

# SUMMER BREAK SPOT

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM:

## *Strategies for Getting Involved*

This resource produced in cooperation with Florida Impact ([www.FloridaImpact.org](http://www.FloridaImpact.org))



## WHY SUMMER FOOD IS IMPORTANT

Children need access to nutritious meals all year long to grow and thrive, but many children who rely on free and reduced-price school meals are at risk of hunger or poor nutrition when school is out for the summer. The federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) helps ensure that children in communities facing economic hardship receive nutritious meals during the summer months, so they can return to school healthy, happy, and ready to learn.

Faith-based organizations are uniquely equipped to participate in the SFSP. Churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious congregations know the needs of area families and are often looking for a more direct community role in helping them address these. Faith-based organizations often have resources that could support the infrastructure needs of neighborhood summer food sites--like offering a congregation's building where children can eat, its kitchen to prepare the food, vans or buses to carry children to the food or food to the children, and regular volunteers who can commit to a set number of weeks to help with supervision and programming for children at summer food sites (either on or off the religious organization's campus). With these resources, the faith-based community can fulfill its mission to serve at-risk children and fight hunger in a uniquely concrete way.

## ABOUT THE FLORIDA SUMMER BREAKSPOT

The **Summer BreakSpot** is what Florida calls its Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and, in Florida, by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACCS).

Public and private non-profits--like schools, faith-based organizations, municipal parks, food banks, and Boys & Girls Clubs, to name a few--act as SFSP **sponsors** and administer the program at the local level. Sponsors receive federal

reimbursement to provide children nutritious meals when school is out in the summer, including food and administrative costs. Sponsors oversee multiple, nonprofit **sites** that serve children in low-income neighborhoods. Once these sites are approved to operate, any child in the community can be fed up to two meals per day at no cost to the family. Sites can be located in a variety of settings, including faith-based facilities, schools, parks, housing projects, day camps, and recreation, migrant, or community centers.

Each year, a current list of summer food sites is posted on [www.SummerFoodFlorida.org](http://www.SummerFoodFlorida.org). You can find more detailed information about the Summer BreakSpot and how to become a sponsor or site at this website.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

There are many different ways to get involved in the Summer Food Service Program, and this guide will show you how other faith-based organizations have successfully participated. Your organization can use these models to start thinking about ways *you* can get involved. By partnering with a sponsor, you could become a summer food site and serve FREE meals to all kids 18 years and younger. Or you might be well-positioned to provide support to other Summer BreakSpot sites in your community. If your congregation is well-staffed and you anticipate serving large numbers, read through [these requirements](#) for becoming your own sponsor.

## INNOVATIVE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

### Become a Site

If your organization is located in a **school zone** where more than half the children are eligible for free or reduced-price (FRP) school meals, it has met the first requirement of becoming a summer food site. You will also need volunteers or staff that can commit to a few, regular hours each day over the summer months and a sheltered, accessible area where children can eat nutritious meals.

Faith-based organizations are encouraged to start as summer food sites under an existing sponsor more familiar with federal paperwork requirements--like a school district, municipal government, or large community organization. The sponsor handles the administrative and financial oversight of the summer food program, while the site focuses on serving the food to the kids! Some sites receive a daily delivery of prepared breakfasts, lunches, and/or snacks ready to be passed out to any child who is present for the meal. If a site has a kitchen and people available to help prepare food, it can also cook or assemble meals on-site.

### *St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tampa.*

Located in an urban area of Hillsborough County with approximately 60% of children qualifying for FRP school meals, St. James AME Church began serving free lunches in the summer of 2013. As a new site, the church came under an existing sponsor, Potter's House Community Development, also a religious-based nonprofit. St. James' staff secretary devoted a lot of time to the Summer BreakSpot site and was supported by 11 church member volunteers, alternating shifts with two volunteers serving meals daily. Anywhere from 7 to 30 children came for lunch each day, a manageable number for a new site, and the church hopes to increase the attendance to over 50+ children in the summer of 2014. In order to reach its goal, St. James AME plans to get members of the congregation to distribute flyers and hang banners to increase neighborhood awareness of the program. The church also has plans to organize a summer program targeted to middle-school-aged children to encourage attendance. As St. James builds and improves its program, the site will provide even more children access to nutritious summer meals in coming years.

## Partner with a School

Schools can make great partners for faith-based summer food sites. Your school district might even be able to sponsor your site! Make sure to approach your school district well before the summer begins if you're interested in forming a new partnership. Schools may also be able to assist you with getting the word out about your summer food site to children at your neighborhood school, connect you with parent groups, or help you access other community resources.

