

Summer Feeding During COVID - Charleston County Public Library

By Devon Andrews, Manager of Community Engagement, Charleston County Public Library, SC

Photos (labeled Summer Meal 2020): from our food distribution program at our McClellanville Library that serves a rural area of Charleston County. Thanks to a partnership with the Lowcountry Food Bank, we were able to provide free snacks all summer to anyone under 18. In the photos, you can see kids not only getting their snacks, but also showing off their prizes that they earned by participating in the Summer Reading program!

Like most libraries in the country, our summer looked very different this year as a result of COVID-19. However, thanks to our amazing school district and local food bank, our branches remained a consistent resource where families could find food all summer long.



Ten of our 17 branches are eligible to participate in the Summer Feeding program. Although our branches closed in the public in mid-March, we resumed curbside services right as the Summer Reading and Summer Feeding programs were scheduled to begin. Through our partnership with the Lowcountry Food Bank, three of our rural branches were able to hand out free snacks to anyone eighteen and younger three days a week. Through a second partnership with Charleston County School District (CCSD), we were able to provide even more food than in previous years. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, CCSD's Nutrition Services staff delivered hot lunches to our seven remaining Summer Feeding branches.

Not only did kids and teens receive a hot lunch on these days, but they also received a shelf-stable lunch and breakfast to take home for the days without hot lunch service, including enough to cover the weekends! As a result of these partnerships, we were able to distribute over 11,000 meals to almost 3,000 children and teens that visited our libraries!



In addition to providing a reliable source of nourishment for families over the summer, we were also able to promote our Summer Reading program to families who may not have internet access, thus helping prevent Summer Slide in a time where students had already been without in-person interaction with their teachers for several months.

To ensure the safety of patrons and staff, all of the wonderful Summer Reading performances and programs that can usually be found in our branches were moved online. In an effort to reach and engage those who don't have consistent internet access, as well as those who needed a break from screen time, branches assembled a variety of Take and Make activities, with supplies and instructions for patrons of all ages to do crafts and STEM experiments at home. The feedback we received from patrons for these Take and Make activities was wonderful, and branches were able to showcase their creativity by creating unique activities for kids, teens, and adults. We also received kits of art supplies from our local art museum to give away at a few of our Summer Feeding branches, as well as tomato plants, nutrition-based activities and information from the food bank to encourage gardening and healthy eating.

Thanks to the amazing efforts of our community partners and library staff, we were able to continue to meet the needs of Charleston County residents through our feeding program, and to provide them with the learning, fun, and sense of normalcy for which they rely on their local library.