

THE SHARE TABLE

ENGAGING PARTNERS AROUND
THE **SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM**
IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Southwestern Pennsylvania



Food Security
Partnership

GREATER PITTSBURGH

community
food bank

A member of Feeding America™



WELCOME TO THE TABLE

*There is an unmistakable community atmosphere around ending childhood food insecurity in Allegheny County. For instance, in late April of 2013, a collection of South Allegheny Middle School students, along with representatives from Pittsburgh Cares and Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, gathered to discuss an issue that was affecting their community: childhood food insecurity. In preparation for their school's canned food drive, the students decorated a picnic table that would be the food drop site and asked the question that students participating in the same service learning project around the country were asking: **What Will You Bring to the Table?** Elsewhere, at summer feeding sites across the country, kids use **Share Tables**. These are places where kids can offer up whole, uneaten parts of their meal to their peers and perhaps exchange them for something they like better. An apple for an orange, for example. Or, an apple for a friend.*

This report focuses on the positive impact of the Summer Food Service Program, what has already been accomplished in the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County at large, and what more key stakeholders in the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County can bring to the "share table" as we work to bring an end to childhood food insecurity.

INTRODUCTION TO CHILDHOOD FOOD INSECURITY

In the years following the Great Recession, many Americans found themselves without gainful employment and with their dollars being stretched to the absolute thinnest. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that in 2012, 14.5% of households experienced a stretch of food insecurity at some point during that year. Compare that with the 8.5% of households experiencing food insecurity in 2007 and it becomes clear that the past few years have been especially tough for families. **Food insecurity** is the condition of having *limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods*. A low paying job or lack of access to transportation can sometimes be the gap between reaching food security. Unfortunately, these circumstances disproportionately affect children. Fully, **1 in every 5 children** in the United States is food insecure.

Much more, an ever-growing body of research points to the devastating health, education, and economic outcomes associated with childhood food insecurity. Food insecure children are several times more likely to underperform academically, have behavioral issues, require special education, and/or repeat a grade. Our best efforts at preparing children for a healthy and prosperous future are so often undercut when a child is too hungry or stressed to learn; cycles of food insecurity and poverty persist. Put simply, providing children with access to nutritious food today is the first step in ensuring we have a healthy, robust, workforce-ready society tomorrow.

FOOD SECURITY IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Within Allegheny County there exists an incredible network of individuals, programs, and organizations working together to help alleviate hunger in the area, from Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Banks' network of partner distribution organizations to community gardens to Farmers' Markets that accept **SNAP** and **WIC** benefits. Still, there are over 41,000 children living in poverty and experiencing food insecurity. Of those, over 1,700 children were homeless for a period of time during the last year. That number jumps to over 2,500 when pre-school age children are factored in. More must be done to take care of one the most vulnerable segments of our population.

The **Southwestern Pennsylvania Food Security Partnership**—an initiative of Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank—was developed to significantly reduce hunger in the area by 2015. Working together, we hope to “feed the line, shorten the line.” While the Food Bank primarily focuses on direct food distribution, the Partnership works to get people enrolled in the federal nutrition programs for which they are eligible thereby shortening the emergency food line.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program): Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP is a federal program that assists low-income families in purchasing food from grocery stores, farmers' markets, and supermarkets.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children): Program through which states can offer supplemental nutrition and nutrition education for low-income mothers infants and children up to age five.

THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

For many low-income families, the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs offer a constant source of food for their kids during the school year. However, when school is not in session, there is the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). SFSP is a federal program administered in Pennsylvania by the Department of Education that helps organizations provide free, nutritious meals for kids. To do this, there are several different levels at which organizations can get involved with SFSP:

SPONSORS are government agencies, schools, and non-profits that generally assume responsibility for running the program including training site supervisors, filing for reimbursements, and following federal regulations.

VENDORS take care of the meal production component. Sponsors that lack the capacity to do meal preparation tend to contract with food service companies, culinary job training programs, or schools to prepare meals for sites.

SITES are the physical location where kids congregate to receive meals. These tend to be schools, parks/playgrounds, houses of worship, and community centers.

OPEN SITES are in school districts wherein at least 50% of children are eligible for free and reduced meals at one or more schools, or in neighborhoods wherein 50% of the children qualify for free or reduced meals. At open sites, meals are offered to any child with no prior registration required making them a valuable resource for low-income communities.

Outside of the roles delineated in the program, the Partnership works to grow the presence of SFSP in Allegheny County by recruiting individuals and organizations to serve in volunteer-based roles. We seek out:

OUTREACH PARTNERS are organizations with which we share flyers and other outreach materials. Though not everyone is able to participate at the program level, most recognize the importance of spreading the word about a resource that is so helpful for low-income families.