If you're not ready to become a site or are not located in an eligible area, your faith-based organization can also partner with schools in other ways, like providing support for sites located at schools. School sites may benefit from your promoting awareness of their Summer BreakSpot sites in the community, recruiting volunteers for serving/preparing meals or leading kid-friendly activities, or transporting food or children.

### *Greater Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, Orlando.*

Serving nearly 45 children a day, St. Paul operates as a site under the sponsorship of the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS). The church serves an urban area where nearly 99% of children qualify for FRP school meals. Lunch and snacks are transported daily to the church by OCPS, and neighborhood children walk to the site to get meals. St. Paul has four volunteers a day from the congregation and provides academic and enrichment activities for the children, including occasional field trips.

### *St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Orlando.*

St. Luke's also collaborates with OCPS using a different approach. The Church is located in a neighborhood that does not qualify for a Summer Breakspot site. However, since St. Luke's already partners with two elementary schools during the school year that do qualify, that offers it a unique opportunity to help one of those schools expand its capacity to be a site during the summer. The Church's volunteers help with a Summer BreakSpot site at Mollie Ray Elementary School, which serves 100 students a day in the summer. Because the school is located in a neighborhood where nearly 92% of children qualify for FRP school meals, students walk to the site to attend summer school programming and receive lunch. St. Luke's, with the help of a summer student intern, recruited 19 volunteers to help the school with food distribution and activities during the summer. These volunteers are recruited for year-round programs. Lynette Fields, Director of Missions, says, "The year-round relationship is critical to being able to do the summer program--we had built-in trust. I think it would be hard for churches to approach schools for the first time about participating in the summer program. They should start earlier in the year . . . making contact no later than March." Volunteers may lead arts and crafts activities, assist with academic work, or help clean up after lunch. Because of its well-organized volunteer base and dedication to service and outreach, St. Luke's was able to branch out and begin helping a second summer food site at Maxey Community Center in Winter Garden.

By partnering with Orange County Public Schools, both St. Paul AME and St. Luke's UMC leveraged their unique strengths to ensure the children of Orange County received healthy meals within safe, fun, and educational summer programming.

## Partner with Affordable Housing Developments

Partnering with a housing authority or affordable housing complex can enable your organization to reach a large group of children who are readily available to participate in your feeding program. These apartment complexes often have community centers or meeting areas on the premises, which make great sites for meals and supervised activities for children. They might also be able to provide a refrigerator to store leftover meals. An apartment complex can also be a great source of volunteers to help support a Summer BreakSpot site. Parents who are home during a site's hours of operation can help with supervision of children and also provide some type of fun activity, thereby helping to draw more children to the meal and increase participation.

## *Do Right Church of Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Ghost, West Palm Beach.*

In Palm Beach County, the Do Right Church partners with local housing authorities and the Gold Coast School of Choice to sponsor four sites—three at public housing complexes and one at a school.

- Stonybrook serves 100 – 120 children per day
- Robinson Village serves 25 – 40 children per day
- Twin Lakes serves 25 -40 children per day
- Hampton Court serves 25 – 40 children per day
- Gold Coast School serves 75 – 100 children per day

The Do Right Church provides its own staff, volunteers, and church van with portable warmers to transport meals, which are prepared at the school and distributed to the three housing complexes--serving between 250 and 340 children a day. At each location, a site supervisor is responsible for monitoring the children, staff, and volunteers and coordinating site logistics. Staff members are paid for up to two hours a day using funds from the federal SFSP reimbursement, while volunteers provide additional coverage. Staff and volunteers at each site lead children in academic games to promote critical thinking and reading-based activities, which help increase site attendance as well as provide children with a safe place to eat, play, and learn. The Do Right Church is working now to raise money to refurbish a food truck to deliver its meals in 2014.

## *The Bridge of the Bay Community Church, Riverview.*

In the summer of 2013, Bridge of the Bay Community Church, in Hillsborough County, partnered with Bayou Crossings Apartments to serve children in this affordable housing complex. Though many children were away from home at other summer daytime activities, the church served around 20 children for lunch and 25 children for snack daily. Between two and four members of the apartment complex's office staff and two volunteers from the church worked together to greet families, serve meals to the kids, and assist with clean-up afterward. The church hopes to include games and activities at the site, as well as provide families with lists of social services in the area. To increase attendance, Bridge of the Bay plans to take flyers door-to-door to residents and conduct outreach through church bulletins in summer 2014. The church's partnership with the affordable housing complex allows it to serve children who otherwise may not have access to nutritious meals in the summer and offers great potential to grow and build this Summer BreakSpot site.

## Partner with Local Government

City and county government can provide excellent resources for faith-based groups looking to become involved with the Summer BreakSpot. Local government agencies and departments can sponsor sites, provide transportation, and/or provide enrichment activities to encourage attendance and reduce summer learning loss.

