



**D.C. Hunger Solutions**

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

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# Library Participation in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program

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Key observations about DC Public Library participation in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program, and strategies to assist libraries increase meal capacity and connect more children to nutritious meals during the summer.

## Introduction

Hunger is a critical issue in the District of Columbia; nearly one out of seven households' struggles with hunger, with uncertain or limited access to nutritious and safe food.<sup>1</sup> During the school year, free school meals – breakfast, lunch, and afterschool supper/snack- ensure that students who come from households struggling with food insecurity have consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed. However, when summer arrives, students lose access to these free meals.

In order to bridge this gap, the DC Free Summer Meals Program, administered locally by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), provides meals to children and teenagers ages 18 and under at hundreds of locations across the city. Sites are located at recreation centers, schools, community based organizations, places of worship, and libraries.

Since the summer of 2010, the DC Public Library (DCPL), sponsored by the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) -- the city's largest summer meals sponsor -- has been playing an increasingly important role in connecting children to nutritious meals. In addition to offering a safe place for youth and teens to eat free meals, libraries provide access to free books and programs that can help lessen the summer learning loss.

D.C. Hunger Solutions (DCHS), the DC Public Library, and DPR have partnered to identify library locations to serve as summer meal sites and support efforts to ensure that libraries can run the DC Free Summer Meals Program successfully. The partners have provided libraries with promotional banners and flyers and funding to purchase needed equipment like refrigerators to safely serve meals. Free summer meals at libraries are doing more than feeding children:

*“The most beneficial part of the summer meal program is the intimate connection it allows us to have with our customers. The program breaks down barriers-we are no longer the ‘mean librarian’ but someone who they can talk and engage with.” –Branch Manager*

*“The meals themselves are the most beneficial part of the program because they provide nutrition to kids who might not otherwise be getting meals. The program also makes the library a one stop shop for books and meals, providing more incentive for families to come.” - Librarian*

*“The meal program is important because it allows the library to be a resource for kids; with the addition of the summer meal program we can provide more than books and computers. As we know, kids do better when they have healthy food and the summer meal program allows us to provide it to those who need it most.” - Librarian*

To build on these successes, during summer 2014, D.C. Hunger Solution and the DC Public Library partnered to assess the current state of the DC Free summer meals program at libraries, and highlight promising efforts to connect more youth to the free lunches. Specifically, this report examines which libraries are sites, identifies the meal service model, analyzes participation trends for summers 2012-2014, and provides an over view of the outreach efforts conducted by the libraries to promote the program. The report also offers concrete recommendations that library staff can use to strengthen their participation in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program.

## Methodology

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<sup>1</sup> [www.dchunger.org](http://www.dchunger.org). D.C. Hunger Solutions, n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2014.

To examine participation trends, D.C. Hunger Solutions reviewed summer meal participation data for summers 2012-2014 provided by DC Public Library. The data included the total number of meals served at libraries, Average Daily Participation (ADP) for each library, and the number of days that libraries operated the meal program each summer. Data was not yet available for summer 2015 at the time of publication. During summer 2014, D.C. Hunger Solution's AmeriCorps VISTA also visited each of the eleven libraries running the program and conducted informal interviews with the library manager or librarian in charge of administering the program. Interview topics included: (a) program operations (b) meal participation (c) outreach strategies (d) scheduled programming. During the visits D.C. Hunger Solutions also observed whether or not there was sufficient space for the meal program to grow at that specific library.

#### **A. An Analysis of the DC Public Library Branch Participation in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program (2010-2014).**

##### **2010**

One library, Anacostia, participated in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program as site sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

##### **Participating Branches:**

Anacostia Library (Ward 8)

##### **2011**

Six libraries participated in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program.

