

CLOSING MEAL GAPS FOR HUNGRY CHILDREN DURING SUMMER



Children enjoying lunch of turkey and cheese on whole wheat bun, cherry tomato and lettuce salad, nectarine and 1% chocolate milk at the CYO Bromley Center in Hamilton.

With grocery store aisles, farmers' markets, and backyard gardens overflowing with fresh fruits and vegetables, summer is a time when we get to marvel at and appreciate the earth's bounty.

But summer is also the time when we see a noticeable rise in child hunger and food insecurity.

When school is out, food insecure children no longer receive the free and reduced-price school meals that keep them nourished. The family food budget, already chronically short, is now stretched to the breaking point with no extra dollars to fill the refrigerator.

Happily, the Food Bank is replacing hundreds of lost meals through our summer feeding and weekend meal programs.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), more commonly known as "summer feeding", provides federal funds for meals and snacks that are served at summer programs, schools, parks and recreation centers, summer camps, and youth centers that are located in low-income areas or serve primarily low-income children. The vast majority of sites offer learning, enrichment, and/or recreational activities in addition to nutritious meals.

The Food Bank is sponsoring summer feeding and providing meals during July and August for 327 children at nine sites in Hamilton and Trenton. As a SFSP sponsor, Mercer Street Friends contracts with a NJ Department of Agriculture approved vendor to prepare and deliver meals to the sites.

The Food Bank determines the menu and ensures that all the food is nutritious. The fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains included in our meals is the only access to these healthy foods for many of the children.

Over 15,852 meals (7,326 breakfasts and 8,526 lunches) will be served.

The summer feeding program has multiple benefits. First and foremost it feeds children who would otherwise go hungry. But it does more. The meals also provide an incentive for children to participate in summer enrichment programs where, in a safe environment, they are engaged in academic and recreational activities that can mitigate the harmful effects of summer learning loss and help return them to school ready to learn.

In addition to the meals reaching children through the summer feeding program, the Food Bank is providing Send Hunger Packing weekend meal packs to 350 children attending summer programs in Ewing, Hamilton, Princeton and Trenton.

4,120 packs – containing four meals per pack for a total of 16,400 meals – will be distributed by the end of August. ■



NUDGING CHILDREN TOWARD HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES:

As part of our commitment to promote healthy eating, the Food Bank gave children attending our summer feeding sites an insulated lunch tote and a set of pencils with printed messages relating to healthy eating. ■

ADVOCATE'S CHAIR

The fiscal year 2018 budget proposed by President Trump would be devastating for the 42 million people in our country facing hunger.

The president's fiscal year 2018 budget proposes billions in cuts to important nutrition and support programs that help millions of individuals struggling with hunger and poverty – children; seniors; military and veteran families; unemployed and underemployed adults; urban, suburban, and rural families; and countless others who need support in times of need.

The budget proposes more than \$190 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) over 10 years, including shifting significant SNAP costs – more than \$100 billion – to states.

The Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (SNAP) is the first line of defense against hunger in New Jersey and throughout the nation. New Jersey is home to some 800,000 SNAP recipients – more than half of them children and senior citizens – who will surely face hunger without this assistance.

SNAP responds quickly and effectively to support low-income families and communities during times of economic downturn and increased need. Enrollment expands when the economy weakens and contracts when the economy recovers. In this way, SNAP helps families to bridge temporary periods of unemployment or a family crisis. If a parent loses a job or has a job that pays low wages, SNAP puts food on the table until the household's economic condition improves.

The average SNAP benefit in New Jersey is a meager \$142 per household. Every SNAP dollar is spent quickly at a local food retailer and directly impacts the local economy by a multiplier of almost 2 to 1. It contributes to the revenue streams that keep cashiers and food truck drivers employed.

Washington proposes funding SNAP through block grants, a fixed amount of money allocated to each state, and shifting a great deal of the financial costs to the states. If this proposal is approved, New Jersey would be required to contribute an estimated \$100 million to the program in 2020, soaring to a debilitating total of more than \$2 billion over 10 years.

It would also compromise SNAP's ability to respond almost immediately to natural disasters, like Hurricane Sandy, when more people need help quickly, or if the economy tanked, there would be no additional funds available to enroll people in the program.

The proposed SNAP cuts would gut this essential program and leave millions of Americans, many working at low-paying jobs, facing food hardships each day. It also hits local retailers from two directions – less money for households to spend on food and a mandatory fee for them to participate in the program.

It is more than sad that the administration lacks an understanding of hunger and poverty and is devoid of any compassion for children, families and seniors who struggle with food hardships. It is unconscionable.

