



Fighting Childhood Hunger in Anchorage

A report on the Kids' Café Program



A Hunger-Free Community Report



by Shawn M. Powers

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“The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. [He or she] shall be entitled to grow and develop in health.... The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.”

*Principle 4, Declaration of the Rights of the Child,
proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1959.*

“I liked it when they had meatloaf. That was good.”

*Jermaine, age 10
Kids' Café Participant, Muldoon Boys and Girls Club, Anchorage, Alaska*

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Introduction

The Kids' Café program is an emerging tool in the fight against childhood hunger in Anchorage. Kids' Café helps meet the needs of hungry and at-risk children by providing nutritious meals and snacks, but the program is much more than just food. Kids' Café sites also provide recreational and education activities, positive role models, and safe spaces. Most Kids' Café sites operate in the hours after school, when the temptations of crime and drugs may be within easiest reach. The program is just over one year old, but is feeding approximately 260 children at seven sites in Anchorage and is continuing to grow.

We might wish that Anchorage was a place where Kids' Café did not need to exist, where all children were assured of adequate nourishment and safe places to learn and play. Unfortunately, Anchorage, like the rest of the country, is no such place. Half of all food stamp recipients in Anchorage are children, as are half of the people who rely on St. Francis House, the city's largest food pantry. The most recent data indicate that approximately one in ten Anchorage children live below the federal poverty line, and children here are 40 percent more likely to live in poverty than adults. With Alaska's high cost of living, these statistics may understate the true extent of the problem.

This report is an assessment of the problem of childhood hunger in Anchorage, the current state of the Kids' Café program, and the opportunities and challenges facing the program as it seeks to reach more needy children. It is intended not only for the Kids' Café staff and board of directors, but also for everyone with a stake in the Kids' Café mission: school district officials, community anti-hunger leaders, government officials, and concerned citizens. My hope is that this report will raise awareness of Kids' Café and the problems it seeks to address, provide analysis that will help guide the program's expansion, and help create new links between Kids' Café and other stakeholders in the community.

Part 1 of the report discusses the consequences of childhood hunger and the extent of the problem in Anchorage. Part 2 provides a snapshot of the Kids' Café program and whom it is currently serving. Part 3 includes recommendations for new Kids' Café site placements, an analysis of the program's future needs for kitchen space, and suggestions for how to raise awareness of Kids' Café in the community. In Parts 2 and 3 I also include boxes featuring children who are currently participating in Kids' Café. I have tried to represent their voices as accurately as possible; only their names have been changed.

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1. The State of Childhood Hunger in Anchorage

One of the greatest tragedies and scandals of contemporary America is that, in the midst of great material wealth, millions of children are hungry or at risk of hunger. To make matters worse, the issue often seems to go unpublicized and unnoticed. Despite a shared belief that children deserve special help and protection, children in America are far more likely to live in poverty than adults. Children from single-parent homes and children from disadvantaged minority groups are especially vulnerable to poverty and hunger. While there is a wide safety net of public programs and private nonprofits, many children suffer from hunger and poor nutrition anyway, often with permanent physical, intellectual, and emotional consequences.

The situation in Anchorage is no different from the rest of the country, and the trends described above are evident here as well. Nearly one in ten children in Anchorage lives below the federal poverty line, and approximately one third of Anchorage School District (ASD) elementary and middle school students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch. This is the challenge that Kids' Café, and other organizations similarly dedicated to feeding hungry children, face in Anchorage. This section reviews the findings of research on childhood hunger and provides a "big-picture" analysis of the problem of childhood hunger in Anchorage.

1.1. The Costs of Childhood Hunger

Hunger and inadequate nutrition pose a number of risks to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children. Numerous studies have examined health outcomes of children from households lacking access to sufficient food. This research has found negative effects from food insufficiency in the following areas:¹

***Physical health.** Children from food-insufficient households are more likely to have a poor overall health status, have more frequent colds and ear infections, and are more likely to develop anemia than other children. Hungry children may suffer from stunted growth and weakened immune systems. These children also experience more frequent visits to doctors and emergency rooms.

***Academic performance.** Studies have linked food insufficiency to lower standardized test scores, diminished retention of new material learned in school, a higher likelihood of repeating a grade, and higher rates of suspension, absenteeism and tardiness.

***Emotional well-being.** Children from food-insufficient households tend to experience higher levels of anxiety, irritability, hyperactivity, aggressive or destructive behaviors, and withdrawn or distressed behaviors. These children also experience higher rates of depressive disorders and suicidal behaviors and are much more likely to need mental health services.

As this research suggests, food insufficiency is devastating not only for the children and families affected, but also for schools and society at large. Failing to feed our children adequately is failing to invest in human capital for the future. Providing food for hungry children is not only the right thing to do, it also prevents further problems down the line.

