until summer 2020 but then, COVID-19 struck. Our library doors were closed to the public in early March but our desire to serve the community remained. We were contacted on March 15th and asked if we would be willing to act as a food serving site as a result of COVID-19 school closures. We jumped at the opportunity and began serving food by March 17th. It is incredibly rewarding to help the community in this way, but it has not come without some challenges. Our first challenge came early on with the way the children picked up the food. In the first week, children were lining up one behind the other to receive their food. Our Deputy Librarian, Mary Helen Avalos had a great idea to turn our parking lot area into a drive-thru, so children could stay safe in their own vehicles.

Another challenge came in the packing up of the food. While all the food is prepared off-site (at our city's local Dairy Queen), the food consists of separate components to make a sack-to-go lunch meal and to make a sack-to-go breakfast meal for the next day, for every child. Our solution was to make an

assembly line with 2 staff members packing lunches and 2 packing breakfasts, while maintaining physical distance and wearing PPE (gloves and masks) ahead of the families arriving.



The children are served the to-go lunches/breakfasts daily for 1 hour, 11:30AM-12:30PM Monday through Friday. It is based on a first come, first serve basis. We use the serving time to not only feed the children, but we also use it to connect with the families. For example, our lunches will often include materials such as Census 2020 bookmarks and even coloring books to help explain COVID-19 to children. When we started on March 17th, we were giving food to 50 children, and now we are up to serving 160 children to meet the demand.

There are other sites that give out food to children in our area as well, but the library is a central part of our community. People feel comfortable coming to our location because they recognize the library as a place to get help. All of us at the Globe Public Library are grateful for this chance to make a difference because we are all in this together.

Breakfast/lunch distribution is handled by Globe Public Library staff Mary Helen Avalos, Effie Dillon, Rayel Starling, Melissa Williams and library director Adrea Ricke. The photos show Melissa Williams and Rayel Starling putting handouts in the breakfast bags, and Melissa Williams passing a box of meals to Mary Helen Avalos.