## *Saint John First Missionary Baptist Church, Belle Glade.*

St. John Missionary Baptist Church operates as a Summer BreakSpot site under the sponsorship of Palm Beach County government, serving breakfast and lunch daily in a rural area where 56% of children qualify for FRP school meals. This Summer BreakSpot model encompasses several successful partnerships that enabled the church to reach 150 children each day in 2013. The church prepares meals on site (self-prep) and also provides a dinner and snack at its own expense, while volunteers and employees from the City of Belle Glade Parks and Recreation Department and Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office help provide enrichment activities. After the meal, children are divided into two groups. One group goes to a local park where they participate in sports, including soccer, basketball, and flag football. The other group stays at the church for reading and math sessions and crafts. Later, the groups trade places, so that each child gets to participate in all activities every day. Transportation is provided by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in Belle Glade, which donated two vans to help transport children to and from the site and park, while the Parks and Recreation Department leads the activities. By working with city and county government agencies, St. John not only ensures that more local children eat nutritious summer meals but helps provide them with a variety of fun activities all summer long.

## Partner with other faith-based organizations

Sometimes a faith-based group that has the resources and desire to help isn't always in a site-eligible neighborhood. Initiating a formal partnership with a congregation that is based in an eligible school zone can make for a strong faith-based collaboration between two (or more) congregations to meet the need of children in the larger community.

### *CROS (Christians Reaching Out to Society) Ministries, Lake Worth.*

CROS Ministries partnered with other congregations outside its own United Methodist Church association to establish day camp sites with SFSP meals. Over the years, these have included:

- St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Delray Beach
- St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Delray Beach
- First United Methodist Church, Pahokee
- St John United Methodist Haitian Church, Boynton Beach
- Calvary United Methodist Church, Lake Worth

Between these and partner sites, CROS ministries serves over 130 children lunch and snack each summer. Summer camp children were served breakfast as well. CROS ministries operates in urban and rural areas with nearly 56% of children qualifying for FRP school meals. With the help 18 staff and approximately 10 rotating volunteers, CROS Ministries provides crafts, games, field trips, and Bible stories.

## Provide Transportation

There are other ways to support the Summer BreakSpot aside from becoming a site. If your faith-based organization is equipped with a bus or van, consider using this oft-needed resource to support your community's existing Summer BreakSpot sites. You may be able to partner with a local summer food sponsor and help deliver meals to remote areas, or you could transport neighborhood children to nearby sites--ensuring that kids who would not otherwise be able to travel to a meal site have access to these nutritious meals. If you *do* operate as a site, you could increase participation at your program by bringing children to and from your location.

### *Stewart Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, Perry.*

Stewart Memorial has been transporting children to its summer meal site for many years. The region is rural, with over 70% of children qualifying for FRP school meals. The church employs between five and six staff members to help serve lunch each summer, along with one or two volunteers from a summer youth employment program and additional volunteers from a parole and probation program in the area. Paid staff members usually serve as cooks and drivers, though volunteers may cook as well. Volunteers come from the congregation and surrounding neighborhoods and have more flexible schedules than paid staff. Because the community is small, the church is able to use its vans to pick up and drop off children directly at their homes in more remote areas. Drivers transport between 80 and 125 children daily, bringing them to the church for lunch and driving them home afterwards. The church requires all children to remain at the table until everyone is finished eating, ensuring that younger kids have time to finish their meals entirely and do not feel compelled to leave food on their plates just to keep up with older children. Because the site serves kids of all ages, younger children are assigned to a volunteer who assists them, as needed. Although the church does not have the capacity to lead enrichment activities at the site, its workers try to make traditional foods more fun, by cutting sandwiches in new ways, and making healthy accommodations where applicable. By providing transportation to children in surrounding neighborhoods, Stewart Memorial is able to increase attendance and serve more children in need.

## Offer Your Facilities

As a faith-based institution, you may have access to a kitchen or facility that a Summer BreakSpot site could use for meal preparation or other logistical needs. You might also be equipped to lend infrastructure to other sites, like chairs, tables, or serving supplies. Consider ways you can help increase another organization's capacity to serve children by sharing these resources.

### *Potter's House Community Development, Tampa.*

Potter's House sponsors several Summer BreakSpot sites in Hillsborough County, using church facilities to prepare and serve summer meals to children in a variety of neighborhoods. Potter's House started by sponsoring one of its own summer camp sites before expanding to partner with YMCAs, parks, and other local churches. By its sixth year, Potter's House sponsored 20 sites, including six churches. The churches allow Potter's House to use their kitchen space, which is needed to prepare and store meals for all 20 sites. In order to serve a daily average of 878 breakfasts, 1,505 lunches, and 210 snacks at these sites, Potter's House developed successful partnerships with local agencies for both monetary and in-kind support. In 2013, the United Way of Tampa Bay provided funding for refrigeration rental units, and the Hillsborough United Methodist Church provided its kitchen space to prepare and store meals each day during the summer.

