Breakout Session Two

Summer Meal Programs

Solutions to the widest hunger gap in North Alabama: Summer Break

Facilitator: Laurel Moffat

Panel:

Catherine Schiesz, YMCA of the Shoals

Rhonda McCarley, Broadway Recreation in Florence

Stephen Benefield, Moulton First United Methodist Church

Summer Meals is a federal program that serves kids age 0-18.

Facilitator: What does the food mean to these families?

Catherine- A mom with three children that gets free lunch during the school year will experience a hard time trying to feed their children every day during the summer.

Rhonda – Saw first-hand the need to feed children during the summer. So rewarding to see that you’re helping families and building relationships with the children.

Stephen- The relationships you build with the children and the families is very important. The vast majority of the kids getting food come from single parent households or live with their grandparents.

Summer meal sites are at a park where people already are, so it reduces the stigma of receiving a free meal.

One of the biggest challenges is driving up participation. Huntsville City Schools is one of the largest districts, but also presents the greatest challenges to get participation.

Stephen- Originally hosted at their church. They sent flyers home with guidance counselors, going door to door in low income areas and it didn’t work, no one showed up. Decided to set up at a gazebo in a park where there is a splash pad. A lot of the people they were trying to target were already at that park, so it ended up being the perfect spot for their summer meals program.

Audience question: How do you reach kids in rural areas that don’t have parks?

Stephen: Explore the community, drive around and see where people are congregating.

Laurel: A popular business model around the US, is Mobile Meals, a van that goes to smaller areas where people congregate; parks, street corners, apartment buildings.

Laurel: Introduced a special produce delivery into the existing summer meals program in Florence.

Catherine: This produce has helped educate children about where their food comes from. It also helps them to try new produce that they might not have tried before.

Laurel: For $200 we served over 500lbs of fresh fruits and vegetables to children.

Audience question: Where do you source produce?

We source from grocery stores and through the Farm Food Collaborative (a program through the Food Bank of North Alabama).

Audience question: Do you see a lot of community members coming to your sites and if so, how do you deal with that?

Rhonda: It depends on the day and it is not easy to plan an exact number. If you have too many, you can refrigerate until the next day. If you don’t have enough, hopefully you have some extra or can improvise in some way.

Audience question: What type of food/meals do you prepare?

Laurel – We work with an outside vendor that provides prepackaged meals that consist of:

Sandwich

Juice

Milk

Vegetable side

Audience question: Are you providing activities for the children and have you reached out to form relationships in your community to do that?

Catherine: The Extension Center is a big help.

Rhonda: Activities at the rec center is a big help

Stephen: Splashpad

Audience question: Are there any other partners you work with for any part of the meal program and how did you start those relationships?

Stephen: Once the program was started, volunteers started showing up by word of mouth. Social media advertising, shares from their fb page.

Rhonda: They have paid staff that helps

Facilitator question: Each site complies with federal regulations. Which system did you use for paperwork and compliance?

Stephen: The paperwork wasn’t hard. One person in charge of counting heads at the site and

Rhonda: Same as Stephen, the paperwork is simple.

Catherine: We’re counting kids anyway, so it’s easy.

Audience Question: Who submits the claim to the state?

Laurel: The Food Bank of North Alabama submits the claim and takes care of the vendor fees. As a host site, you only have to fill out one or two forms a day.

Audience question: Are the meals served on site, can they be transported? How would you do a mobile meals truck?

Laurel: All meals must be eaten on site, period. Even with a mobile meals truck, the site can be smaller, but children must still eat at that site.

Audience question: What do you do on rainy days?

Stephen: If it’s really bad, just refrigerate the food and go out the next day. If it’s just pop up showers, go anyways because people will still be out.

Audience question: What do you do if you order too many meals?

Refrigerate and they are good for up to four days. Just order fewer for the next day and serve the leftovers.

Audience question: What about the parents that come with the children, can you serve them?

Laurel: No, this is only for children up to age 18. You can try to connect them to food pantries in the area. If it keeps happening, contact the Food Bank and we will try to help.

Facilitator: If someone is interested in becoming a summer meals site, what factors should they take into consideration and what advice do you have?

Catherine: Just do it. There are going to be hungry kids and you have to trust it will work.

Stephen: Make sure you have a committed core of volunteers you can count on. Volunteers will come and go, but the core group is essential. Planning out the logistics is something the Food Bank does, so you’re set up to succeed.

Huntsville City Schools has done the program in about a dozen sites since 2013. They do both breakfast and lunch. Sites are determined right after spring break. City of Huntsville gives free rides with city transportation to the summer meal sites. If you live outside of Huntsville City and would like to serve children over the summer, ask churches or Madison County Schools to use their buses and HCS will feed them.

Scottsboro Housing Authority – Churches are partnering and hosting sites on alternating weeks to reach more people.

Final Thoughts:

Stephen: Even a Dollar General parking lot could be a good place to set up. Anywhere people congregate. If you know there is a need, get creative and find a way

Rhonda: This is a very rewarding program and I encourage you to try it.