In the summer of 2011, building on Anacostia's model, D.C. Hunger Solutions and DC Public Library identified five\* additional libraries to serve as meal sites under the sponsorship of DPR. With the support of the Wal-Mart Foundation, D.C. Hunger Solutions granted a total of \$12,000 to five libraries for the purchase of refrigerators and other program supplies; the grant also provided outreach materials including posters, flyers and drawstring bags that libraries used to promote the availability of meals.

##### **Participating Branches:**

Petworth Library\* (Ward 4)

Takoma Park Library\* (Ward 4)

Woodridge Library\* (Ward 5)

Southwest Library\* (Ward 6)

Parkland Turner Library\* (Ward 8)

Anacostia Library (Ward 8)

##### **2012**

Eleven libraries participated in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program.

With a grant from Share Our Strength, D.C. Hunger Solutions provided a total of \$4,200 to seven\* new libraries for the purchase of refrigerators, enabling them to become summer meal sites. Takoma Park and Parkland Turner, which participated during summer 2011, were closed due to their small size. Through the efforts of their AmeriCorps VISTA, D.C. Hunger Solutions was able to visit all eleven participating libraries to survey staff members about program operations and provide outreach materials to promote the program. During summer 2012 DCHS also collaborated with OSSE and DCPL to invite Councilmember Tommy Wells to eat lunch at the library, resulting in a *Washington Post* article that highlighted the importance of the DC Free Summer Meals Program.

##### **Participating Branches:**

Martin Luther King Jr. Library\* (Ward 2)

Petworth Library (Ward 4)  
Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park Library\* (Ward 4)  
Lamond Riggs Library\* (Ward 5)  
Woodridge Library (Ward 5)  
Southwest Library (Ward 6)  
Francis Gregory Library\* (Ward 7)  
Capitol View Library\* (Ward 7)  
Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road Library\* (Ward 7)  
William O. Lockridge/Bellevue Library\* (Ward 8)  
Anacostia Library (Ward 8)

### **2013**

Thirteen libraries participated in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program.

D.C. Hunger Solutions provided a \$600 grant matched by the D.C. Public Library Foundation allowing two\* more sites to purchase refrigerators and operate the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program. In addition to the two new sites added to the Program in 2013, two libraries, Anacostia and Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road, were open for weekend meal service, operating on two Saturdays during the summer.

#### **Participating Branches:**

Mt. Pleasant Library\* (Ward 1)  
Martin Luther King Jr. Library (Ward 2)  
Petworth Library (Ward 4)  
Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park Library (Ward 4)  
Lamond Riggs Library (Ward 5)  
Woodridge Library (Ward 5)  
Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Library\* (Ward 6)  
Southwest Library (Ward 6)  
Francis Gregory Library (Ward 7)  
Capitol View Library (Ward 7)  
Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road Library (Ward 7)  
William O. Lockridge/Bellevue Library (Ward 8)  
Anacostia Library (Ward 8)

### **2014**

Eleven libraries participated in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program. Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park and Woodridge, open in 2013, were closed for construction and did not participate as summer meal sites.

During summer 2014, D.C. Hunger Solutions worked closely with DC Public Library to spread awareness about library participation in the Program through city-wide outreach and promotion. DCPL promoted the Program on social media platforms throughout the summer and placed information about the meals on the back of the summer reading logs that were distributed to thousands of youth across the city who participated in the library's summer reading program. In addition to these efforts, D.C. Hunger Solution's AmeriCorps VISTA visited all eleven participating sites providing additional summer meals materials to the libraries. Further, in 2014 four libraries, Anacostia, Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road, Capitol View, and Bellevue were open for Saturday meals; Anacostia, Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road operated meal service on four Saturdays, while the other two locations were open for only two Saturdays.