1.2. Childhood Poverty in Anchorage: Data from the U.S. Census

It is impossible to know exactly how many children in Anchorage are hungry at any one time. However, we can be confident that thousands of children in Anchorage are at risk of not having enough to eat. Data from the 2000 Census provide a detailed if not up-to-the-minute picture of child poverty in Anchorage. More current data on children in poverty are not available, but the overall poverty rate in Anchorage remained essentially unchanged between 2000 and 2003, suggesting that the present situation may not be substantially different from what was described in the 2000 Census.²



***Over 6,800 children in Anchorage live in poverty.** According to Census data, 9.3 percent of children in Anchorage live below the federal poverty line. The rates of child poverty in Anchorage are lower than those of Alaska (11.8 percent) and the United States (16.6 percent). However, the lower poverty rates for Anchorage and Alaska may be misleading, since the cost of living is higher in Alaska than in the Lower 48 states. Many people who are not officially poor in Alaska may have the same standard of living as people who are officially poor elsewhere in the U.S.

***Children in Anchorage are more likely to live in poverty than adults.** Mirroring state and national trends, the proportion of children living below the poverty line in Anchorage (9.3 percent) is higher than the proportion of adults living below the poverty line (6.6 percent), as reported by the 2000 Census. Children under the age of 5 are more likely to be poor than children between 5 and 17 years old (10.8 percent and 8.7 percent, respectively).

***Asian American and Alaska Native children are most likely to live in poverty.** According to the Census, 23 percent of Asian American children and 19 percent of Alaska Native children in Anchorage live below the poverty line. The poverty rates were lower for Hispanic children (14 percent), Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children (12 percent), African American children (12 percent), and Caucasian children (6 percent).

***Single-parent households are more likely to experience poverty than two-parent households.** Only 3 percent of Anchorage families with two parents live below the poverty line. By contrast, 10 percent of families with a single father and 21 percent of families with a single mother live in poverty.



1.3. Childhood Hunger in Anchorage: Data from Usage of Services

Another way of quantifying the number of children at risk of hunger in Anchorage is through enrollment in services for low-income households. These services include the Food Stamp Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), free and reduced-price school lunch, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Each of these services is available to individuals below a certain income level, frequently 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

***Over 14,000 children in Anchorage relied on federal assistance programs last year.** From December 2003 through November 2004, 14,005 Anchorage children accessed food stamps, 8,231 benefited from TANF, and 7,478 used both.³ These numbers reflect all of the children who used the services at any point during the year and include many transient users. Since many eligible individuals do not participate in these programs – the estimated food stamp participation rate in Alaska is 72 percent of the eligible population – these figures may underestimate the number of children in need of assistance.⁴

***Children make up a disproportionate share of federal assistance recipients in Anchorage.** Children comprise 51 percent of food stamp recipients and 68 percent of TANF recipients in Anchorage. Eighty-seven percent of households accessing food stamps are single-parent households, as are 67 percent of households accessing TANF.⁵

***Children make up a disproportionate share of emergency food recipients in Anchorage.** According to a 2002 survey conducted by St. Francis House, a program of Catholic Social Services and the largest food pantry in Alaska, 48 percent of those who receive food from its pantry are children. According to that same survey, 34

percent of respondents said they and their children sometimes skip meals due to a lack of food.⁶

***Over 2,200 children in Anchorage experienced homelessness at some point during the 2003-2004 school year.** The Child in Transition Homelessness Project, a program of the Anchorage School District (ASD) Title I Department, identified 2,236 children as eligible for its services between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004. To be eligible, children must be homeless or living in a shelter, hotel, or transitional home. Among those eligible, 1,702 children used project services during the school year, including 279 preschool students, 588 elementary school students and 835 secondary school students.⁷

***Over 11,000 children in Anchorage receive free or reduced-price school lunch.** Elementary and middle school students from low-income households are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. As of December 1, 2004, there were 9,002 students eligible for free school lunch and 2,712 students eligible for reduced-price school lunch in ASD. The total for free school lunch includes the entire enrollment at the five Provision 3 elementary schools which, due to sufficiently high numbers of needy children, offer free meals to all students. Since high school students are not eligible for this program, there are many more students potentially in need of food assistance than these numbers show.⁸

***Thousands of children in Anchorage benefit from early childhood nutrition programs.** Low-income children are eligible for CSFP until age 6 and for WIC until age 5. As of December 2004, 594 children in Anchorage were enrolled in CSFP.⁹ Enrollment numbers for children were not available for WIC, but there were 4,471 people (pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women as well as children) enrolled in the program in December 2004. Since 75 percent of WIC applicants that month were children or infants, it is likely that the total enrollment is mostly children as well.¹⁰

It is important to keep in mind that the enrollment numbers for these programs do not translate directly into numbers of hungry children. In many cases, these programs probably help prevent children from going hungry. What these statistics do indicate, however, is that there are thousands of children in Anchorage who come from low-income households that have asserted their need for assistance. While not conclusive, these statistics are highly suggestive that many thousands of Anchorage children are at risk of hunger.

