Philadelphia
Free Summer Meals 2014

MIP 2014

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Interns

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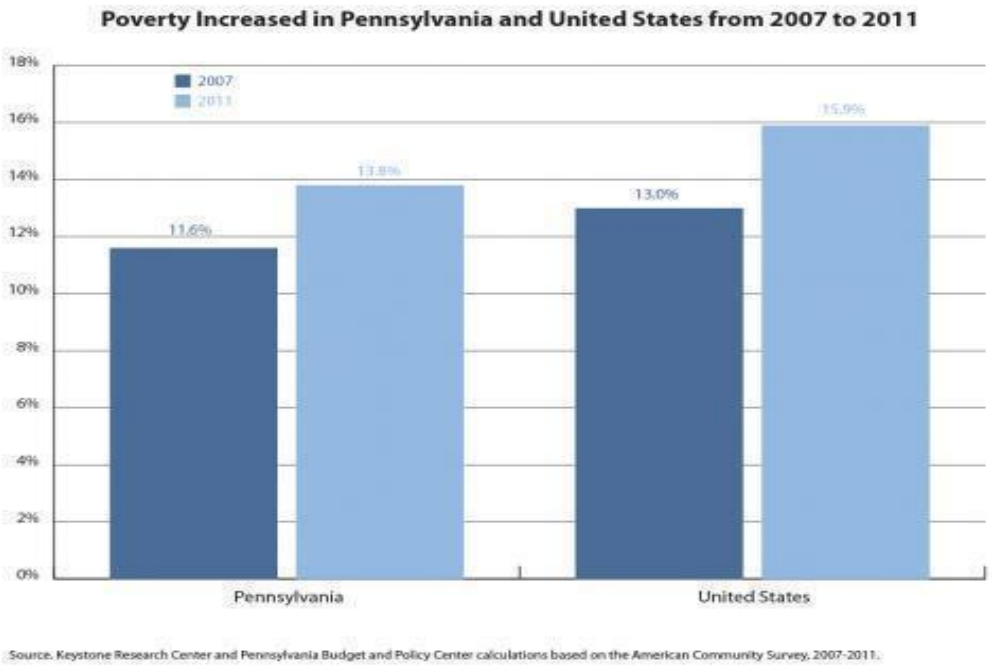
Summary:

During the school year, children age 18 and below from low-income families (for example, a family of four whose income is less than $44,123) are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals through the public school system. As the school year comes to a close and the summer months begin, the need for adequate nutrition for Philadelphia's kids remains constant, though the schools' ability to meet that need significantly diminishes. The Free Summer Meals Campaign seeks to fill this void of available food to Philadelphia's youth during the summer months. There are more than 1,200 sites across the city providing kids and teens with meals. As interns with Fun Safe Philly Summer, we worked to raise awareness, and in turn participation rates, about this program by canvassing two neighborhoods, Kensington and Kingsessing. Through the distribution of door hangers and palm cards, the group made contact with the residents and businesses of these two communities and provided them with information and details about distribution, including where meal sites are located and who is eligible to receive a meal. The hope is that this outreach and community contact helped to increase participation in this program and thereby reduce hunger amongst young Philadelphians.

Background:

Over the past decade, child poverty has been a growing challenge, both nationally and locally and has contributed significantly to the prevalence of child hunger. According to the United States Census Bureau, the child poverty rate fluctuated between seventeen and twenty-

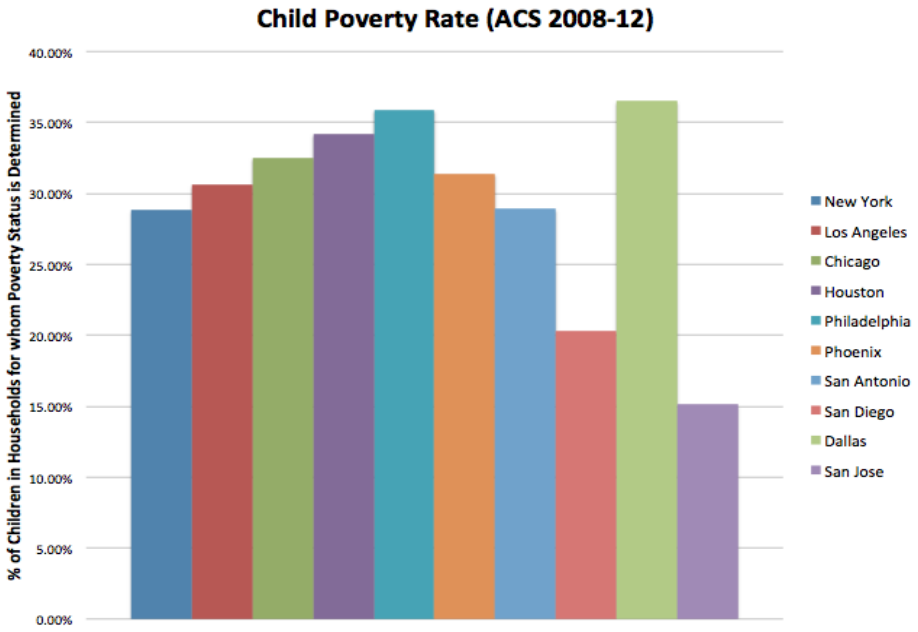


two percent over a ten year period between 2001 and 2010. As of 2010, one in five children in the United States is living below the poverty level. In Pennsylvania, the child poverty rate was slightly below the national rate, with a nineteen percent child poverty rate as of 2011. This rate increased by more than four percent between 2007 and 2011 (Pennsylvania Budget and Data Center).

