

COFI ambassadors partner with Food Depository to raise awareness of summer meals

It's a sticky, hot, mid-July Wednesday in Chicago's Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood. Most people in the neighborhood are inside staying cool. Not the Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) Food Ambassadors, however. They're busy going door-to-door in the community spreading the word about the summer meal programs available for children. The need in the area is great, with more than half of the children in the community living in poverty.

"I see the impact when children have food and when they do not. It makes a big difference," shares Sherry Henry, an ambassador who has volunteered with COFI for three years.

COFI partners with the Greater Chicago Food Depository during the summer to raise awareness of free summer meals in high-need communities. COFI ambassadors hand out flyers and put up door hangers with information where to find the nearest meal programs.

Spreading the word about summer meals is particularly important for Charlene Campbell, the team leader.

"I have experienced hunger. I've used pantries and my children have used the summer meals program, so food issues are important to me," she said. "I know the food helps children."

Charlene has been participating in the summer meals canvassing since it started in 2012. By raising awareness, she knows she's making a difference.

"Kids should not have to be hungry," she said. "That's why we're out here today."



Summer meals event focuses on fun, food, awareness



Children receive a free lunch at the summer meals event on July 11.

In July, the Food Depository partnered with 14 other organizations to raise awareness of summer meals in our community. At the event, hundreds of children received free meals, participated in fun activities and learned about nutrition - while their parents got more information about where to find summer meal sites near them.

The event's aim was to raise awareness of summer meals - despite a high level of need during the summer, only 14 percent of eligible children utilize the program in Illinois. The Food Depository is working to lessen that gap and is on pace to distribute 600,000 meals this summer at nearly 300 sites.