2. Kids' Café: Present Conditions

Kids' Cafés, both in Anchorage and elsewhere in the country, have a unique and important role to play in eliminating childhood hunger. In particular, the program helps to fill gaps left by public assistance and other components of the private emergency food system. In many cases, Kids' Café sites provide children with a meal or snack during the after-school hours, when free or subsidized school meals are not available. Since Kids' Cafés tend to be activity spaces as well as feeding programs, Kids' Café sites may have less stigma associated with them than other emergency food agencies. Kids' Café also provides a resource for children from households which, for one reason or another, do not utilize other food assistance programs to the fullest. Finally, Kids' Café sites are more than simply a place to eat; they also provide a safe place for children to hang out, opportunities to socialize, mentoring from staff, and in many cases tutoring or physical activity. At their best, these services help break the cycle of poverty by providing children with good role models, helping them to succeed in school, and keeping them away from crime and drugs.

The Kids' Café program in Anchorage is currently small in scale but serves diverse constituencies of needy children. This section provides an overview of the existing program and an assessment of whom it is currently reaching. We begin with a brief discussion of the history behind the Anchorage Kids' Café program and the national program. We then move on to a discussion of overall program trends and an analysis of current site placement.

2.1. Kids' Café in Anchorage: Historical background

Kids' Café in Anchorage is the product of a collaboration between Food Bank of Alaska (FBA), the state's major food bank, and Bean's Café, a day center and community kitchen near downtown Anchorage. While the organization itself came into existence in November 2003, incorporating as Kids' Deli (doing business as Kids' Café), the program structure existed before then. Bean's Café was preparing meals and snacks, drawing on food from FBA, and distributing them to after-school programs in Anchorage as early as 2001. This same process continues to exist now, with FBA providing most of the food, Bean's Café serving as a central kitchen, and many of those same after-school programs continuing to be involved.

The reason for creating the Kids' Café organization over this existing structure was to facilitate donations, according to Jim Crockett, past executive director of Kids' Café and current executive director of Bean's Café. Some people may be inclined to support children's programs but not homeless services and vice versa, explained Crockett. For that reason, it made sense to create a separate organization that could actively target constituencies more likely to donate to children's causes. In addition to raising money, the Kids' Café organization

provides administrative and food safety oversight and logistical support to the individual programs.

The Kids' Café program has also brought federally-subsidized meals to needy Anchorage children during the summer months. In the summer of 2004, Kids' Café sponsored the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) at three of its partner sites. SFSP seeks to ensure that children from low-income areas continue to have access to nutritious meals when school is out for the summer.

As of this report, Kids' Café in Anchorage is not an affiliate of the national Kids Café program but is working toward becoming an affiliate. The national Kids Café organization is a program of America's Second Harvest, the nationwide network of food banks and food rescue organizations. Inspired by a grassroots effort to feed



children in Savannah, Georgia, America's Second Harvest created the national program in 1993, and today there are more than 1,000 Kids Café sites nationwide.¹¹ Becoming an affiliate would enable the local Kids' Café program to access national program resources, including conferences, technical expertise, and funding. Perhaps most noteworthy is the ConAgra Foods *Feeding Children Better* program, which provides seed grants of \$20,000 to start new Kids Café sites.

2.2. Kids' Café in Anchorage: Program Trends

The Anchorage Kids' Café network currently includes seven partner sites, which serve approximately 260 children on a weekly basis. Table 2.1 lists the current sites, along with their average number of children fed each day, the type of meal served, the age levels of children served, and an indication of whether or not the site provides transportation for participants.¹²

The seven current Kids' Café sites may be roughly divided into two categories. In one category are sites that draw participants primarily from their immediate neighborhood and that have fairly open membership with few or no special requirements for participation. The two sites at Boys and Girls Clubs fit this description, as do the two sites associated with low-income housing projects: the Campfire USA program at Loussac Manor and the Strawberry Village site. These will be referred to as "open" sites.

Site Name	Meals/day	Type of meal	Age level	Transportation?
"Open" Sites				
Campfire USA - Loussac Manor	25	Hot meal	Elementary through High School	No
Mountain View Boys and Girls Club	70	Hot meal	Elementary through High School	Yes
Muldoon Boys and Girls Club	25	Hot meal	Elementary through High School	Yes
Strawberry Village	25	Sack meal	Preschool through Middle School	No
"Specialized" Sites				
AK Native Heritage Center	75	Sack meal	High School	Yes
Crossroads	30	Hot meal	High School	No
Little Steps	10	Hot meal	Preschool	Yes

In the other category are sites that draw participants from all over Anchorage and that have special requirements for participation. Crossroads, the Anchorage School District program for teenagers experiencing pregnancy and parenting, belongs in this latter category. Little Steps, which is a preschool for children with severe emotional disturbances, also targets a very specific population. The program at the Alaska Native Heritage Center High School Program draws participants from each of Anchorage's high schools, and participants must be Alaskan Natives or American Indians. These will be referred to as "specialized" sites.