Although Pennsylvania's child poverty rate is slightly lower than the national rate, the child poverty rate in Philadelphia is more severe when compared to the national rate and other top ten United States cities, by population. According to the Census Bureau's 2008-2012

American Community Survey (ACS), approximately thirty-six percent of Philadelphia county children under eighteen live below the poverty level, with nineteen percent of Philadelphian families living below the poverty level. Therefore, as of 2012, the child poverty rate in Philadelphia is on average more than fourteen percent higher than the national rate.

Furthermore, as of 2012, Philadelphia had the second highest poverty rate out of the top ten cities, with Dallas exceeding the child poverty rate by slightly more than one percent. However, Philadelphia's standing nationally has improved since 2010, when it ranked the highest child poverty rate out of the top ten cities. Following Philadelphia is Chicago, with a child poverty rate of thirty-two percent. Meanwhile, Philadelphia's child poverty rate exceeds the rate of the second largest city in Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, by more than four percent.



Source: American Community Survey 2008-2012

In response to elevated levels of poverty, various programs have been implemented to address issues common to low-income areas such as workforce development, educational programming, food assistance, and low-cost or free healthcare facilities, just to name a few. In Philadelphia, Free Summer Meals is just one such program. Since 2009, we have seen a

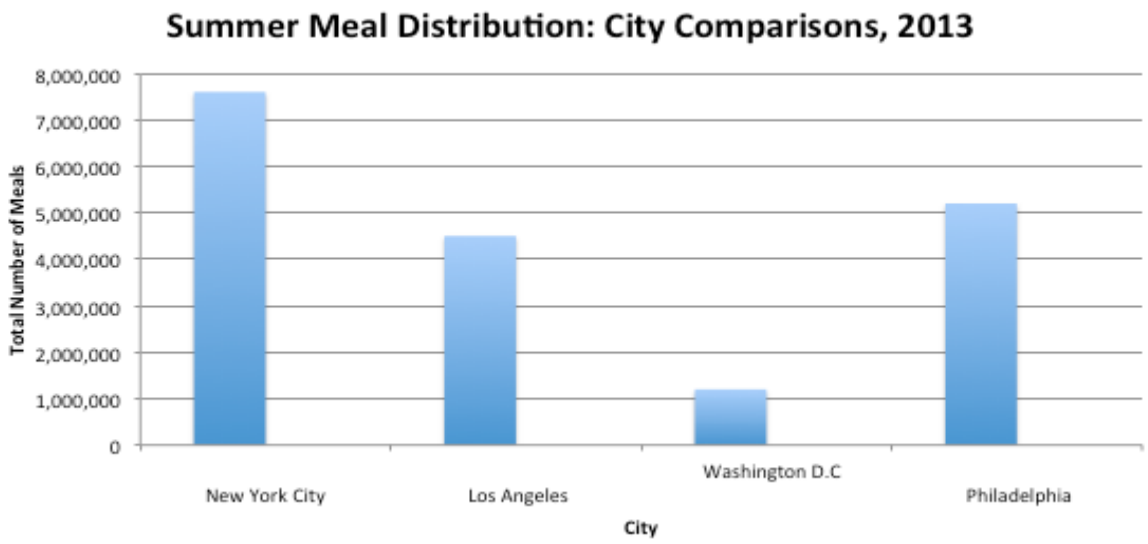
consistent number of summer meals distributed throughout Philadelphia, as noted in the chart below.

Source: http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-table

These meals are distributed to children ages eighteen and younger at a myriad of distribution locations, varying from recreation centers to community playstreets, open air sites on blocked tertiary streets. These meal sites are determined through a formula requiring that a location meet one of the two following criteria: 50% of the children in the school catchment area are in free or reduced price programs or 50% of the children must qualify as in poverty per the Census Bureau.