#### **Participating Branches:**

Mt. Pleasant Library (Ward 1)

Martin Luther King Jr. Library (Ward 2)  
 Petworth Library (Ward 4)  
 Lamond Riggs Library (Ward 5)  
 Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Library (Ward 6)  
 Southwest Library (Ward 6)  
 Francis Gregory Library (Ward 7)  
 Capitol View Library (Ward 7)  
 Dorothy I. Height/Benning Road Library (Ward 7)  
 William O. Lockridge/Bellevue Library (Ward 8)  
 Anacostia Library (Ward 8)

**Finding # 1: Eleven of the 26 DC Public Library locations participated as DC Free Summer Meal sites in 2014. Two of the remaining 15 libraries - Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park and Woodridge - should be prioritized to participate as D.C. Free Summer Meals Sites.**

Libraries are eligible to participate as open summer meal sites if they are near a school where 50% or more of the students qualify for free and reduced priced meals. This covers most DC Public Library locations in Wards 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, where there is a higher concentration of students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals. Further criteria for targeting summer meal sites include: whether or not a library is co-located with a participating summer meals site (e.g. Deanwood and Rosedale are co-located with Park and Recreation Centers that serve as meal sites) and if not, whether or not there is another site nearby which is already serving meals. In the case that there is a site nearby, caution needs to be taken as there still may be a need for the library to serve meals if the site nearby only targets a specific age group or if safety concerns prevent children from accessing that site. It is also vital that participating libraries have the physical space and staff resources to serve at least 20 meals per day, since this is the minimum threshold for DPR sponsorship.

Based on the criteria outlined above, two sites that have been closed for construction should be reconsidered for summer 2016. Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park and Woodridge, located in Wards 4 and 5, participated in the program during summer 2013 but were closed in 2014 for renovations. Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park library is open, and the new Woodridge building is expected to re-open by summer 2016.

**Figure 1. D.C. Public Library Locations by Ward**

Ward	Library Locations	Status Summer 2014
1	Mt. Pleasant	Participating
2	Georgetown	Not Participating - Low % of Youth Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Meals
	Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial	Participating
	West End	Not Participating - Low % of Youth Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Meals
3	Chevy Chase Cleveland Park Tenley- Friendship Palisades	Not Participating - Low % of Youth Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Meals
4	Petworth	Participating
	Takoma Park	Not Participating - Limited Space/Staff
	<b>Juanita E. Thornton/Shepherd Park</b>	Not Participating – Closed for Construction
5	Lamond-Riggs Library	Participating
	<b>Woodridge</b>	Not Participating – Closed for Construction

6	Northeast	Not Participating - Limited Space/Staff
	Northwest One	Not Participating - Limited Space/Staff
	Rosedale	Not Participating - Co-located with a DPR Summer Meals Site
	Southeast	Not Participating - Limited Space/Staff
	Southwest	Participating
	Watha T. Daniel/Shaw	Participating
7	Capitol View	Participating
	Deanwood	Not Participating - Co-located with a DPR Summer Meals Site
	Dorothy I. Height/Benning	Participating
	Francis A. Gregory	Participating
8	Anacostia	Participating
	Parklands Turner	Not Participating - Limited Space/Staff
	William O. Lockridge/Bellevue	Participating

**Bold:** Priority sites

## B. Meal Service in 2014

**Finding #1: All participating library locations offered meal service Monday through Friday, with four locations also offering Saturday meal service. Library locations served lunch and operated the program six out of the nine weeks that the summer meals program ran city-wide.**

The library is able to use existing staff capacity combined with the support of DC Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) employees to offer lunch service five days a week. Because the SYEP program does not span the entire duration of the summer meals program, the meals program in the library typically starts two weeks later than the city-wide program, in line with the SYEP schedule. In 2014, DCPL provided meals during six of the nine weeks that the summer meals program was operated in the city. Four libraries, Anacostia, Benning Road, Capitol View and William E. Lockridge/Bellevue also offered meals on Saturdays during those six weeks.

Aside from the SYEP participants, the library does not hire temporary staff to support summer programming. Although the Summer Meals program allows for up to two meals or a meal and a snack to be served each day at a site, libraries offered only lunch due to staff capacity.

