

Summer Time and the Children Are Hungry

by Vivian Lucas
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It's that time of year again. The homework assignments are in and the tests are over at last. School is out; and while children living in many families are looking forward to vacations at the beach, amusement parks, and summer camps, many others in low-income families will be wondering where their next meal will come from. For more than 22 million American children, the school food program is how they access most of their meals. (<http://bit.ly/1TXQ2fj>) When school is out for the summer, many of these same kids go hungry.

This is a growing problem that we have the power to address according to Billy Shore, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Share Our Strength and the No Kid Hungry Campaign. "This is an extraordinary time," Shaw wrote in NKH's 2016 Briefing Book. "For the first time in history, we've had 45 million Americans living below the poverty line for four years in a row. We've crossed a threshold where a majority -- 51% -- of public school students now live in low-income families. One in 5 American children struggle with hunger. Poverty is complicated. Feeding a child is not. This is a solvable problem." (<http://bit.ly/1t1n1IV>)

Several options are available to help address summer hunger for millions of America's children. Almost all of these options require that communities work together through nonprofits, government, faith organizations, and corporate entities.

A well-known program is the Summer Food Service Program under the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. The program provides nutritious meals to low-income children during the months when school is out. Unfortunately, many barriers to participation in the program exist, including unfamiliarity with the program or sites, lack of transportation, and limited food distribution hours.

A more comprehensive alternative to address child hunger is one that also makes an effective and sustainable impact to address poverty. Rev. Richard Joyner, a Top 10 CNN Hero, is the president and founder of the Conetoe Family Life

Center in North Carolina. The center works with volunteers, residents, churches, area organizations, and others to grow, share, cook, and distribute healthy food to his community. Located in a predominately African-American community in rural Edgecombe County, the Conetoe Family Life Center helps to interrupt the cycle of poverty by improving the resources available to families, specifically children. The youth are involved in the Center's activities and operations, especially growing, harvesting, and cooking vegetables. By training the children in gardening and bee-keeping skills, the center is able to provide healthy foods, resources and education to empower the youth and community to create new economic opportunities.

By engaging the community, using available, sustainable resources, and building partnerships, this alternative offers unique ways to provide healthy food and education to low-income children who might otherwise be hungry during the summer.

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