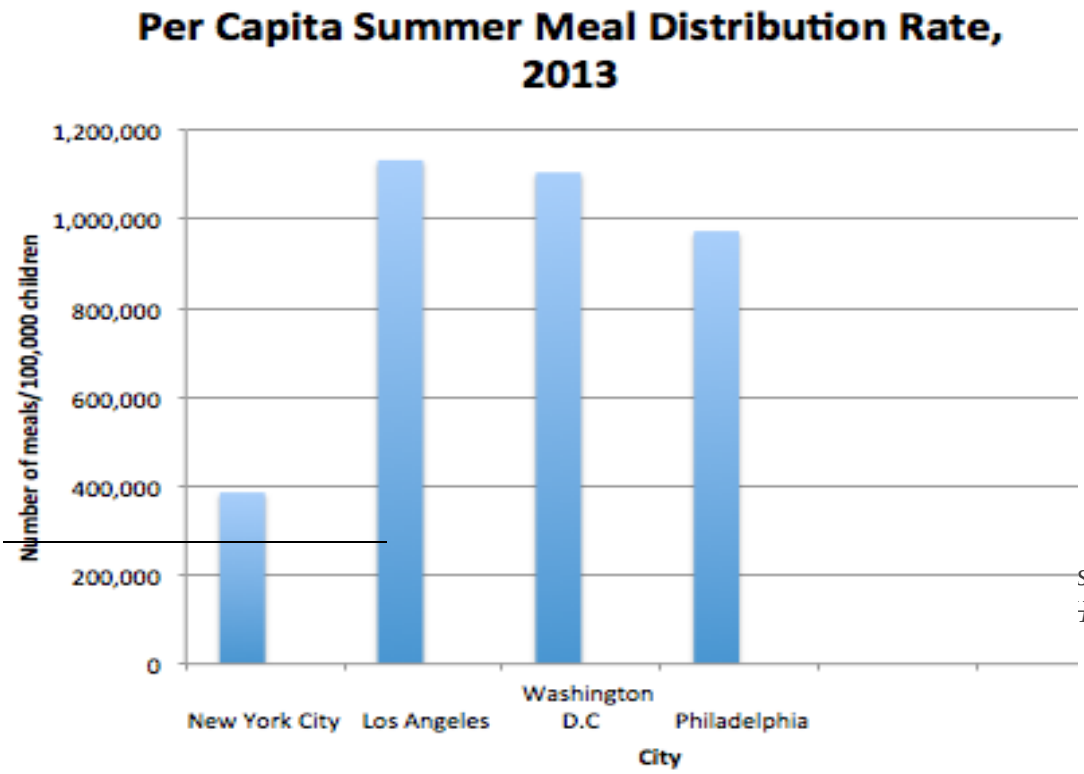
As compared to other US cities, Philadelphia has one of the highest summer meal distribution numbers as of 2013. However, the total summer meal distribution numbers may be commensurate to the city's population; in fact, while Los Angeles boasts the highest per capita distribution rate for its large population, Washington, D.C does not trail far behind in its meal

distribution rate.



"Nearly 1 in 4 people in Philadelphia live in poverty, double the rates experienced at both the national and state levels. More than one-third of all children in Philadelphia live in poverty."[1]

Source: http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-table



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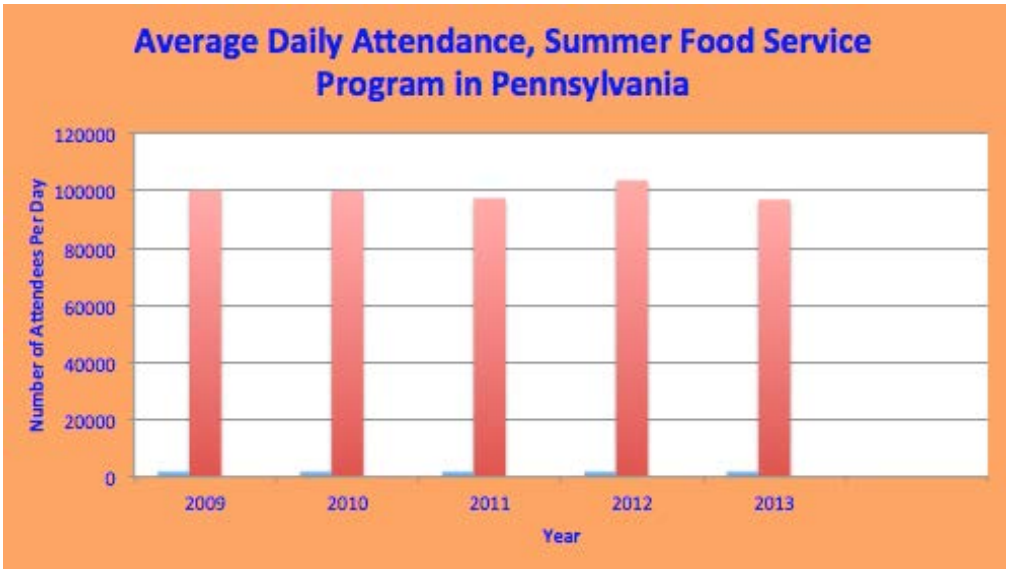
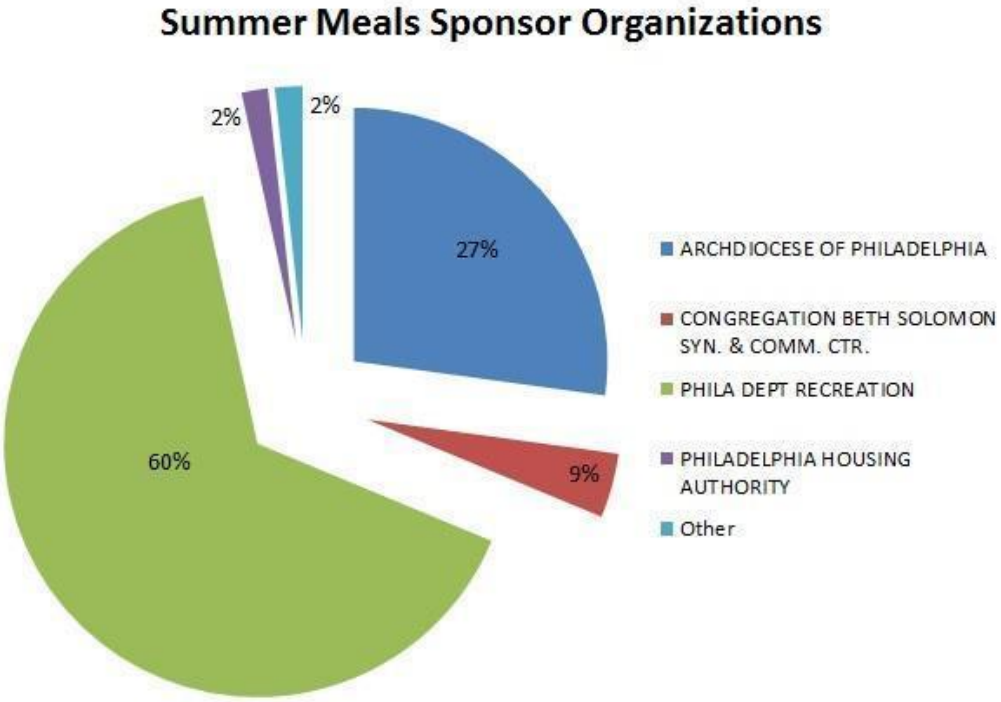