On a program-wide level, Kids' Café serves predominantly elementary and high school students, which account for 35 percent and 48 percent, respectively, of the total client population. Middle school students make up a significantly smaller portion of the children served at 13 percent. Four percent of the children – almost all of whom attend Little Steps – are preschoolers, and less than one percent of participants are old enough for but not currently enrolled in school. This breakdown is somewhat biased by the fact that two of the "specialized" sites, Alaska Native Heritage Center and Crossroads, serve exclusively high school students. Considering the "open" sites alone, 62 percent of children benefiting from the program are in elementary school, 23 percent are in middle school, and 13 percent are in high school.¹³

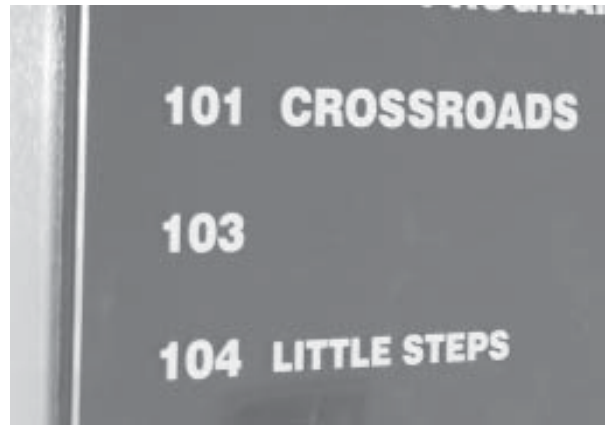
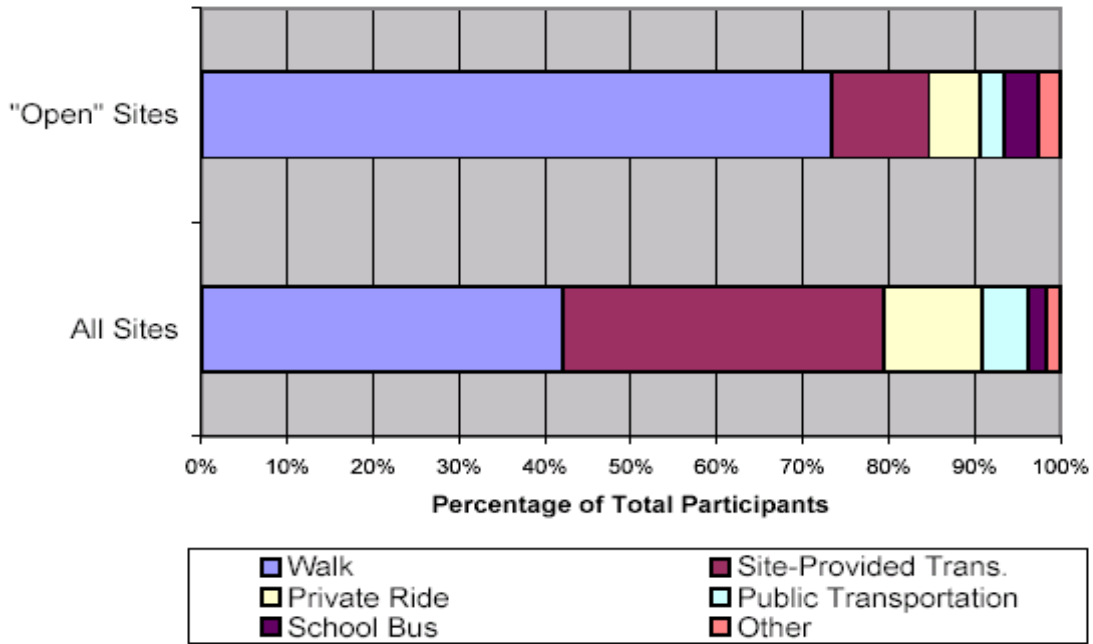


Figure 2.1 summarizes the transportation methods utilized by Kids' Café participants to get to the sites. An overwhelming majority of the participants access the sites by walking or by transportation provided by the site itself. About 42 percent of the children walk to the Kids' Café location they attend. Four of the seven sites provide van or bus transportation for participants, and 37 percent of children utilized this option. Only 11 percent of participants receive rides from their parents or guardians or from carpooling. Approximately 5 percent of the children reach their Kids' Café site on public transportation, and 2 percent arrive on a bus directly from school. Once again,