SITE SUPERVISORS are individuals who attend their Sponsor's training and are then responsible for taking meal tallies, food temperatures, and being the point-person for a particular site. Several sites will have one person spearheading the program, but having alternate or co-site supervisors available helps spread the responsibility.

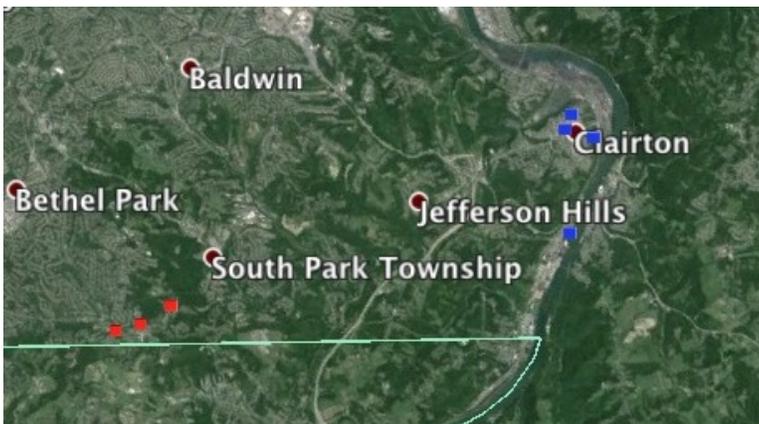
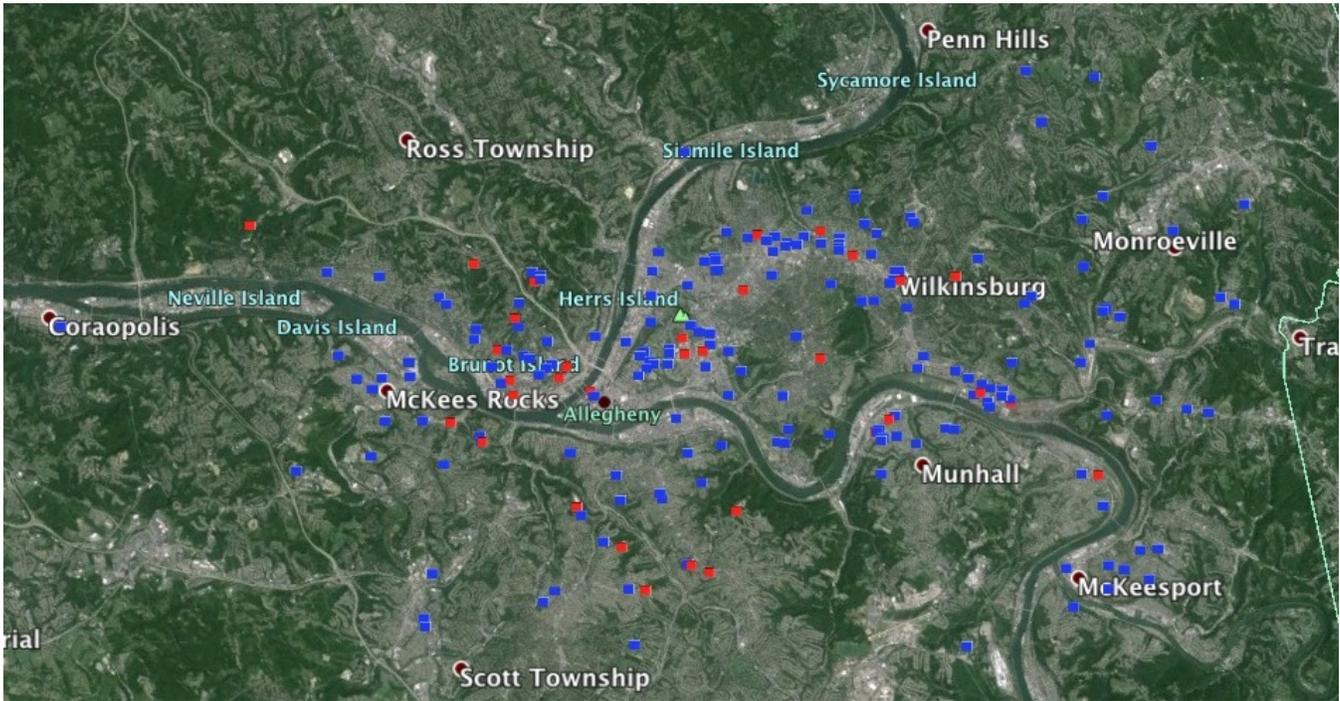
SITE VOLUNTEERS help provide programming at sites. Though programming is not a requirement of SFSP, participation tends to be much higher at sites where activities are also offered—recreation programs or reading groups, for example.