Source:http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-table

The meals are funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and distributed by meal site coordinator organizations and/or individuals. Referring to the graph above, the largest distributor of summer meals in Philadelphia is the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. The Philadelphia Housing Authority, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Congregation of Beth Solomon Synagogue,

and Community Center, as well as numerous other organizations participate in the distribution of summer meals.

Campaign Marketing & Promotion

To market free summer meal programs, jurisdictions used a variety of promotional materials including flyers/posters, palm cards, door hangers and informational phone calls to local households. Different states provide hotline numbers that families and residents can call or text for information regarding the availability and location of summer meals. When residents call the informational number, an automated voice provides a list of available locations for children to be able to obtain a free meal. Some jurisdictions attempted to make their promotions appealing to children and teenagers by including the word "teens" in their flyers. However, the majority of publications were targeted predominantly to younger children, which was made obvious by the color scheme and graphics they contained. The materials that were more focused on children often included more information that parents would be concerned with, such as locations and phone numbers. These differ slightly as compared to promotional materials from New York City and Washington, DC (See Appendix).

Low-income children in need of meals are easier to access during the school year, but during the summer identifying those in need becomes more difficult. Additionally, these low-income families are often scattered throughout the city, rather than concentrated in a particular area. For this reason, some cities like Baltimore, Maryland, of which eighty-four percent of the children in the school system qualify for free or reduced cost lunch and nearly forty-eight percent in the county, have found innovative ways to reach children that fall on the cusps of city lines. In Baltimore, the city has a mobile system which helps them reach more children and they also have begun to serve lunches at public libraries. By targeting libraries, Baltimore is able to reach

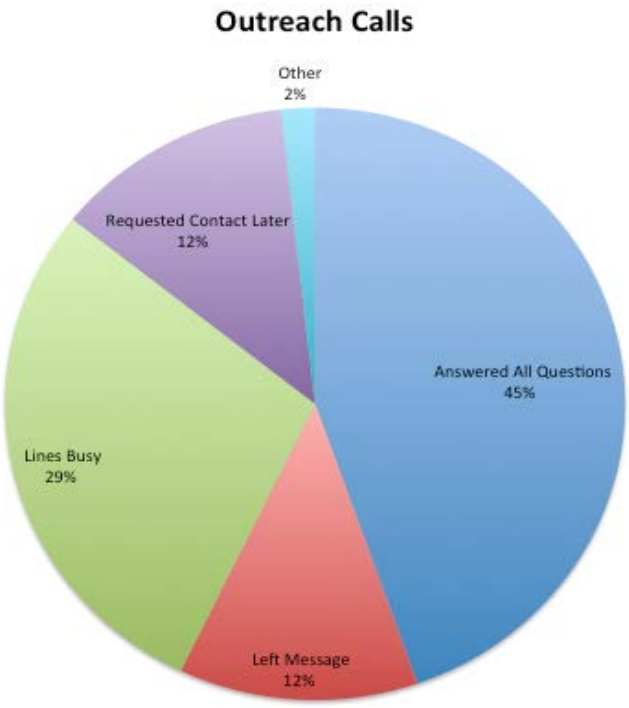
more kids who do not necessarily live in the heart of the city. Other locations that are used to reach more rural populations include religious organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, and community action agencies. Target groups are not the only entity of the organizational scheme for marketing that differs among states. The department in charge of marketing and organizing free summer meals can vary greatly as well. For example, the program is run through the Housing Authority in Chicago, through the Department of Education in New York City, and through the Department of Agriculture in Pennsylvania.

Community Outreach

In Philadelphia, there are more than 1,000 locations where free summer meals are distributed. Some of these locations are 'playstreets'. A playstreet is a block in a neighborhood that is closed off in order to allow neighborhood children to play safely under the supervision of an adult from that street. The playstreet providers in two Philadelphia neighborhoods, Kensington and Kingsessing, were contacted to assess how the first week of Free Summer Meal distributions went. Their contact information was obtained through the Why Hunger database.