Figure 2.1. Transportation Methods Used by Kids' Cafe Participants



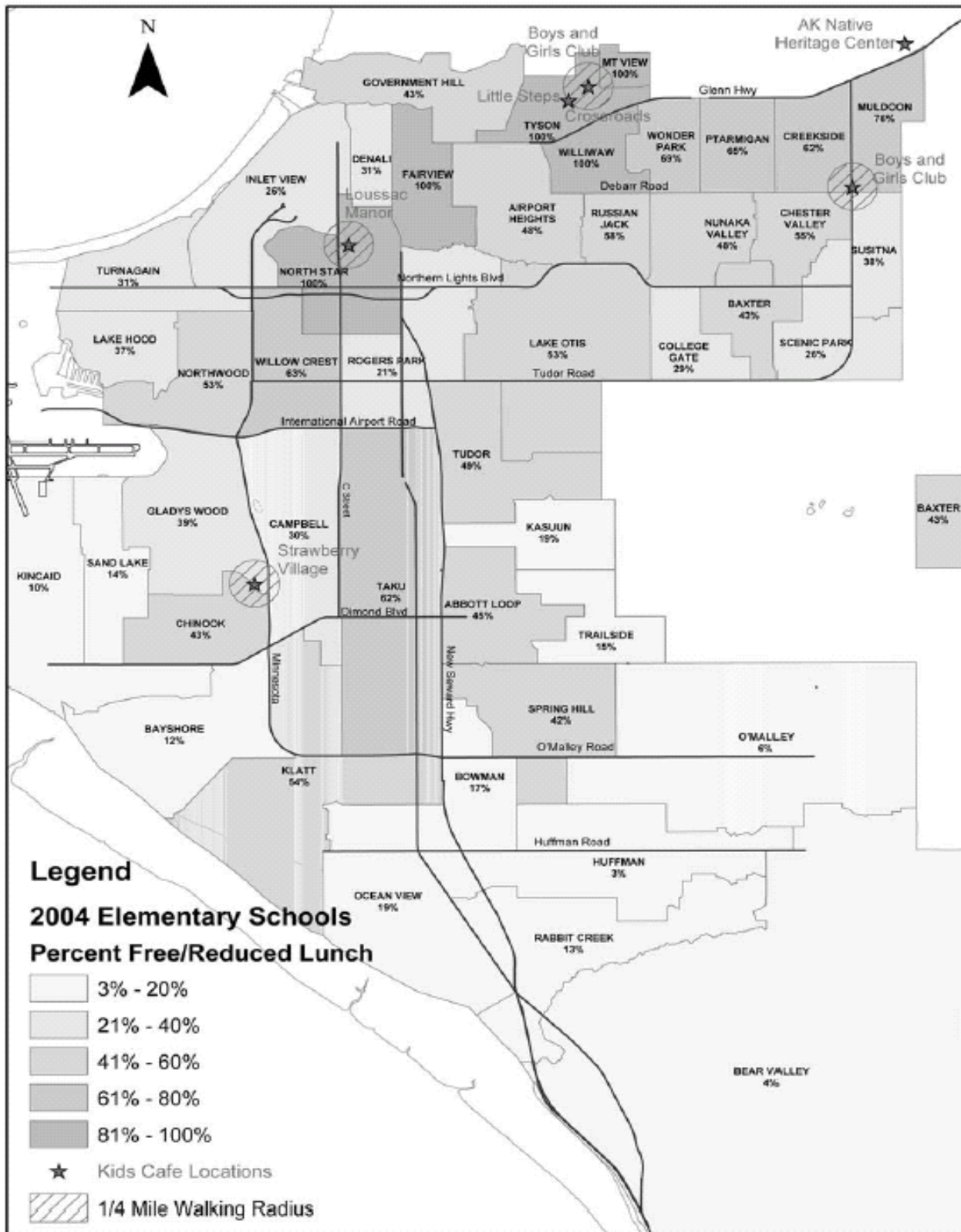
the picture is somewhat different for the “open” sites taken alone. In this case, 73 percent of the children walk, 11 percent use site-provided transportation, and 6 percent receive private rides.¹⁴

2.3. Present Site Placement

Since the mission of Kids’ Café is to feed hungry children, a critical question is the extent to which Kids’ Café sites are accessible to needy children. Since so many participants walk to their Kids’ Café site (42 percent of the entire participant pool and 73 percent of participants at the “open” sites) the physical location of sites is essential for accessibility.

Figure 2.2 provides a visual representation of the location of Kids Café sites relative to needy children.¹⁵ The map of Anchorage is divided into elementary school attendance boundaries; each region represents the “catchment area” of one elementary school. The areas are shaded according to the proportion of children receiving free- and reduced-price school lunch at that school, with darker shades indicating higher proportions of children from low-income households. The five Provision 3 schools – Mountain View, Tyson, Williwaw, Fairview, and North Star – provide free school lunch to all children

Figure 2.2. Elementary Attendance Areas by Percentage of Students Receiving Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch



Anchorage School District DGIS - 1/19/2005

because large majorities of their students come from low-income households. The locations of Kids' Café sites appear as stars on the map. To provide some sense of scale and distance, the four "open" sites are surrounded by a circle with a quarter-mile radius. Any child living within that circle would have a quarter-mile walk or less to get to the Kids' Café site from his or her home. For a small child, or for anyone during a harsh Anchorage winter, a quarter-mile walk can be quite challenging.

The map indicates that the existing "open" sites are situated in areas of high need. Two of those sites, the Mountain View Boys and Girls Club and Loussac Manor, are located in regions with 100 percent free school lunch. The Muldoon Boys and Girls Club is located in a district where 76 percent of children receive free or reduced-price school lunch. Located between two lighter-shaded regions, Strawberry Village might appear to be an anomaly, but in reality it serves a housing project that is known to be a pocket of poverty in a more middle-class area. The "specialized" sites are also located within or close to school regions of high need, but the physical location of these sites is not as meaningful given their selective membership.

It is worth noting that Kids' Café is not the only after-school resource available to hungry children. Kids' Kitchen, a dinner program founded in 1996, was the first program of its kind in Anchorage. Kids' Kitchen is located at Fairview Community Recreation Center, which lies inside the Fairview Elementary School boundaries, another area of high need. According to Elgin Jones, the executive director of Kids' Kitchen, approximately 100 children benefit from this program.