Essentially, this program requires quite a bit of community organizing of individuals, organizations, and government agencies particularly when one or two barriers keep organizations from participating in the program at some level. By facilitating relationships between organizations and individuals, the Partnership helps to ensure that all entities that can help grow the program have what they need to get started and for their program to grow each summer. Additionally, our presence helps Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) and Pittsburgh Parks & Recreation with the responsibility of recruiting and developing sites. In 2013, Allegheny County DHS sponsored 84 sites; Pittsburgh CitiParks sponsored 74.

In the summer of 2013, a total of 24 sponsors served a total of 546,377 meals and snacks. Each day, nearly 10,000 children participated in the program at sites across the county ranging from Vacation Bible Schools to summer recreation camps to community pools. Still, there are over 72, 500 kids under 18 eligible for the program in Allegheny County but over 62,000 of them are not participating.

WHERE IT WORKS

Below is a map of all the Allegheny County Summer Feeding sites that ran in the summer of 2013. Blue squares indicate an open sites; red squares indicate enrolled sites, wherein at least half the children registered for that program are eligible for free or reduced lunch. *An ideal SFSP environment is one in which low-income children have a site within walking distance of their home each day during the summer.*



SOUTHEASTERN ALLEGHENY COUNTY



NORTHEASTERN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

A BIGGER TABLE: what more is needed to decrease childhood food insecurity

SITES + SPONSORS: The map shows that there are several areas in which poverty is rampant but feeding sites are scarce. Clairton, Wilkinsburg, McKeesport, and Homewood are target neighborhoods/boroughs for site recruitment. In these neighborhoods, there is great need and many untapped resources that could really champion this program. Houses of worship, community centers, and schools in these neighborhoods should work together with the Partnership to ensure that existing sites are operating at a high capacity and to identify potential sites for future summers. And, just as participants benefit greatly from having sites in close proximity, sites are better serviced when their Sponsor is also a part of the community. Finding organizations with the administrative capacity to coordinate sites, a unique understanding of the specific needs of a service area, and the drive to decrease childhood food insecurity is paramount. In 2013, Earthen Vessels Outreach serviced 8 summer feeding sites in Homewood, East Liberty, and Lawrenceville neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. Similarly, Wilkinsburg Community Ministry took on 8 sites in the borough of Wilkinsburg. Having a greater number of Sponsors taking on a manageable number of sites gives them the opportunity to work closely to develop a site to its highest potential.

OUTREACH: One of the more difficult aspects of SFSP is that there is no built-in outreach component. The Partnership disseminates flyers to partners and helps coordinate robocalls with school districts. However, there is no universal channel through which the program is communicated to eligible families. Offices of elected officials and school district superintendents, particularly those in open site eligible districts, should take an active role in reaching out to low-income families in their constituency. Whether it is through direct mail, robocalls, or hosting Summer Food kick-off events, these stakeholders should encourage families to utilize the 2-1-1 dial service to find the site nearest them, a system in place courtesy of the United Way of Allegheny County.

START-UP and EXPANSION: Potential sites in low-income communities that could most benefit from SFSP often lack one or two resources to get started. Many of those sites could benefit from in-kind donations. Businesses can host recreation equipment drives for outdoor sites or donate a refrigerator or oven to indoor sites. Foundations can offer grants to organizations hoping to start a mobile summer feeding site to service the more rural pockets of Allegheny County. Workforce Investment Boards can set up programs through which teenagers and adults can learn valuable skills working as a SFSP Site Supervisor.

In 2014, the Partnership will begin working with two new food vendors: Pittsburgh Community Kitchens and Springboard Kitchens, an initiative of Lutheran Service Society. Both organizations are workforce-training programs that work primarily with students who have barriers to employment such as criminal backgrounds or issues with homelessness, offering students culinary and life skills. Their students are then able to market those skills to secure gainful employment in the food service industry. Not only are Springboard Kitchens and Pittsburgh Community Kitchens working to reduce prison recidivism and reduce food waste by rescuing ripe foods that need to be used in the next day or so, they are helping to reduce hunger in the area. The food prepared by their students will end up on the plates of low-income children from around the County. This is what it means to bring something to the share table.

