

Creative Partnership in Oakland Nourishes Kids' Bodies & Minds

City of Oakland, Alameda County Community Food Bank and Oakland Public Library partner to bring 2,900 summer meals to kids

This is the year for creative thinking when it comes to community partnerships. Difficult economic times are challenging cities, school districts, and community organizations everywhere to think more strategically about how to ensure kids in need have access to healthy meals when school's out. Nowhere are the resulting possibilities better illustrated than in Oakland, California.



The City of Oakland has enjoyed a longtime partnership with [Alameda County Community Food Bank \(ACCFB\)](#) to promote the city's summer meal program. This past summer brought that partnership to a new height. After a food bank volunteer read about the opening of a new public library branch in Oakland, the idea was born to utilize the Food Bank's vast network of volunteers and the available space of the public libraries to set up new summer lunch sites.



ACCFB approached the City of Oakland with the proposal that the city sponsor [Oakland Public Library](#) branches as summer meal sites for a two-week pilot. Here's how it worked: ACCFB offered to provide the volunteers to distribute the meals while the library could offer what it knows best—books. The timing couldn't have been better. Or worse. Despite the fact that Oakland's libraries were facing imminent summer closure as a result of the city's budget deficit, two library branches—both in high need areas—stepped up to become summer meal sites.

Library staff regularly witnessed how kids were impacted by the lack of access to healthy meals when school was out. Some kids opted for unhealthy vending machine snacks. Some kids had no food at all. News spread quickly that kids could show up at the library—a kind of sanctuary in some of the city's neighborhoods—for a free, healthy lunch and a retreat to the mind-expanding world of books.

Within days of the libraries' scheduled closure, news came that they would remain open. In addition, two more library branches were interested in becoming sites. ACCFB worked quickly to recruit, train and staff Oakland's four library sites with its volunteers.

Fast forward to an astonishing result: 2,900 meals were served, with the help of 88 volunteers at four sites. A two-week pilot had turned into a 10-week program reaching 120 children a day. One site alone expanded from 25 kids to 70 kids in just four days. Library usage and memberships increased.

Most important, a new vision was formed, one that highlights the possibilities that arise when we use tough times to rethink how to better work together to support the kids that need our help most. Whether it's working with your local parks and recreation department to set up new sites, contacting the local food bank or Girl Scouts to find volunteers, or establishing a media sponsorship with your local Univision TV/radio station, the opportunities are boundless.

Who will you partner with this summer?



(This article originally appeared in the January 2012 newsletter)