Voices: Jermaine, 10, and Princess, 10
Kids' Café Site: Muldoon Boys and Girls Club

Jermaine and Princess, an energetic brother-and-sister tag team, were able to remain seated just long enough to tell me a little about their experiences at the Muldoon Boys and Girls Club. They live with their mother, grandmother and 3 other siblings, and for the last year they have been taking the Boys and Girls Club van from their elementary school each day.

"It's fun! You get to do a lot of things instead of being bored at home," Princess said. The club offers a wide range of activities, including basketball, a computer lab, and foosball tables. Jermaine enjoys hanging out with his friends and playing Magic and Yu-Gi-Oh!, which are collectable card games. The children at this particular site have also become young philanthropists. "We're doing a bake sale here for the tsunami victims," Princess said. "When it hit all those kids... man, that's sad."

And how do they rate the dinners? Princess gives them a thumbs up, and Jermaine gives mixed reviews. Jermaine, however, is a picky eater. "I hate everything but potatoes and uncooked carrots," he said. Apparently, though, he made an exception for Kids Cafe meatloaf. "I liked it when they had meatloaf – that was good. I ate like 10 slices of it. I ate so much meatloaf my stomach started hurting."

3. Expanding Kids' Café: Needs and Opportunities

The Kids' Café program is already reaching hundreds of needy children in Anchorage, but the organization is setting its sights even higher for the future. There are many challenges, questions and opportunities facing a new and growing nonprofit organization, but this section focuses on three of them: where new sites could and should be located, what will happen when the current central kitchen arrangement becomes unsustainable, and how to increase awareness of the program among people who could benefit from it.

3.1. Placement of New Sites

As discussed in the previous section, the existing Kids' Café sites are located in areas of high need. However, the map in Figure 2 suggests that there are still a number of new areas in which Kids' Café could have a considerable impact. Since so many Kids' Café participants walk and so few use private rides or public transportation, physical location should be a high priority in establishing future sites.

***Provision 3 Schools:** There is currently a Kids' Café or a similar organization (Kids Kitchen) serving four of the five highest-need elementary school regions.¹⁶ The Williwaw Elementary School area is the only one of the five not currently served; the closest "open" Kids' Café site, the Mountain View Boys and Girls Club, is on the opposite side of the Glenn Highway. Prioritizing children who attend these high-need schools, and those who attend Williwaw in particular, may be one effective strategy for expanding the program.

***East Anchorage:** The Wonder Park and Ptarmigan Elementary School attendance areas, which are bounded by the Glenn Highway on the north and Debarr Road on the south, lie between the two Boys and Girls Clubs. However, neither of these sites reports more than 5 percent of their participants coming from either school.¹⁷ These neighborhoods would likely be well-served by a Kids' Café site.

***Spenard:** The Spenard neighborhood includes the Northwood and Willow Crest Elementary School attendance areas, both of which have relatively high numbers of low-income children. There is currently no Kids' Café site in this area.

***South Anchorage:** South Anchorage is not commonly considered an area of high need, but there is lower-income area west of the Seward Highway in South Anchorage.

This includes the Taku and Klatt Elementary School attendance areas. This area is also currently unserved by Kids' Café.

As noted in the previous section, most of the after-school programs serving Kids' Café food existed prior to the creation of Kids' Café. The program could continue adding sites in this same manner, by creating partnerships with existing after-school programs in target areas. Pending an affiliation with the nationwide program, Kids' Café could also build new sites "from scratch" with seed money from the ConAgra Foods *Feeding Children Better* program. Some possible new sites include:

***Spenard Recreation Center.** SRC, which is the twin of the Fairview Recreation Center (home of Kids' Kitchen), lends itself well to a new Kids' Café site. SRC has a kitchen and a variety of after-school programs already in operation. It is also located in one of the areas identified as high-need above.

***Boys and Girls Clubs.** There are three additional Boys and Girls Clubs in Anchorage that are not affiliated with Kids' Café. Two of these are standard Boys and Girls Clubs: the Woodland Park club (2300 W. 36th Ave., in the Lake Hood Elementary attendance area), and the South Anchorage club (8401 Sandalwood Pl., in the Abbott Loop



Elementary attendance area but providing transportation from Taku). The South Anchorage location is especially well-positioned to serve a high-need area that does not currently have a Kids' Café. The club at McLaughlin Youth Center (2600 Providence Drive) is located within a juvenile detention facility. Boys and Girls Club administrators have expressed interest in exploring the possibility of Kids' Café sites at additional clubs in Anchorage.

