

SPRING 2019

MEMBER OF
FEEDING[®]
AMERICA

ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD HUNGER

My daughter, Maybela, goes to the Kids' Cafe Program here at the community center every day after school. She's pretty shy, but she still loves to be around her friends. It's her tenth birthday tomorrow, so she's extra excited today.

Dorothy, a full-time working mother, struggles with affording to put food on the table. Her daughter, Maybela, benefits from the child nutrition program hosted daily at the community center. **"Maybela gets dinner during the week. She gets a full meal with vegetables and milk. Her favorite night is hamburger night, or taco night, depending on the week."**

Are kids really going hungry? Parents, children, and teachers all answer resoundingly—**YES**. For children like Maybela, hunger does not end when the last school bell rings.

New research from No Kid Hungry shows how many children are coming to school hungry in our state and across the country and how it affects their academic performance, their health, and their futures. 46% of children from low-income families say hunger hurts their ability to learn. 12% say that sometimes

at night they are too distracted by hunger to do their homework.

"I've skipped meals so that she can eat. But I'm so grateful we have this place, so we don't need to go to those extremes often," says Dorothy. "We can rely on these meals-for Maybela, at least when times get really tough."

Feeding the Gulf Coast operates the Afterschool Meal Program at partner locations throughout its 24-county service area. Once the school year ends, most of our sites and many new ones begin operating the Summer Meals Program where any child, 18 and younger, has access to free meals all summer long. By partnering with schools, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other after-school care sites, we reach over 20,000 children each year.

To find a Summer Meals site near you, visit our website or text "FOOD" to 877-877.

"Honestly, I don't know what we'd do if it weren't for this place. Things would be hard, that's for sure. To everyone who makes this possible, I want to say, thank you. You're making a difference in my daughter's life."

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- Dorothy, mother of Kids' Cafe participant

LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP

Visit our website
feedingthegulfcoast.org



FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Some of my favorite memories as a child involve the long, summer months. *Sadly, many children along the Central Gulf Coast face uncertainty when that last bell rings for the school year.* Instead of cheers for carefree days ahead, they know the assurance of a regular meal is behind them.

Here at Feeding the Gulf Coast, providing that assurance is at the forefront of our daily efforts year-round. Throughout the school year, we partner with local sites to provide healthy, nutritious meals in a safe place where education and enrichment are the main components.

We know how vital it is to keep our future strong by investing in our children today. Additionally, through the support of generous donors, we are able to send kids home with backpacks on the weekends during the school year so that a meal is never missed. Once that last bell rings announcing summer break from school, we have sites ready to provide meals throughout the entire summer where any child, 18 and younger, can access a healthy meal.

The work we do feeding hungry kids year round is only possible because of the support we receive from the communities we serve.

THANK YOU!

CATHY POPE

PRESIDENT & CEO, FEEDING THE GULF COAST

OUR GOAL

Improve the quality of our clients' diet

FROM FARM TO FAMILY

We're connecting local produce to those in need.



NOURISH



FARM TO SCHOOL INITIATIVE BRINGS FRESH PRODUCE AND HANDS-ON NUTRITION EDUCATION TO LOCAL KIDS

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The kids have an opportunity to try a new fruit or vegetable and learn about growing healthy food at home. Kids are encouraged to take the items home to share with their household. The assistant at the Kiwanis Boys & Girls Club called me and said, 'Can we have more kale and collards for our families? The parents and children won't stop talking about how great it was to have the produce given to them at the center!'

- Cindy Bloom, Feeding the Gulf Coast Produce Strategy Manager

Farm to school is a national community-based strategy focused on creating a healthy school food environment by providing activities that support the development of healthy eating habits for children while improving family food security.



receive educational materials that teach how the produce is grown and harvested.

Farm to school also serves as a valuable opportunity to connect local farmers with the school system. Feeding the Gulf Coast helps procure fresh produce for our students and provides our local farmers with a way to donate produce that would possibly go to waste at the end of the season.

In 2018, over 19,000 servings of produce —watermelon, satsumas, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, blueberries, and apples were served with meals in our Child Nutrition Programs.

Our experience affirms what farm to school research has shown for a decade—that kids and families who learn about fresh fruits and vegetables through an engaging manner are more likely to eat it and share their excitement with their whole family. We are inspired to continue implementing these best practices in 2019. **Kids win, farmers win, and communities win.**

Working through partnerships with local farmers, program sites, and the National Farm to School Network, Feeding the Gulf Coast is providing hands-on learning about fresh food, agriculture, and nutrition to our students.

Children at our Afterschool and Summer Meal program sites have the opportunity to taste new fruits and vegetables and take produce home to their families. **This helps our goal of ensuring more of our clients have access to healthier food options.**

Our child nutrition staff help them learn how to prepare the items with a simple easy-to-make at home recipe, and kids





meet ANJA

During May, we are introducing you to the faces of hunger. Follow our social media outlets to learn more about the hidden truth of hunger and how hope is restored through meals and support. Let us meet you—if you have a story of hunger and hope, we want to hear it.

They are survivors—we are survivors. Solina, who is 13, wants to be a NICU nurse when she grows up, and Zoe, who is 11, is passionate about being an animator. The food pantry and other sources of support have been healing for us. They've helped us put the past behind us and focus instead on moving forward with our dreams.

Anja recently left her husband, who was abusive to her and her daughters. Unable to work while in a controlling relationship, she struggled to save up the resources needed to escape the situation. With the help of a local women's shelter, Anja and

her daughters were able to find a place of refuge while establishing a new life away from the cycle of abuse.

"I haven't been able to find work yet, even though I'm trying. As a result, I have barely any income coming in. When we first moved, I was scared that I might not be able to feed my family."

"My friend told me about a local food pantry, and it's been one of the best things that has ever happened to me."

Anja and her daughters visit the pantry to get meat, fresh vegetables, pasta, and other healthy pantry staples. This hope has given Anja peace of mind

and empowered her to provide a better life for her daughters during a difficult time.

"I know this situation has been rough for my girls, and so many times I've felt helpless to make it better. When we were suffering from abuse, food was withheld from us, and we often didn't get enough. I didn't want my children to feel like that again, even if it was for a different reason."

"It feels good, as a mother, to know your children will come home from school, open the fridge, find something there and be able to eat when they are hungry. During meals, they smile and laugh, and I know food is now something that brings comfort instead of fear."



FIGHT HUNGER WITH YOUR GROCERY LIST

Hunger in your community is closer than you think. From now until May 20, you can help fight hunger simply by adding participating items to your shopping cart at your local Walmart and Sam's Club stores.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE:

Purchase a participating item in-store or online.

Donate in-store at the register.

Share our stories of hunger and hope to advocate for those in need in your community.

walmart.com/fighthunger

ADVOCACY CORNER | SHARE YOUR STORY OF HUNGER & HOPE

What does food mean to you? Is it the root of a family tradition or a connection to a culture? Is it a reward for passing a test or finally hitting the gym one afternoon? Is it something you fear you will not have enough of at times? You have a story worth telling. We are asking you to share your own story of food insecurity, where you experienced it directly, or through a family member or community work.

Help provide a voice for yourself or for your neighbors struggling with hunger along the Central Gulf Coast. Utilize the contact us form on www.feedingthegulfcoast.org/learn-more/contact-us.



HOW YOU CAN HELP:
HELP RAISE AWARENESS OF THE ISSUE OF HUNGER AND ENGAGE THE PUBLIC IN WORKING TO ADDRESS HUNGER BY SHARING THE INCREDIBLE IMPACT THAT FOOD BANKS HAVE ON COMMUNITIES.