## C. Participation Analysis

**Finding #1: The total number of meals served has decreased each summer since 2012. However, the average number of meals served per day per site increased from summer 2013 to 2014 by 23 percent.**

**Figure 2-Meal Service Data for Summers 2012-2014**

Year	# of Sites Participating in Summer Meals	# of Sites Participating in Saturday Meals	Avg. # of Operating Days	Total # of Meals Served	Avg. Total # Meals Served Per Site	Avg. # of Meals Served Per Day Per Site
2012	11	0	35	10,640	967	28
2013	13	2	31	9,185	707	22
2014	11	4	32	8,756	686	27

As seen in Figure 2, the total number of meals served has been dropping each summer since 2012. The main factor contributing to the drop is the decrease in the total number of days that libraries operated the meal program from 2012 to 2013. Even with two more sites participating in the program, and two of the participating sites open for meal service on two Saturdays in 2013, the total number of meals served and the average number of meals served per day per site from 2012 to 2013 dropped from 27 to 22 when the number of operating days decreased from 35 to 31.

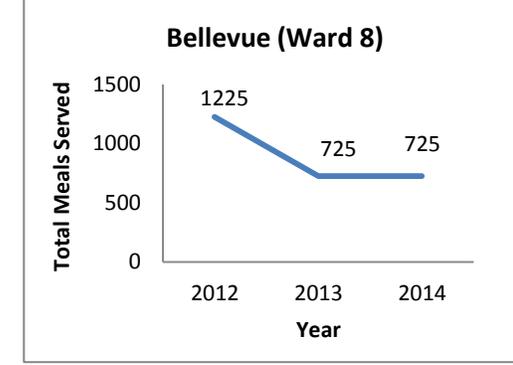
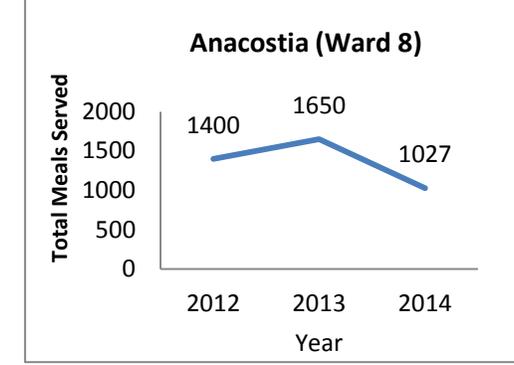
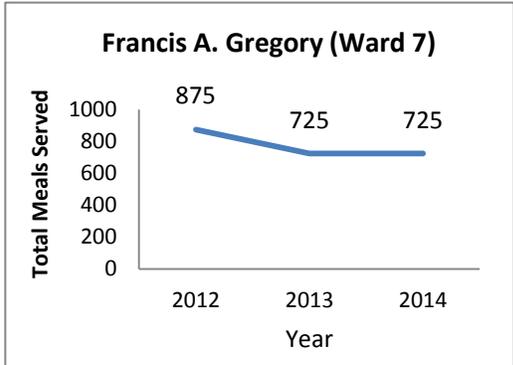
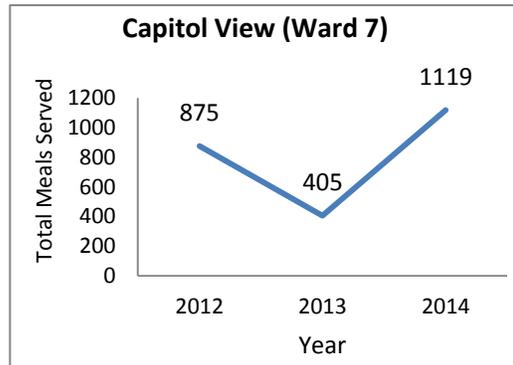