## Provide Creative Activities and Programs

Daily attendance numbers increase when a site offers activities or programming, such as a reading club, recreational sports, vacation bible school, or a summer tutoring program. Volunteers are a great resource when planning to implement daily activities for children and can help provide ideas, resources, and staffing to ensure more children benefit physically and mentally from summer meals!

### *First Baptist Church of Leesburg.*

Last summer about 150 children in Leesburg had the opportunity to attend a program called "NASA Summer of Innovation," which was located at The Genesis Center, an outreach site of the First Baptist Church of Leesburg. The Genesis Center joined forces with NASA, Lake County middle- and high-school student volunteers, and the Boys & Girls Club of Lake and Sumter. The students taught subjects to rising fourth and fifth graders. Leesburg High students taught aeronautics; East Ridge students taught robotics; Lake Minneola High students taught about the solar system; and Oak Park Middle students taught about life sciences. The program highlighted a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics- or STEM. Boys & Girls Club staff and participants were bused daily to The Genesis Program to take part in this creative and innovative six-week program. The program included activities where students assembled telescopes and a solar system mobile. Students also had the singular opportunity to speak, via webcast, to astronauts at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. "The program was a great success," said Pastor Ken Scrubbs, Director of The Genesis Center. "The kids had fun and learned a great deal. It allowed the older students to be more responsible. We really wanted to have a strong element of children working together."

## R & R! Raise resources and recruit volunteers

Faith-based communities are in a unique position to collect donations for neighborhood summer food sites. Start by asking your summer food sponsor(s) in the spring what infrastructure needs they anticipate, i.e., programming materials like art supplies, recreational equipment, eating utensils like plates and napkins, wages for staff or drivers, background-check fees for your volunteers, retrofitting of a bus or van for summer food transportation, etc. Schedule a collection for one or more of these specific needs during a regular worship service devoted to the theme of children. This service could also serve as a platform for your summer food "ambassador" to share information about the Summer BreakSpot and your congregation's involvement with specific community sites. You might consider inviting a SFSP sponsor or site host to

speak during the service about the program and what needs it meets. A follow-up field trip for prospective volunteers from the congregation when summer begins might help recruit volunteers.

People who want to serve tend to come together in faith-based communities, making them excellent volunteer recruitment stations for supporting Summer BreakSpot sites in the community. The biggest challenge is ensuring that time commitments are serious and sustained through the summer. In order to maintain a squad of reliable summer food volunteers, first find out what the neighborhood Summer BreakSpot site needs and then recruit volunteers with applicable skills and schedule availability. Communication from a congregation's lead coordinator should share clear information regarding scheduling and duties while emphasizing the importance of consistent attendance and punctuality. These points can be driven home with the establishment of a sign-up sheet, preferably assigning volunteers to the same shift across several dates to reduce training sessions, eliminate confusion, and increase program consistency. To maintain a robust volunteer program that lasts from year to year, check out this [resource](#) online to help you develop policies and procedures, design position descriptions, develop effective trainings, track and evaluate your volunteer program, and finally, show volunteers your appreciation for their hard work.

### *Generations Christian Church, Trinity.*

Generations Christian Church has supported the summer lunch bus program at Gulfside Elementary in Pasco County for a few years. This bus serves two stops at affordable housing complexes each day of summer. Last year, the church collected 1000 used books to donate to the bus, so that children can read during lunch and even take books home to keep. The Church also promotes the program through its website, community network, and congregation as well as rotates about 10 volunteers into the summer program. Gulfside Elementary actually coordinates the volunteers for the program, and Generations Christian Church notifies the school contact in advance regarding which one or two days each week volunteers will be available. Fifty volunteers, who assist with the Church's weekend pack-a-sack program, also show up during the week to provide additional support on the bus by engaging with and reading to the youth. The Church also provides half a dozen volunteers to help prepare and serve food during the winter and spring breaks when the Principal sends out the food bus when children lose access to school meals--another testament to the benefit of a year-round partnership between a faith-based group and a neighborhood school serving at-risk children.

**IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN GETTING MORE INVOLVED WITH SUMMER BREAKSPOT, GO TO**

[www.SummerFoodFlorida.org](http://www.SummerFoodFlorida.org) or contact Florida Impact at (850) 309-1488 to locate your nearest staff support.