



Media Release

Contact:

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Providers Needed for Arkansas Summer Food Program

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is seeking schools, nonprofit organizations and government agencies that are willing to provide children with nutritious meals and snacks during the summer as part of the agency's Summer Food Service Program.

This 100 percent federally-funded program was created to ensure low income children who receive free or reduced lunches during the school year don't go hungry when school is not in session. Last year, 150 providers at more than 400 sites across Arkansas served more than 1.4 million meals to children.

Unfortunately, that's only about 12 percent of the children who are eligible for free or reduced lunches during the school year, said Shelia Bailey, who manages the program for the DHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education's Child Nutrition Program. Also of concern to Bailey is the fact that 15 counties in Arkansas had no providers last year. They were: Clay, Randolph, Fulton, Izard, Stone, Searcy, Cleburne, Franklin, Conway, Perry, Montgomery, Prairie, Grant, Cleveland and Calhoun counties.

"Having a provider in every county is crucial," Bailey said. "We have children out there who need and qualify for this food; we just need a way to get it to them. That's where the providers come in. They're the most direct access we have to the children."

Bailey said good nutrition has been proven to be essential for childhood growth and development.

Providers are needed to oversee the production and distribution of the food at sites like schools, playgrounds and churches. Organizations that qualify receive funds to pay for meals and snacks for the children. All sponsors receive training before starting the program that will teach them how to plan, operate and monitor a successful food service program. Sponsors submit claims and may be reimbursed weekly.

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Sites may serve up to two meals per day and may choose from breakfast, lunch, a snack or supper. Each meal served must meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nutritional guidelines.

Providers can be public or private non-profit organizations, public school food authorities, public or private non-profit residential summer camps, colleges or universities that participate in the National Youth Sports Program, or units of local, state or county government. Meals are available to all children regardless of age, color, sex, race, national origin, or disability.

For more information, visit <https://dhs.arkansas.gov/dcece/snp/SummerInfoM.aspx> . For questions, contact Luciana Scott at 320-8973 or Luciana.scott@arkansas.gov.