There is a definite recognition of the importance of summer feeding in Allegheny County. Over the next two years, the Partnership hopes to harness that energy to increase the amount of meals served by roughly 10% each year, bringing projected totals to:

600,000 meals in Summer 2014

660,000 meals in Summer 2015

To reach these goals, the Partnership will need greater support from elected officials, organizations, food service companies, businesses, and individuals. We all owe it to the thousands of food insecure children in Allegheny County to bring something to the table.

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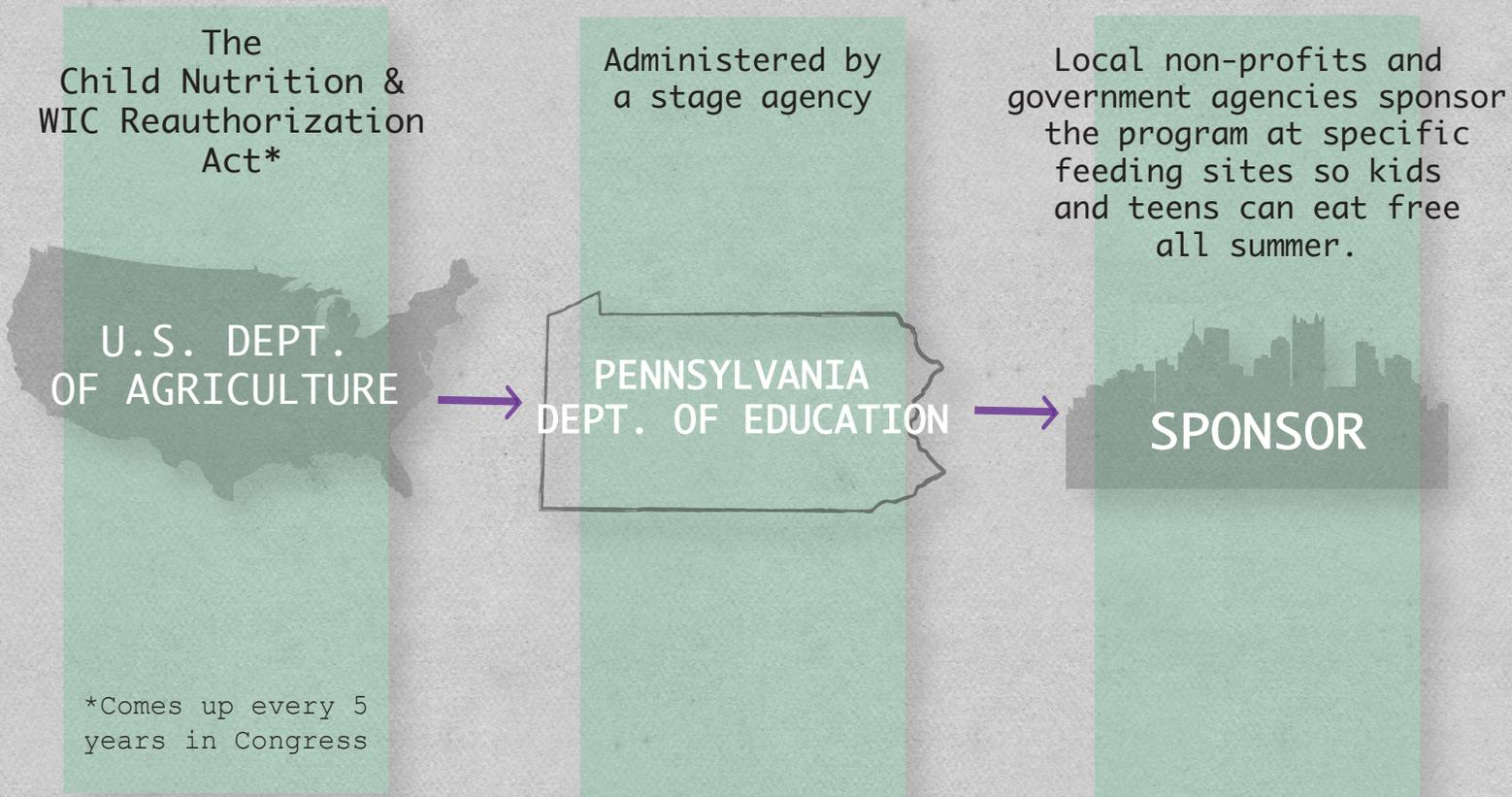
HOW IT WORKS

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

SOUTHWESTERN PA



FOOD SECURITY
PARTNERSHIP



ALLEGHENY COUNTY: An average day in the life of Summer Food