***Low-income housing projects.** Two current sites, Strawberry Village and Loussac Manor, are located in community spaces in low-income housing projects. The Strawberry village site provides an excellent test case for this approach, as it is the only site that was not offering an after-school program prior to the existence of Kids' Café. This Kids' Café site was created when the residential services coordinator at Strawberry Village found children complaining of hunger and looking for food in the community building after school. The principal of a nearby elementary school also reported students coming to school hungry. Staff at Strawberry Village have found that Kids' Café is working well and meeting a genuine need, although finding volunteers to help supervise the children has been an ongoing challenge. Their experience at Strawberry Village indicates that housing projects can make excellent Kids' Café sites, but finding program supervision will be a concern, especially where after-school programs do not already exist and residential services staff are already spread thin.¹⁸

***21st Century Community Learning Centers.** The 21st CCLCs are a project of the ASD Title I program. These after-school programs provide extra help for students having difficulty with their school work. Students who participate also receive milk and a “minimal” snack, according to ASD officials. There are currently 21st CCLCs at one middle school and 12 elementary schools: Fairview, Government Hill, Mountain View, Muldoon, North Star, Northwood, Ptarmigan, Russian Jack, Taku, Williwaw, Willow Crest, and Wonder Park. The 21st CCLCs might not make ideal Kids’ Café sites because children are selected for the program on the basis of academic need, while Kids’ Café targets children at risk of hunger. There would also be regulatory hurdles to clear before food could be brought into the schools. However, it would be worth at least having a conversation with ASD officials about this program.

3.2. Central Kitchen Capacity

If the Kids’ Café program continues to grow, the current arrangement with Bean’s Café as a central kitchen cannot be sustained indefinitely. Crockett estimates that Bean’s Café could produce approximately 500 to 600 meals per day for Kids’ Café, suggesting that the program is already around half its food preparation capacity. What could be done when Kids Café reaches the 600 meal mark? There are at least three potential strategies, which are not mutually exclusive:

***Conducting food preparation at existing sites.** One or more of the current Kids’ Café sites could prepare food for the children at that site and possibly for other sites. Among current sites, only the two Boys and Girls Clubs have kitchen space that is both large enough for the task and separate enough from other parts of the facility to avoid interference with other activities. The Mountain View Boys and Girls Club has the best-equipped kitchen. Given the existing relationships between Kids’ Café and these sites, this option may be the easiest to implement, but it would lose the efficiency advantages of centralized food preparation.

***Establishing a new central kitchen.** Creating a new food preparation site to supplement or replace Bean’s Café is the second option. There is a growing trend nationwide toward dual-mission kitchens that provide both food to emergency food organizations and job training in the culinary arts. The most famous example is the DC Central Kitchen in Washington, DC, but Bean’s Café practices this model to some extent as well by hiring its own clients to work in the kitchen.

Another way to implement this model here may be to work with the King Career Center, a job-training facility located near the University of Alaska campus and operated by ASD. As of now, the Culinary Arts program only produces food for the King Career Center’s own cafeteria. Principal Guy Okada and the chefs at the kitchen



facility have indicated that paying students to prepare Kids' Café meals could be a possibility. With limited time and kitchen space, however, the most they could do would probably be to prepare sack meals. Whether or not the King Career Center could become involved, dual-mission kitchens have been very successful in other parts of the country, and the emergency food community in Anchorage should look seriously at this option as Kids' Café expands.

***Establishing a partnership with the School District.** This is the haziest option at present, but potentially a very promising one. ASD Student Nutrition is facing changes in the next few years as a result of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, which mandates that all school districts participating in the federal school meals program implement wellness policies by 2006. Depending on the policies enacted in Anchorage, there may be significant changes in Student Nutrition's food preparation and distribution systems. Given that uncertainty, school officials are not prepared to

Voices: Angelica, 18, and Kimberly, 1
Kids' Café Site: Crossroads

Angelica is a vivacious 18-year-old student at Crossroads, the Anchorage School District's alternative high school for teenagers facing pregnancy and parenthood. The day I met with her, she was preparing to give a cooking demonstration to her classmates. When she learned she had become pregnant at 16, it appeared that her high school career was over – until her guidance counselor at West High School told her about Crossroads.

"I wouldn't have stayed in high school without Crossroads," she said. "I've gotten so much done. I'm graduating a semester early, and my grades are a lot better than at West [High School]." What she values most about the program is the opportunity to interact with sympathetic peers and teachers. "People here can relate to me because we have the same drama," she said. "I'm closer to the teachers, I'm closer to all the students." This is a refreshing change from her previous high school. "I don't think [my classmates at West] respected me. They would make up crap, like I didn't know who the dad was." Occasionally strangers would give Angelica a hard time as well. "People at Wal-Mart would say, 'Aren't you a little young to be knocked up?'"

Following her graduation from Crossroads, Angelica hopes to go to nursing school, perhaps at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), while continuing to care for her daughter Kimberly. "I'm not glad I had her so young," Angelica said, "but I'm glad that I did have her because I'm so much more mature now. I'm much more mature than those people at West. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't go out and sleep with everybody." As for her plans for Kimberly, Angelica hopes to be able to send her to a small school with the kind of intimate teacher and peer relationships she has found at Crossroads.

offer use of ASD facilities to Kids' Café at present. However, Student Nutrition officials have expressed enthusiasm for Kids' Café and receptiveness to future discussion regarding use of ASD facilities. Any such arrangement would require the approval of the superintendent, the school board and the Department of Health and Human Services. One complicating factor is that sanitation requirements and union contracts, as they exist now, would require that ASD staff be hired for ASD facilities to be used. If a cost-effective arrangement could be found, however, it could meet Kids' Café's central kitchen needs indefinitely. It seems well worth Kids' Café's while to continue engaging with the school district on this issue.



