

The Power of the Food Program in Emergency Shelters

Creating Community Through the Child and Adult Care Food Program

ROUND ROCK, TX, USA, August 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) ensures nutritious meals to over 4.5 million children and adults every day. The CACFP is mainly operated in child care centers, family child care homes, and afterschool care programs, but emergency shelters can also serve meals through the food program.

The food program helps emergency shelters serve healthy meals to children under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness. All meals served through the CACFP at emergency shelters must be provided at no-cost, and the shelters are reimbursed for up to three full meals (breakfast, lunch, and supper). The CACFP is an important resource for emergency shelters to ensure equitable access to nutritious food to those experiencing a difficult time in their lives.

The City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS) sponsors the CACFP for a majority of the emergency shelters under their operations. As a part of their mission to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring, OHS provides food services to ensure that people in shelters and others experiencing homelessness have access to healthy meals. While they provide multiple types of food services, they are able to be reimbursed for meals served at seven of their family shelters across the city through CACFP.

OHS has been operating the CACFP since 2018 and the food program has been successful in helping them feed children at their shelters. Each month, OHS serves over 11,000 meals through the food program. OHS' Director of Food Services, Amara O'Connell, believes the program is beneficial to their shelters, because it lessens the financial burden of providing a meal service, which allows them to allocate more funds to the other critical programs they provide at the



The City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services (OHS) provides food services to ensure that people in shelters and others experiencing homelessness have access to healthy meals.



Our work really focuses on ensuring that people who are in shelters, as well as people who are street homeless are being fed healthy, nutritious, and delicious meals.”

*Amara O’Connell, OHS’
Director of Food Services*

shelters.

“I think that the CACFP is beneficial for our sites. This program really allows us to serve healthy foods to our folks. Being able to lessen the burden of having to pull general funds for the meal service, when you can use the CACFP funds to do that, lets us redirect those funds for health care, mental health, or facilities allowing for a better shelter experience overall.”

The food service team at OHS also recognizes how important the program is for the participants receiving

meals at their emergency shelters. In fact, OHS recently published a report showing that they have made progress towards one of their key missions of reducing food insecurity and increasing Philadelphian’s access to healthy and delicious meals. In the report, they also identified areas for improvement and have been working to incorporate feedback from their participants to improve their meal service.

One requirement of the CACFP is that children must eat in a congregate setting. Amara shared that this has been great for their shelters, because many of the children have never had that experience before. OHS has seen how important it is for the children, and their parents, to have a meal together and create a sense of community.

“Part of the requirements of the program is that children and adults are required to eat in congregate settings. That has been valuable, because there are some kids who have never experienced that before. We see just how important it is for that community feel and the family feel to sit at a table and have a meal together.”

Participation in the CACFP also helps OHS educate children and families about eating healthy. Those who receive meals in their shelters are able to see the benefits that come with eating healthy and may form better eating habits. The nutrition education they receive through CACFP, and supporting efforts by OHS, are long-lasting pieces of information that people can take with them beyond their shelter experience. OHS participates in the CACFP because it does require serving healthy meals and they are excited to uplift nutrition in their programs.

OHS would love to see more emergency shelters participating in the CACFP. While attending the [National Child Nutrition Conference](#), OHS noted that child care programs make up the bulk of those participating in the CACFP. Emergency shelters are a completely different type of setting, but the food service team at OHS believes it is incredibly important to provide healthy foods to those children who are experiencing a very difficult time in their lives.

“It’s rewarding to be able to go into sites where kids are excited about the food we are serving. It

feels good to know that we're doing something to make people comfortable in situations that aren't comfortable at all."

The United States Census Bureau estimated that over 325,000 people who are experiencing homelessness are living in shelters. They estimated that eight percent of that population are under the age of 18, meaning that over 25,000 children and young adults are living in homeless shelters. Emergency shelters provide critical services to children and families experiencing hardships. With the CACFP, emergency shelters could receive reimbursement for the nutritious meals they provide to children, lower the cost of the food service overall, and focus their other funding to provide additional services and resources.

Since 1986, the [National CACFP Sponsors Association](#) has been a leading national organization offering support to thousands within the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) community. Our core mission is to provide advocacy, education and resources for everyone involved in administering, operating and participating in USDA's child nutrition programs. Our overarching goal is to ensure nutrition security for families by facilitating access to vital food programs.

Jennifer Basey
National CACFP Sponsors Association
+1 512-850-8278

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[X](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/738749762>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.