Questions Asked During Outreach:

- How many meals do you receive each week?
- Are you receiving your meals on time?
- Are the children attending?
- Do you need anything? (i.e trash bags, ice)



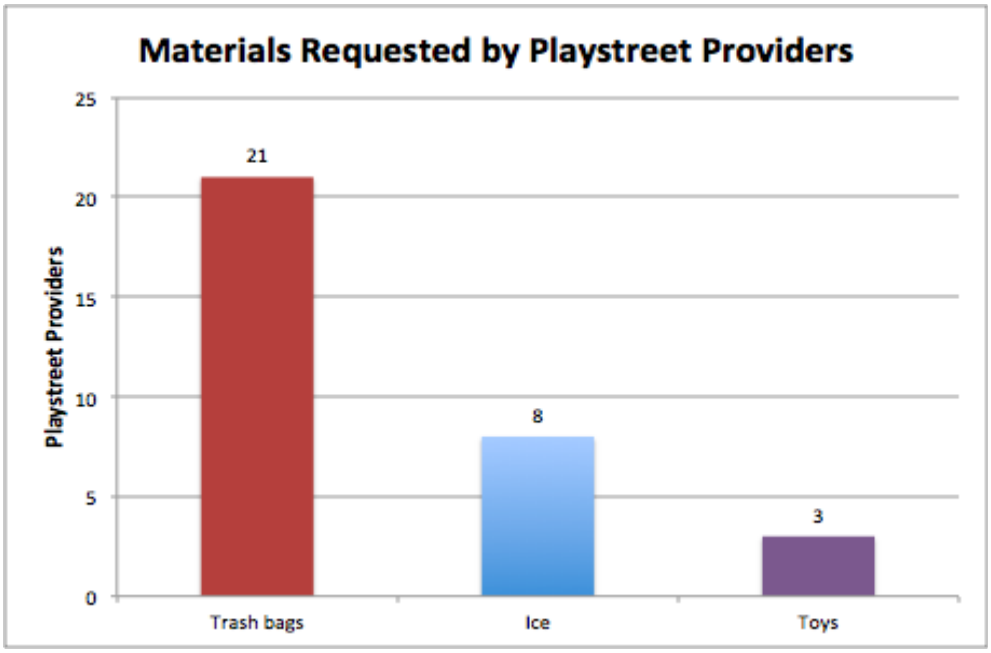
- Would you prefer to receive information from us over mail or email?

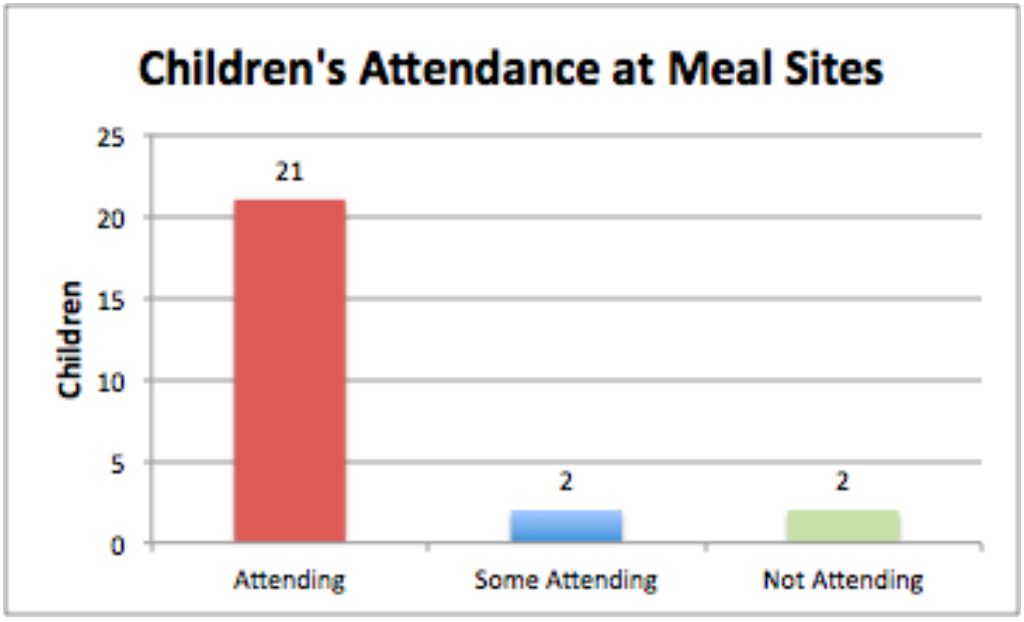
Out of the 56 playstreet providers called, twenty-five (44.6%) were able to answer the questions at the time they were called. Messages were left on seven (12.5%) phone lines, sixteen (28.6%) lines were busy or out of service, and seven (12.5%) providers asked to be contacted at a later time. One (2%) of the people called said that their street was not a playstreet. [2]

Out of the 25 playstreet providers interviewed, 24 stated that they were receiving their meals on time and one provider said that they were not. 21 providers said that the children were attending, two said that the children were not attending, and two said that some of them were attending. When asked what they needed for distribution, 21 providers said that they needed trash bags, eight needed ice, three needed toys, one needed a thermometer. Two providers did