3.3. Awareness of Kids' Café

As a new organization, Kids' Café is not yet widely known in the community. A key task for the organization in coming years will be to increase public awareness of Kids' Café. One constituency to target is, of course, children who are at risk of hunger and could benefit from the program but are not yet aware of it. Some avenues for increasing awareness among children and families in need of assistance include:

***Helping Us Give Out School Supplies (HUGSS).** A joint project of ASD, Catholic Social Services, Lutheran Social Services, and the Salvation Army, this program distributes school supplies to students in need at the beginning of each year. Information on Kids' Café could be distributed with the supplies at schools that are close to Kids' Café sites.

***School Nurses.** School nurses are often on the front lines of the child hunger problem. Food Bank of Alaska has already established a relationship with some ASD nurses through its Nurses Fighting Hunger program. FBA provides nonperishable snacks to the nurses, who provide the snacks to students who come into their offices with hunger-related complaints. Kids' Café could capitalize on these existing relationships by distributing information about the program to school nurses.

***Other emergency food organizations.** Another venue for spreading the word about Kids' Café is the network of food pantries and other emergency food organizations in Anchorage. Disseminating information about Kids' Café through these organizations would be a fast and simple way to reach needy families. FBA makes hundreds of referrals to such organizations each month, and FBA staff should at least have information about Kids' Café locations. While making a referral to Kids' Café would not be appropriate in most cases, these calls sometimes lead to conversations about the caller's situation, and it would

be beneficial for FBA staff to be familiar with child feeding programs as a potential resource if it appears that Kids' Café could help the caller's family.

3.4. Conclusion

Kids' Café is a dynamic approach to solving the problem of childhood hunger in Anchorage. Although the program is fairly new, it is feeding hundreds of children in high-need areas of the city and is poised to continue growing. One key to sustaining the program's success will be ensuring the program's accessibility to children in need through the physical locations of sites, by providing transportation, or both. To continue growing, Kids' Café will also need to build new connections and relationships with other stakeholders in the community. The Anchorage School District, in particular, has a large stake in the Kids' Café mission. All signs indicate that ASD officials are eager to engage with Kids' Café and assist the program however possible. Kids' Café and other emergency food organizations could also benefit from working more closely together. With the support of the community, Kids' Café can move Anchorage closer to the goal of eliminating hunger, and all of its devastating consequences, among children.

Notes and References

¹Research findings summarized in Center on Hunger and Poverty (2002), “The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children,” available at <<http://www.centeronhunger.org/pdf/ConsequencesofHunger.pdf>>.

²All Census data were collected from U.S. Census Bureau, *American Fact Finder*, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en> (last viewed 24 January 2005). The number of individuals living in poverty in 2000 was 18,682 (7.2 percent of the population), while the number of individuals living in poverty in 2003 was 18,559 (7.0 percent of the population).

³TANF and food stamp enrollment data provided by Connie Hutchinson of the Department of Health and Social Services, State of Alaska.

⁴Food stamp participation rate from USDA Food and Nutrition Service (2004), “Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2001,” available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Participation/Reaching2001.pdf>.

⁵Hutchinson.

⁶Survey results from St. Francis House Food Pantry Consumer Survey (2002). A summary of these results is available at <http://www.foodbankofalaska.org/facts/hunger_survey.html>.

⁷Data on the Child in Transition Homelessness Project provided by Trish O’Gorman of the Anchorage School District Title I Department.

⁸Data on free and reduced-price school lunch enrollment provided by Bill Norton of the Anchorage School District Student Nutrition Department.

⁹Data on CSFP enrollment provided by Starr van Mersbergen of Food Bank of Alaska.

¹⁰Data on WIC enrollment provided by Margaret Duggan of the Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Health and Human Services WIC program.

¹¹Information on the national Kids’ Café program is available from America’s Second Harvest at <http://www.secondharvest.org/site_content.asp?s=28>.

¹²Information on Kids Café sites collected from a survey of Kids’ Café site supervisors.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Many thanks to Ophelia Dargan-Steed of Anchorage School District Demographics / GIS services for generating this map.

¹⁶Site supervisors at the Boys and Girls Club Mountain View location report roughly equal numbers of children from the Tyson and Mountain View elementary schools, so I count this site as serving both school areas. Relatively few children (approximately 5 percent) in that program attend Williwaw Elementary School. As mentioned previously, the Loussac Manor site serves the North Star Elementary School area and Kids' Kitchen serves the Fairview Elementary School area.

¹⁷Kids Café site supervisors.

¹⁸Thanks to Liberty Kyser for providing her perspective on Kids' Café at Strawberry Village.

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The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program

The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program is a year-long leadership development program that trains emerging leaders in the fight against hunger in the U.S. The Bill Emerson Fellows are a living tribute to the late Rep. Bill Emerson, who devoted his energies to assisting the poor and needy. The fellowship consists of a six-month field placement with a grassroots anti-hunger organization followed by a six-month policy placement in Washington, DC. The fellowship is a program of the Congressional Hunger Center, a nonprofit leadership development organization located in Washington, DC.

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