

MACOMB DAILY

MISD summer lunch program reaching more children than ever

By Gina Joseph gjoseph@medianewsgroup.com; @ginaljoseph on Twitter | July 1, 2019

Tanya Nofs knows what it's like to be a hungry child. And it's her experience growing up that has fueled her ambitions to expand L'Anse Creuse Public Schools' Mobile Summer Food program.

"The more children we can reach the better," said Nofs, supervisor for food and nutrition in the district, while watching two little girls sitting on a blanket enjoying their lunch in the shade at Lake St. Clair Metropark.



A group of children enjoy the lunch provided by L'Anse Creuse Public Schools' mobile summer lunch program, which made a stop at Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

"We think it's great," said Mike Lyons, Huron-Clinton Metropark's Eastern District Park Superintendent. "It's a win-win for the park and our community."

The park in Harrison Township is a new stop for the mobile unit, which travels throughout the district during the summer, bringing breakfast and lunch to children in need.

The Summer Food Service (SFSP) in Michigan was established to ensure needy children get the same nutritious meals they are offered with the free school lunch program, even when school is out for the summer. The free meals are provided to all children including those in special needs classes up to the age of 26.

It's a federally-funded meal program that can be sponsored by public and private nonprofit schools, residential camps or even colleges or universities participating in the National Youth Sports Program, government agencies or other private nonprofit organizations. These groups partner with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

More than 300,000 southeast Michigan children rely on free or reduced-price meals including 59,400 children in Macomb County.

- Oakland County: 62,572 children
- Wayne County: 174,793
- Monroe: 8,787
- Livingston: 5,672

The program started 20 years ago. However, it was not until 2013 that it really started having an impact in the community due to campaigns that made families more aware of the program, which has since been branded Meet Up and Eat Up; and efforts by school districts to expand their reach.

"After looking at the numbers we said we go to do something to try and feed more kids," said Nofs in a previous story.

It was then she reached out to members of the school district's transportation department and asked them for help. They in turn brainstormed and came up with the idea of converting a school bus into a food truck. After all, most of the children who take advantage of the free meals at school are also the ones who ride the bus and during the summer have no way to get to the free meal sites. The food bus allows Nofs and her crew, including Stacey Cook and Cindy Heilig, to venture out into the community where children live and play.

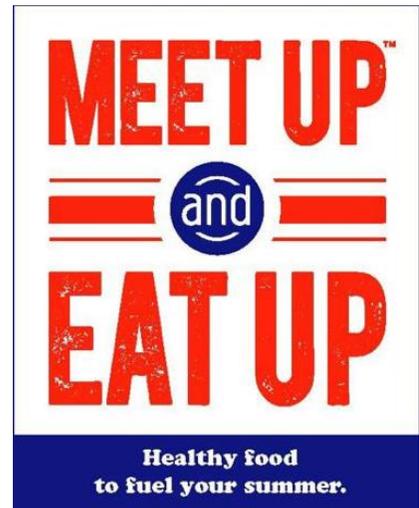
"We've also created this flyer to show parents where all of the sites are located and have reached out to a lot of our community partners so they can share it with their families," said Carolyn Thomas, who was also getting a big kick out of watching the crowd of children gathering around the food bus.

"This helps the whole family out," said Rene Mantoglio of Harrison Township, who was visiting the Metropark with his three nieces, Emma, 4, Sofie, 6, and Breanna, 8, and joined a group of children eating lunch in the park. "Their parents are having a hard time, so my wife and I are helping out."

Amanda Gonzalez, who travels from Taylor to Harrison Township to enjoy the Metropark, was surprised to see the mobile food bus parked nearby.

"We don't have anything like this at home," she said, eyeing the daughters who were enjoying the lunch provided by the L'Anse Creuse program.

"I like the cookie," said her daughter, Emma Gonzalez, 5, who joined Mantoglio's crew on the blanket.



Stacey Cook offers a boy lunch during his visit to Lake St. Clair Metropark. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

When Nofs started her route she saw about 200 kids. Now, they are reaching about 5,500 kids.

Plus, they are one of several other school districts working to expand the reach of Macomb Intermediate School District's summer food programs.

"We are fortunate in Macomb to have 77 Meet Up and Eat Up sites throughout the county," said Alesia Flye, chief academic officer for the MISD. "Some of these sites are school based and some are community based."

Meet Up and Eat Up locations qualify based on a school's or broader geographic area free and reduced eligibility guidelines. Currently, 17 out of 21 local school districts in Macomb County host Meet Up and Eat Up sites.

"Our school and community leaders understand the value of this important service for our students and families," Flye said. "The Metro Beach site is an example of a partnership among L'Anse Creuse Public Schools; MISD; and Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (Metroparks).

Also helping out is Gleaners Community Food Bank, which launched its 9th annual Hunger Free Summer campaign during Tuesday's Summer Jam Day Camp at an activity center in Detroit. The Summer Jam Day Camp is one example of the more than 90 summer meal sites provided by Gleaners, which also has mobile units.



Emma Gonzalez, 5, of Taylor enjoys the free lunch provided to her and her sister during their visit to Lake St. Clair Metropark. GINA JOSEPH - THE MACOMB DAILY

“Every child deserves a hunger free summer. Yet, we know that without access to breakfast and lunch at school, many kids in our community will spend the summer wondering where their next meal will come from. We cannot let that happen,” said Gerry Brisson, Gleaners president and CEO in a news release announcing their summer programs and a fundraiser.

During the 12-week campaign, now through Sept. 2, Citizens Bank, the Toni Wisne Sabina Foundation, General Motors, Ford and other generous sponsors will match all donations, dollar-for-dollar, made to Gleaners. Every dollar donated will provide six nutritious lunches and or breakfast to local kids.

“That’s why our summer programs and Hunger Free Summer campaign are so critical,” Brisson said.

This summer Gleaners expects to provide more than 4.5 million meals to ensure kids get the nutrition they need to grow, be healthy and thrive.

The summer food programs run Monday through Friday, however, this year Gleaners will be providing ten meal sites in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties with “Weekend Backpacks,” filled with fruit, vegetables, healthy proteins and grains to help carry children over until the programs resume on Monday.

“This is a God send,” said Larry Ireland, pastor of New Generation Church in Mount Clemens, who was visiting the Metropark with a summer youth group and who has had to used his own money, to feed children who came to camp without a lunch.

To find the nearest Meet Up and Eat Up location visit mcgi.state.mi.us/schoolnutrition/

https://www.macombdaily.com/lifestyles/misd-summer-lunch-program-reaching-more-children-than-ever/article_3f019330-99ef-11e9-a83c-27e14d947f37.html