[2] Some of the playstreet providers had problems that inhibited them from distributing meals. One woman stated that she was in the hospital and that her son was distributing meals in her place.

not require additional supplies. 24 providers preferred that materials be sent to them via mail, and one person requested email.[3]





[3] See Appendix for table

Direct Outreach and Observations

In addition to contacting playstreet providers over the phone, volunteers working with the Fun Safe Philly Summer initiative visited Kensington and Kingsessing in order to distribute paper materials and raise awareness about the Free Summer Meal campaign. Starting at a street corner, the volunteers visited each house on designated blocks. At the conclusion of two days of outreach in Kensington and two days of outreach in Kingsessing, volunteers distributed 3,447 door hangers and 574 palm cards.

Method: At the beginning of each day, the group would divide in half, each subgroup assigned to a different route throughout the neighborhood. As the volunteers started down a block, it was most efficient to have several people on each side, which minimized the number of times they had to cross back and forth. Volunteers carried both door hangers and palm cards to distribute throughout the neighborhoods. The hangers were distributed in greater volume, but it was not uncommon to meet someone on the street or find someone sitting on their porch, in which case a palm card was used.

It was important to hang the door hangers on actual door knobs whenever possible. When hung on a railing or on the handle of a screen door, they were likely to fall off or blow away. It did not seem to be problematic to open gates. The only exception was if the front door itself was opened into the house, and in several cases if there was a dog who seemed unfriendly. There was one house that had a sign referring to the use of a gun against intruders and, for this reason, volunteers did not hang a door hanger there. Due to the nature of the neighborhoods that were canvassed, it was common for several houses on the block to be condemned, abandoned, or simply boarded up. Unfortunately, it was difficult in some cases to tell if a house was occupied.

Interactions: Speaking in person to the residents of a neighborhood was the best way to conduct outreach. For these interactions, the palm cards were used instead of the door hangers. On each card/hanger the three closest meal sites were listed. When the outreach volunteers met residents on the street or by doors, they would usually started with the question, "Have you heard about the Free Summer Meals for Kids program?" If the person said that they *had* heard of the program, volunteers indicated the location of the meal sites and the hotline number they could call. If they had *not* heard about the program, volunteers offered a brief introduction, mentioning that all kids under the age of eighteen were eligible to receive two free meals a day, Monday through Friday, and that there was no registration necessary. Volunteers then indicated the hotline number and the label with the meal site locations. The majority of the people indicated that they did not know about the program.

Residents' Reactions: The receptiveness of both kids in the neighborhoods, as well as elderly and other community members who did not directly reap the benefits of our program, was impressive. Kids were drawn to the words "free" and "for kids". One anecdote mentioned that a little girl said "That's for me!" as the volunteer began to speak with her about the program. Some children asked questions about what kind of food they would be getting or where they should go to receive the meal, which gave volunteers more confidence that the children were interested in the program. Elderly members of the community and those without kids under eighteen years old were still willing to take palm cards from volunteers to distribute to their neighbors who did have kids.

Observations: The weather often dictated how many people volunteers were able to reach out to on any given day of visits to Kingsessing or Kensington. On very hot and humid days, or days that threatened rain, there were fewer people out on their porches and on the streets

to interact with than on more mild and temperate days. In general, there seemed to be far more people outside of their house or on the sidewalks in Kensington than there were in Kingsessing. Volunteers found, in general, that it was better to reach out to parents instead of the children themselves. One anecdote from a volunteer mentioned a group of elementary age kids leaving school and volunteers gave several of them the palm cards. As the volunteers walked away, they saw the cards scattered on the ground in pieces. Another anecdote recalled one woman who said she was the only playstreet distributor in the area who started her meals at eleven in the morning; all other providers around her began distributing at noon. This resulted in kids from other blocks, not meant to get meals at her site, coming over at eleven in the morning to get an earlier meal, which led to her not having enough meals for all of the kids in her area.

Recommendations

While the outreach efforts during the 2014 Free Summer Meals Campaign seem to have had a positive impact (e.g. Kingsessing and Kensington are first and third in placing calls to the hotline number), there are several measures that can be taken in the future to improve outreach efforts.

- As suggested in a report by two Summer VISTA members, the position for VISTA members should be extended to 10-weeks in length and should begin at an earlier date. This would allow outreach to begin sooner and therefore more students and parents would be informed before the summer began.
- Although most interactions with the neighborhoods' residents were positive, sensitivity training for outreach members may be useful in promoting greater understanding and empathy between volunteers and Philadelphian residents and children.
- When volunteers made calls to playstreet providers, a large number of phone lines were out of service. A stronger means of communication between playstreet providers and

volunteers is needed, as accurate data concerning outreach efficacy cannot be collected if playstreet providers cannot be contacted. It might be helpful to actually visit the playstreets to make contact with the providers.

- Lastly, the summer meals program may want to collaborate with summer meal sites so that all meal sites coordinate meal distribution times to meet demand. One playstreet provider complained that children from other areas came to her site because she served her meals half an hour earlier than the others.

