Providing Help and Hope for Children and Families

For most children, summer break from school lasts 90 days. This is 90 days too long for the nearly 321,000 children in the Food Bank’s service area who rely on school meals. Fewer than 1 in 6 children have access to summer food programs, which means many of these children and their families will be worried about where their next meal is coming from rather than the fun activities of summer break.

As we head into the summer months, the Food Bank’s partner agencies are seeing an increase in need, likely due to rising costs of essential items like gas and food. But together, with partners like the Help Center NC, located in Henderson, we can provide kids and their families both help and hope. The organization operates a food pantry – ensuring families have food year-round, and a Kids Summer Meals program (more on page 2) when school is out to help supplement children and teens during the summer.

President & Founder Twanna Joyner Jones sees the struggles of families they serve throughout the year – which includes worrying about food, where they will live, and why they don’t have the same clothes or shoes as other kids at school. “We’re not only providing a meal, but we’re trying to figure out what other basic needs the family has,” Jones related. “And we’re only able to do that around a meal. They open up and feel like it’s safe.”

Jones shares that the excitement from kids who receive food in the summer is special. She sees the worry fall away from young faces and receive thanks in the form of smiles, hugs, and pictures drawn in gratitude. A recent visitor told Jones they receive hope when they visit the Help Center NC.

“That’s our goal, the greatest combination you can give someone is help and hope. If I give people help without hope, I’ve failed and if I give them hope without help, I’ve failed. But when we bring the two together, we create something that is so magnificent for families.”

Your support of the Food Bank’s Stop Summer Hunger initiative can provide that combination to kids who could face a summer of hunger. Our goal is to raise enough food and funds to provide 10 million meals this summer – and thanks to you and our partners, we know this is in reach. Donations made in the months of June and July will be matched to double the impact of your gift. Visit foodbankcenc.org/stopsummerhunger to help.
From the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

Although this is the 14th year of our Stop Summer Hunger initiative, it never gets easier to face the fact that hundreds and thousands of children will be worrying about where their next meal will come from. Rather than looking forward to an extended break from homework and responsibilities, they will be counting down the days until school starts again.

Thankfully the Food Bank and our partner agencies stand ready to help. Together we hope to provide 10 million meals in our 34 counties this June and July. This means our friends and neighbors won’t have to make tough choices between food and gas, or rent, but can feed the whole family.

And our Kids Summer Meals program stands ready to provide children and teens with thousands of nutritious meals during their break. So rather than face a summer of hunger, they can hope for a summer of fun.

Our goal this year is to provide 10 million meals through our community partner food pantries and soup kitchens. Some generous friends of the Food Bank will be matching donations in June and July so it is even easier for you to make an impact.

Join me in helping to send our kids back to school in the fall with happy memories and hope for the year ahead.

With sincere thanks,

Peter Werbicki, President & CEO

Kids Summer Meals: One Part of the Solution to Summer Hunger

Kids Summer Meals (KSM) provides families with children and teens ages 2-17 an additional resource for healthy, nutritious meals during the summer months. The Food Bank has sponsored the program since summer of 2009 and through it, has provided nearly 1.8 million meals. KSM sites typically offer breakfast and/or lunch for children when school is officially out for the summer.

The Help Center NC has been a Kids Summer Meals site since 2018. President Twanna Joyner Jones finds the program is vital to the kids receiving the meals, but it also takes pressure off their caretakers. Even during COVID, the Help Center provided meals and activities the kids could do safely at home.

“I love being a part of the program,” said Jones. “The Food Bank does the heavy lifting and allows us to just stand on the front lines.” Jones also shared that their agency has already been seeing an increase in demand, so KSM will be especially helpful this year.

Visit foodbankcenc.org/kidsmeals to find a site near you.
Advocating to Get Kids the Meals They Need

In our Food Bank’s 34-county service area, more than 300,000 children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals at school. When the COVID-19 crisis began, it was these kids and teens that our Programs team here at the Food Bank thought about first: what happens for them and their families if schools close, and after-school and summer programs that offer food can’t operate?

Thankfully, waivers for school meals and nutrition programs were extended quickly — ensuring kids and families had easier access to that food during an incredibly uncertain time. The waivers made school meals free for all kids, allowed meals to be picked up by parents or other caregivers, did not require a congregate setting, and made it ok to pick up multiple meals at one time.

The outcome of these waivers was incredible. Kids continued to receive nutritious food and families had a sense of stability despite employment changes and routines being upended. We heard from so many program partners that access to these meals was life changing for the neighbors they were serving. The Carolina Hunger Initiative reported that the waivers helped provide SIX TIMES the number of meals to children and teens in 2020 than in 2019. The Food Bank was able to provide more than 46,000 meals.

But now, the child nutrition waiver extension is in trouble. Without an extension, USDA cannot provide any child nutrition COVID-related waivers past June 30, 2022. This issue has bipartisan support and is critically needed for school meal programs and summer meal service providers all over North Carolina.

The Food Bank and our partners across the state are advocating hard for an extension of these waivers, and you can help! Visit foodbankcenc.org/blog for a post that contains a tool that can help you contact your elected officials and urge them not to leave kids in limbo.

With gratitude for your support and advocacy,
Dana Ellis, Director of Programs

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Twenty Years of Support from the Biogen Foundation

Biogen — a global biotechnology company with operations in North Carolina — has a core philosophy of Caring Deeply. As their longtime collaborator, we know that this philosophy applies to both their mission to be pioneers in neuroscience, as well as their commitment to empowering the next generation of scientists and building stronger, healthier communities. Biogen's philanthropic arm, the Biogen Foundation, has zeroed in on providing critical support for vulnerable children and families’ basic needs — making them a key collaborator in our mission to realize a hunger-free North Carolina.

The Biogen Foundation has been a generous supporter of the Food Bank since 2009. Since the start of our partnership, the Foundation has directly enabled almost 200,000 meals to be provided for vulnerable children and families. In 2014, they became a founding partner of our School Pantry program, helping us launch pilot pantries on school campuses in Wake and Durham counties. They continue this support today, with their most recent gift of $100,000 in support of our Nourishing Children and Teens Initiative.

In addition to their support for our children’s programs, the Biogen Foundation made the first gift to launch our COVID-19 pandemic relief fund in March 2020. We are so grateful for the Foundation’s continued generosity and willingness to pioneer programs as we test new ways to nourish, educate, and empower our community.

"Biogen cares deeply about creating a healthier, more equitable world by supporting our neighbors in need. Access to food — nutritious food, specifically — is a key social determinant of health that has a direct impact on wellbeing. As the Biogen Foundation enters our 20th anniversary year, we are honored to continue supporting the Food Bank in their incredible work to nourish our Triangle community," said Melissa Seymour, Global Head of Quality and Chief Quality Officer, Biogen Foundation Board member.

When children are well-fed with healthy, nutritious food, they can pay attention in school and concentrate their energy on getting better grades, form positive social bonds with friends, and grow to their full potential. Corporate and Foundation partners are critical to our ability to innovate. If you would like to get your organization involved with our work, we welcome the opportunity to share our vision of no one goes hungry in central and eastern North Carolina.

For more information:

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In Memoriam

Lucia Noel McLaughlin, a former Food Bank board member, passed away on March 18, 2022. She used her many years of professional experience in strategic communications, public relations, and journalism on the board’s communication committee, including planning a 10 year anniversary event and leading a previous logo rebrand. We are grateful for Noel’s support and expertise in the early days of the Food Bank.