

# Meals Close to Home

*The Role of Housing Properties in Reducing Child Hunger During the Summer*



**In Massachusetts, around 200,000 youth live in food insecure homes. Hunger impacts a child's ability to thrive academically and puts them at risk for adverse health outcomes. Low-income families rely on healthy school meals to bridge gaps in their food budgets, where can they turn when school is out? The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally-funded nutrition program that provides free meals to youth ages 18 and under. With your help, we can reduce child hunger in the summer months.**

## HOUSING PROPERTIES: BRINGING MEALS TO WHERE KIDS LIVE

Over 80% of children are at home during the summer without access to transportation. This makes them particularly vulnerable to learning loss and food insecurity. Summer meals sites at housing complexes can fill this gap by providing a site close to home. The community dynamics, amenities, and on-site management staff can support a pleasant environment for a summer meal site.



Youth enjoy a summer meal at Riverside Village in Leominster

Housing complexes often have indoor and outdoor spaces available, like community rooms and pools. This allows for operation during inclement weather. The residential coordinator can play an important role for these sites, serving as the connection between food service staff and residents. The relationships they have with the community helps establish trust with parents and a welcoming atmosphere for children to enjoy meals. Summer meals sites complement other programs and enrichment activities for residents.

## SUCCESS STORY: MEADOWBROOK APARTMENTS, FLORENCE

Lunchtime is an exciting time to be around Meadowbrook Apartments in Florence in the summer. Youth 18 and under living within the complex and its surrounding neighborhood enjoy a free meal together along with engaging events and activities. Kids and teens linger in the air-conditioned community room to use the computers and a sharing library, or play in the outdoor pool and basketball courts.

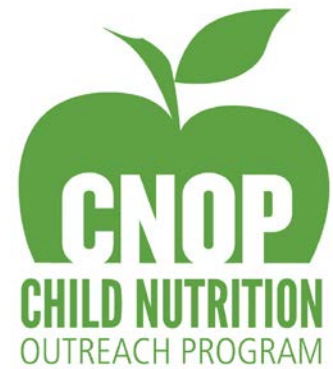
Partnerships with local organizations and services provide activities attracting parents and children alike. Twice each week, volunteers come from the local YMCA to facilitate a reading program. Police officers also visited the meal site to engage with youth, handing out autographed cards which students could collect to win a prize at the end of the summer – a chauffeured ride to the first day of school!

The Resident Services Coordinator has been a key champion for the summer meals program at Meadowbrook, spreading the word through a variety of outreach efforts including lawn signs, flyers, and daily calls to residents. Residents and neighbors from outside the complex are welcome to participate. Meals are provided free of charge to anyone under 18, while parents are able to purchase meals.

The summer meal site at Meadowbrook Apartments was an immediate success. By its second year of operation, 814 lunches were served over 5 weeks. Given the program's success, they are considering expanding the program by offering a late afternoon snack in addition to the lunchtime program.

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## SITES & SPONSORS

Housing complexes can help to provide summer meals to the youth in the communities they serve by becoming a “site”. Sites function as the physical location in which meals are distributed and consumed. Sites are supported by a “sponsor” which provides the meals in accordance with USDA guidelines, delivers meals to the site, and provides administrative support by completing paperwork and handling meal reimbursements.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Programming:** Enrichment activities and special events help keep kids engaged in the program all summer long. Programming doesn’t always require funding, many community organizations and services are interested in supporting housing properties. Partnerships can be built with local kids clubs to offer reading programs or activities. Police or health services can come out to hold community clinics. Games, books, and toys can also be collected, offering hours of entertainment.



Programming offered with the meal at Davis Commons in Brockton

**Indoor & outdoor space:** We encourage sites to identify outdoor and indoor spaces where kids can enjoy the meal. With the potential of inclement weather, this offers flexibility to provide a welcoming environment. Both spaces should be easily identified with signage to ensure families can find the site.

**Teen Programming:** There are many opportunities to involve teens that are either living at the complex or from the local community. Teens can be trained by the site supervisor to set-up the site and serve meals each day; this is an excellent leadership opportunity for them. We know when teens feel a sense of ownership and inclusion they are more likely to come back – often bringing friends or siblings along. Teens, along with trained site personnel, can also be ambassadors for the program, helping to organize outreach activities and gather kids each day.

**Outreach:** Although a housing complex may be a tight-knit community, serving summer meals is likely a new idea for residents. Distributing fliers directly to residents’ homes, posting information in common areas, sharing over social media, and including in newsletters and calendars can all help to spread the word about the program. Signage near the meal site itself can provide another reminder to residents to take advantage of the free program.

**Staffing:** The Resident Services Coordinator at the housing property is the ideal person to be the site supervisor. If a resident services coordinator is not available, staff from the Management Company or sponsor, and/or volunteers could take this role. But it is critical for someone to be on-site to welcome children and ensure the program’s success. CNOP can help develop a staffing strategy with the sponsor or site.

## NEXT STEPS: STARTING A HOUSING COMPLEX SITE!

“Non-profit” organizations have different requirements than those for “non-profit” organizations. Please contact the Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread at [cnop@projectbread.org](mailto:cnop@projectbread.org) or 617-723-5000 to find out if your housing property is eligible to participate in this program or visit us online at [www.meals4kids.org](http://www.meals4kids.org).