Conclusion

Between the end of one school year and the start of the next, there are several months during which the Philadelphia public school system is not available to provide nutritional support to the children who face hunger in the city. The volunteers, VISTAS, and interns who have participated in outreach efforts with the Free Summer Meals campaign hope to bridge this gap from June to September, when thousands of kids under 18 may be missing important parts of their diet. In fact, over 40,000 children 18 and younger who would be eligible to receive free or reduce-price meals during the school year do not receive meals during the summer.

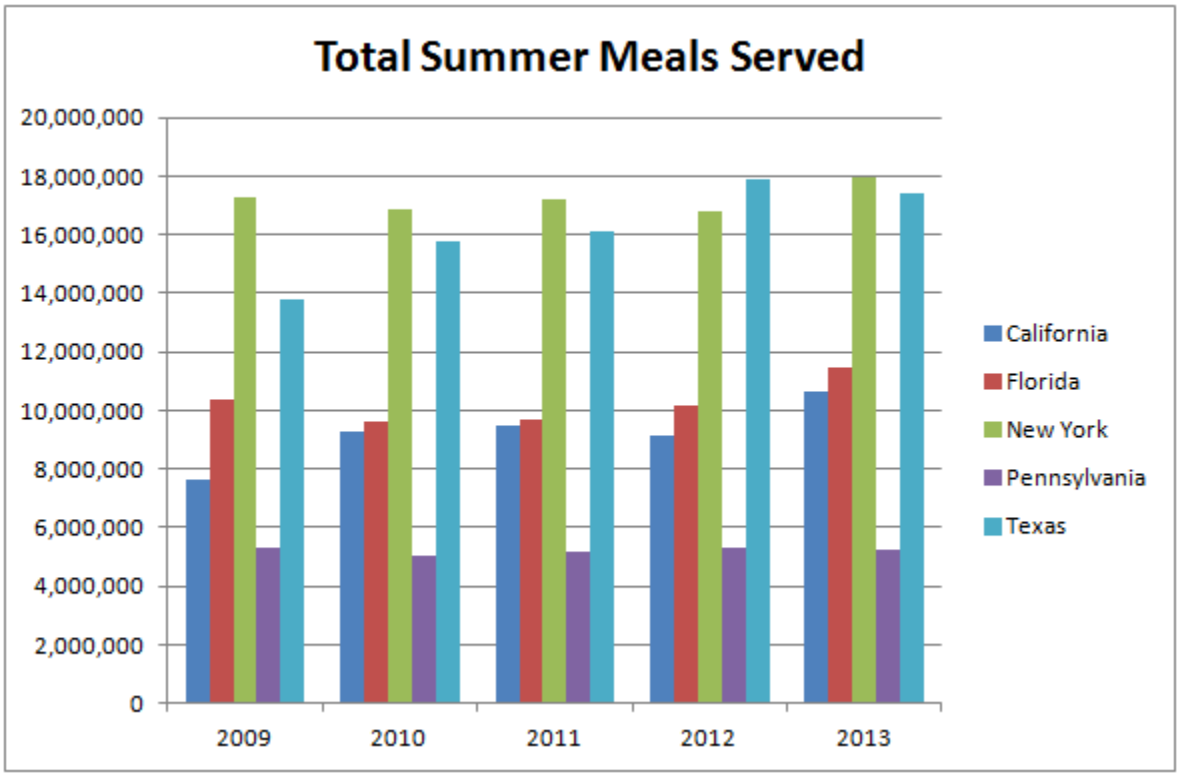
During the summer of 2014, the neighborhoods of Kensington and Kingsessing were targeted by 11 volunteers and two Summer VISTA participants. Outreach calls to playstreet providers revealed that 24 out of 25 of the sites were receiving their meals on time and all but one site reported that the children were attending the playstreets. During the door-to-door outreach, the volunteers encountered residents who were very engaged and receptive to the information they provided. During these outreach sessions over 500 palm cards and nearly 3,500 door hangers were distributed. This summer, Kingsessing and Kensington ranked first and third in number of calls to the Summer Meals hotline. This seems to indicate that the distribution of

materials, as well as the presence of volunteers on the streets, encouraged residents in these neighborhoods to contact the hotline and, hopefully, take advantage of the availability of the free meals.

Final Comments

It has been a pleasure for the Mayor's Internship Program to contribute to the efforts of the Fun Safe Philly Summer initiative and help the City make the lives of Philadelphians healthier and happier. We thank you for taking the time to read this report and we hope that our efforts, both out in the neighborhoods and contained within this paper, have contributed positively to this program and will help to make adjustments and improvements to better the operation and development for future years of this campaign. We wish you the best in your work for the City of Philadelphia and, again, thank you. In an address at the University of Pennsylvania, Franklin Delano Roosevelt said "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."