As the Quakers say, it is time to “speak truth to power.” Contact your senators and representative and tell them that cutting food and nutrition programs is not acceptable. ■



STRIKE OUT HUNGER SCORES A WIN

Thank you to the United Way of Greater Mercer County for organizing Strike Out Hunger, a meal packing event held on June 27 at the Sun National Bank Center. Volunteers packed 177,408 packs of oatmeal, which the Food Bank is distributing to close meal gaps for children, families and seniors.

In addition, the United Way made a contribution of \$20,000 to Mercer Street Friends to support our hunger relief work. ■



PRINCETON TRUCKFEST

A fleet of food trucks lined Prospect Street in Princeton on April 27 for the 4th annual Princeton TruckFest organized and hosted by the Community Service Inter-Club Council, in conjunction with the Pace Council for Civic Values.

This event raises funds to support local charities addressing child and senior hunger. Over \$25,000 was raised to be shared between Mercer Street Friends Food Bank and Meals on Wheels of Mercer County. ■

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL WINS 2016 STUDENTS CHANGE HUNGER STATEWIDE CHALLENGE

AWARDED GOVERNOR'S CUP
FOR 2ND YEAR IN A ROW



A Mercer County school has once again clinched the **Students Change Hunger Governor's Cup**. The trophy was presented to the Cambridge School on June 5 for taking first place in the statewide food and fund drive competition that takes place every fall. The Cambridge students earned first place by collecting 7,065 lbs. of food and raising \$1,385 in donations for the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.

Students Change Hunger is a joint project of New Jersey's food banks to raise awareness about hunger and challenge students to collect nonperishable food or raise money for their regional food bank. Schools within the respective service areas of the individual food banks compete with each other based on the size of the student population. Schools that bring in the most food are recognized at ceremonies held by their respective food bank.

In addition, schools have the chance to compete for the **Governor's Cup** and statewide recognition, an award bestowed on the school that utilizes the most inventive, creative and spirited marketing and food/fundraising efforts. The Cambridge School students created flyers, produced a movie, designed and sold "Let's Pear Up to Stop Hunger" t-shirts, created visual displays and incorporated learning about hunger into the classroom curriculum.

Other Mercer County schools participating in the competition were Congregation Beth Chaim Religious School, Eden Autism, Hopewell Valley Central High School, John Witherspoon Middle School, KinderCare Learning Center, Mercer County Community College, Notre Dame High School, Road Less Traveled Co-op, Saint Ann School, Saint Gregory the Great Academy, Stuart Country Day School and The College of New Jersey.

In total, the Mercer County schools collected 21,172 pounds of food and \$3,585 for the Food Bank.

It was a record year in 2016, with a total of **229 schools** participating statewide, gathering **231,934 pounds** of food and over **\$30,000** in monetary contributions!

Students Change Hunger 2017 will start on Monday, September 18 and run through Monday, December 11. It's early, but that doesn't mean you can't start collecting now!

For more information, please contact Brian Peterson at bpeterson@mercerstreefriends.org. ■

VOLUNTEER COUNTS March 2017 to Mid-July 2017

Visits by Volunteers.....**476**
Number of Hours.....**1,321**

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse during this period.

- Alpha Phi Omega at TCNJ
- Bank of America/Merrill Lynch
- Berkshire Hathaway Home Services Fox & Roach
- Bloomberg
- Bonner Center at TCNJ
- Circle K at TCNJ
- Church and Dwight
- Credit Suisse
- Girl Scouts Fort Berry Woods
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Investors Bank
- Johnson and Johnson (ITS)
- Morgan Stanley
- National Association of Letter Carriers
- Navigant PACE
- New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance Company
- Old Navy (Hamilton MarketPlace and QB Mall)
- Princeton University Graduate Students
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- State Street
- Verus Claim Services

If you would like to volunteer, please call the Food Bank at 609-406-0503.

RECENT GRANTS AND AWARDS

- Bonner Center at TCNJ
- Credit Suisse 2016 Holiday Charity Initiative
- Credit Suisse Team Volunteers
- Josephine Peiser Charitable Foundation
- Princeton TruckFest
- Princeton University Office of Community and Regional Affairs
- ShopRite LPGA Classic
- United Way of Greater Mercer County



TableTalk

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WATCHING THE GARDEN GROW

The children attending **Urban Promise Learning Lab** planted an herb garden with seeds donated to the Food Bank by **Target**.

The herbs go home with the children and they get to taste the flavors in meals prepared by family members.



The children also took a short walk to visit a garden planted and tended by residents of East Trenton. ■

Damary Caraball, Learning Lab supervisor, points out the grape tomatoes.

TableTalk

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A PUBLICATION OF MERCER STREET FRIENDS

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