Introduction

Summer hunger is a fact for far too many families. Studies show that school meals provide the majority of calories for low income children. Out of the roughly 21 million students that receive school lunches, only 15 percent will have access to meals in the summer months. Only 11 percent of school food service agencies participate in USDA Summer Meals. During the spring of 2013, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack began calling upon community members to ensure that children do not go hungry when school is out, noting, "Children need healthy food all year long to grow and achieve to their highest ambitions". In response, our firm, Outline LLC established Growers to Growers, a youth empowerment initiative aimed at connecting children with tools and resources necessary to become engaged, healthy citizens.

Partnering with Good Cheer Food Bank, we were able to secure a grant from Food Lifeline that provided not only the food, but all health and safety equipment, coolers, and advertising materials. We submitted a letter of request to the Mayor and City Council regarding use of Langley Park, and on May 20 City Council members voted unanimously to allow for a summer meals site.

Site:

Sites can be approved according to two factors: free/reduced price lunch participation rates of schools or Census Data. The city of Langley is eligible as a region, based on 2010 Census data.

According to the Food Research Action Committee (FRAC) map, 2010 Census data showed 50-60% of youth in the qualifying area are under age 19 and living below the 185% poverty rate (a qualifying line for WIC, SNAP and other programs).

We felt Langley Park was an excellent location, based on its' central location already known to attract youth. The uniquely Whidbey covering, picnic/dining area, and access to restroom and transportation met site requirements. Good Cheer’s Langley Thrift Store is located kitty-corner on Second St. and Anthes Avenue.
Good Cheer and Food Lifeline

Good Cheer’s support was essential to the success of the program. Executive Director Kathy McCabe, the staff, interns, and volunteers helping out in various capacities made the program possible. An entire shelving unit in the Good Cheer walk-in refrigerator was devoted to Kid’s Café. At the Food Bank, the storage area for Kid’s Café included a small residential refrigerator, a narrow shelving unit, and approximately a 3x6 foot space for coolers.

Food lifeline provided all health and safety equipment, coolers, and advertising materials. The equipment provided was all in excellent condition and attractively designed. It was not difficult for one volunteer to transport all materials to the site; two volunteers made set up fast and easy. Rebecca Van Maren, Food Lifeline Kid’s Café Coordinator was a tremendous resource.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of this program. Recruitment was conducted by contacting past year’s participants in Summer Meal programs, personal contacts, and through a Call for Volunteers run by Good Cheer on Drewslist. Volunteers were asked to visit the site at lunch service before signing up and were given training using the Kid’s Café USDA manual.

For volunteer management, Sign-Up Genius was used. Sign-Up Genius is a free online service for volunteer scheduling, the system allows organizers to invite, schedule, view, and communicate with volunteers. Three of the volunteers at the Kid’s Café had volunteered in the past for a Summer Meal program. Three of the volunteers this summer at the Kid’s Café were youth under aged 18 (two in high school, one in middle school).
Volunteers were asked to obtain food handler permits, the cost of which could be reimbursed by Good Cheer. Approximately 85% of volunteers obtained the permit and no reimbursement requests were submitted.

Food was set up on the low semi-circular table under the covering. A picnic table and another table with stools were set up for diners.

The grass area was also available for picnic style dining. There are three trashcans located at the perimeter of the park and a restroom facility across the street.

**Outreach**

The program was widely promoted. Locally, announcements about the site were listed on the South Whidbey School District school websites, Drewslist (a local email list serve), and flyers were distributed posted around South Whidbey. Regionally, the site was included in Food Lifeline outreach materials, on the Parent123 website and phone line.

Using the social media service Twitter, we (@Growers2Growers) promoted our meal site and participated in a number of events and discussions, including United Way of King County’s “Summer Stories” and USDA’s Summermeals Twitter campaigns.
Education

Chris Korrow, film marker, farmer and naturalist, offered multi-aged activities about bugs, being observant in nature, and ecosystems. Worksheets and other activities that focused on healthy dietary choices were also offered on occasion. Daily, the site practiced the art of the table by providing social dining opportunities complete with table cloths and flower arrangements.