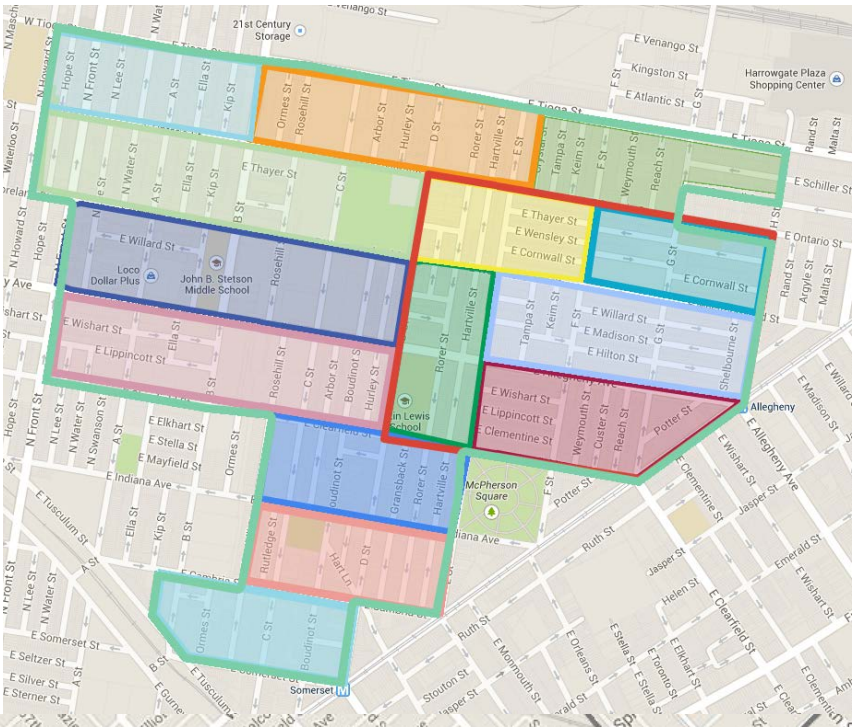
Appendix



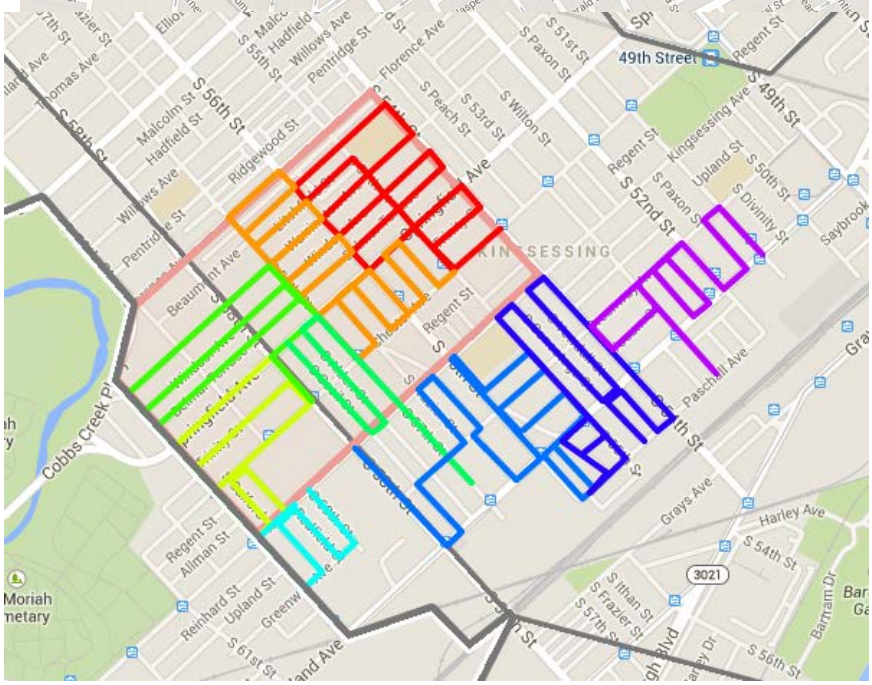
Source: http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-table

Neighborhoods Canvassed in Outreach

Kensington



Kingsessing



Phone Calls to Play Streets:

Name	# of Meals	Receiving meals on time?	Are children attending?	Materials needed	Preferred contact method
Beverly Smith	150	yes	yes	trash bags, ice, thermometer	mail
Lorraine Edwards	175	yes	yes	trash bags, toys	mail
Barbara Jones	200	yes	yes	trash bags, toys	mail
Josette Lewis	175	yes	yes	----------	mail
Victoria Mile-Chambli	175	yes	yes	ice	mail
Lizzie Carcalho	175	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Yenes Green	200	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	mail
Deborah Alexander	150	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Sandra Haith	200	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	mail
Annette Corbett	150	yes	yes	trash bags, toys	mail
Cynthia Delmont	125	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Samiryyah Kinard	175	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Phyllis Smith	200	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	mail
Tyra Coleman	200	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	tyracoleman35 @yahoo.com
Ana Aponte	150	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Eva Cruz	200	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Letitia Ferguson	200	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	mail

Anitra Brooker	200 and needs more	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Juan Carmargo	300	yes	no	----------	mail
Larry Counts	250 and needs more	yes	no	trash bags	mail
Maria Soto	250	yes	yes	trash bags, ice	mail
Diana Cruz	200	no, irregular	some	trash bags	mail
Tyesha Thorton	300	yes	yes	trash bags	mail
Jocinda Toler	150 and needs more	yes	most	trash bags	mail

Promotional Material Examples

Washington, DC

New York City