Summer Meals:

Meals were served weekdays from 11:30 to 12:30 from June 24-August 30th, closed on July 4th. In the 49 days the site operated, 689 meals were served to youth at no-charge. The average daily meal service was 15 youth; records show a low of 0 and a high of 44.

Based on observations, the majority of youth (75%) that participated in the program were elementary aged children accompanied by parents. About half of the dining guests came to the site regularly (at least once per week); approximately a quarter of the guests come to the site frequently (at least three times per week). Approximately 5% of youth accepted a second meal, returning to take at least three or more items.
**Food and Menus**

Menus adhered to the National School Lunch Offer vs. Serve food service plan. Offer vs. Serve requires that youth be offered choices of items that meet requirements in food categories (i.e. dairy, meat and meat alternatives, fruits, vegetables, grains) of which they may take all but must take a minimum of any three. At each meal, vegetarian options were available and youth following vegan diets could participate in the program and meet requirements. Offer vs. Serve eliminated food waste and trash while empowering youth to make independent dietary decisions.

Food Lifeline’s food items were all individually packaged and the agency also provided utensils and service ware. Menus varied each week and included items such as bagels with cream cheese, sugar peas, yogurt, sunflower seeds, hard-boiled eggs, baby carrots, hummus, apple-cinnamon muffins, granola, string cheese and sliced apples. The feedback received from volunteers, participants, and the adults that accompanied participants about the food all positive.

Through the Good Cheer Garden and the Gleeful Gleaners, youth were offered supplemental packages of fresh produce, such as purple beans, mixed varieties of carrots, and red and Shiro plums to take home to eat later and/or share with family.

**Waste management**

Volunteers routinely walked the park and collected waste from children, both during and after meal service. The City of Langley regularly emptied the three trashcans that serviced the meal site.

Food items were tracked to note if they were distributed, donated, or disposed of. Unused food was able to be donated through the Food Bank. Each week, packets of fresh fruits and vegetables that were left over were delivered to the South Whidbey Children’s Center. This provided teachers and families with ready-to-eat healthy snack for children that otherwise would not have been available.
Summary

During the 10-week period in which Kid’s Café operated, Food Lifeline delivered Good Cheer’s entire order instead of Food Bank picking up products. This convenience provided Good Cheer with significant savings in ferry fees, fuel, and volunteer hours.

Short lead-time this year proved challenging to schedule guest instructors and implement curriculum. In addition, the Whidbey Children’s Theater’s move from the Porter Building and the summer closure of the Hub attributed to the lower than anticipated participation rates. Based on observations, a later meal service (such as 12:00-1:00 or 12:30-1:30) may increase participant rates in older youth.

To increase the value placed in education and to acknowledge the time it takes to do it well, it would be advisable to allocate a stipend for educational development. This investment would also allow for compensation for guest instructors.

With a commitment to continue the programming, planning could begin in early spring to secure volunteers, guest educators, and community partners. Youth involvement is to be encouraged in the planning, outreach, and implementation stages.

With community and volunteer support, it may be a worthy endeavor to explore the possibility of expanding the Kid’s Café with new locations into other eligible areas on Whidbey Island (such as Freeland, Coupeville, and Oak Harbor).

689 free meals were served. Volunteer and participant satisfaction was high. The program’s alignment with Good Cheer’s mission, feedback received from participants, and the benefits of the program in relation to resources expended, lead us to believe that there ample capacity and interest to continue the Summer Meals program as long as there are eligible sites on South Whidbey.

Growers to Growers wish to thank Kathy McCabe and Good Cheer Food Bank and Thrift Stores, Rebecca Van Maren and Food Lifeline, Langley City Council, Kid’s Café volunteers, and everyone that came to lunch at the Kid’s Café. We are available for consultation and project management and hope to see the continuation of Kid’s Café.

Sincerely,

Aaron & Miriam Coates