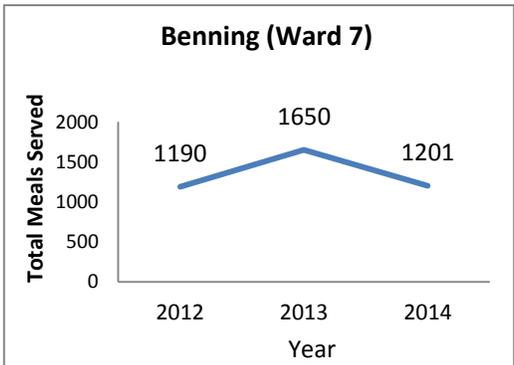
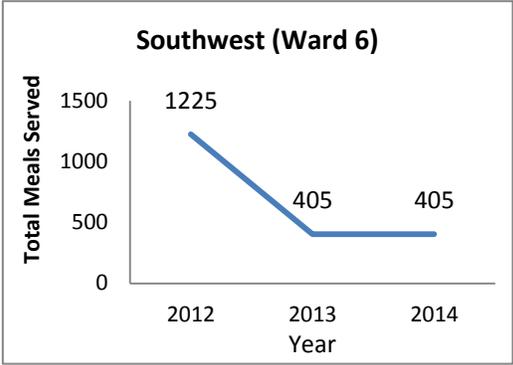
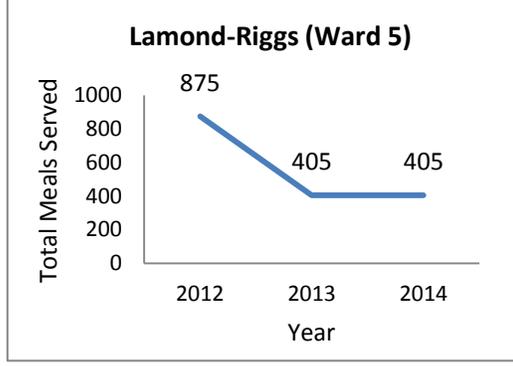
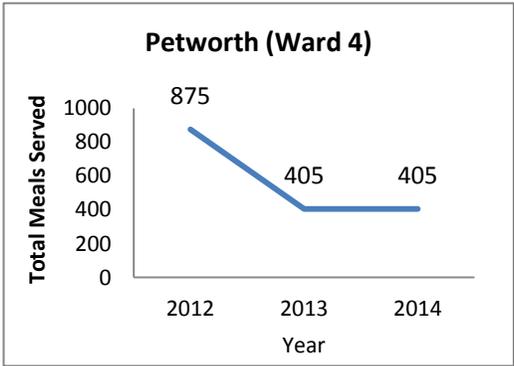
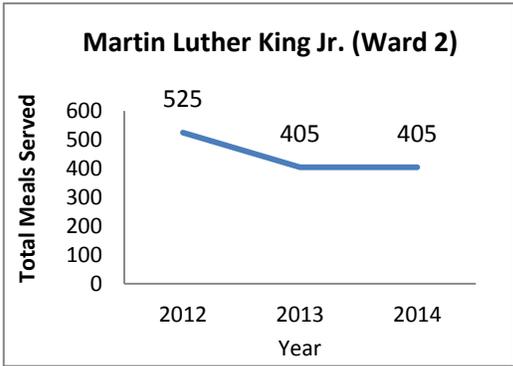
While there was a drop in the number of meals served from 2012 to 2013, the year when outreach efforts were weakest, the average total number of meals served per day per site remained flat when comparing 2012 to 2014, the years when the greatest amount of outreach was conducted. Further, even with libraries open for meal service the same number of operating days in 2013 and 2014, and two fewer libraries participating in the program in 2014, the total number of meals served only decreased by about 400 from the previous summer pointing to more successful outreach strategies.

The outreach efforts conducted by the DC Public Library and D.C. Hunger Solutions in 2012 and 2014 seem to have positively impacted the average number of meals served per day at each site; adding Saturday service at four locations in 2014 is a likely contributor to the spike in the average number of meals served per day per site in 2014 over 2013.

**Finding #2: There was great variation in the total number of meals served among the different libraries during summers 2012, 2013 and 2014.**

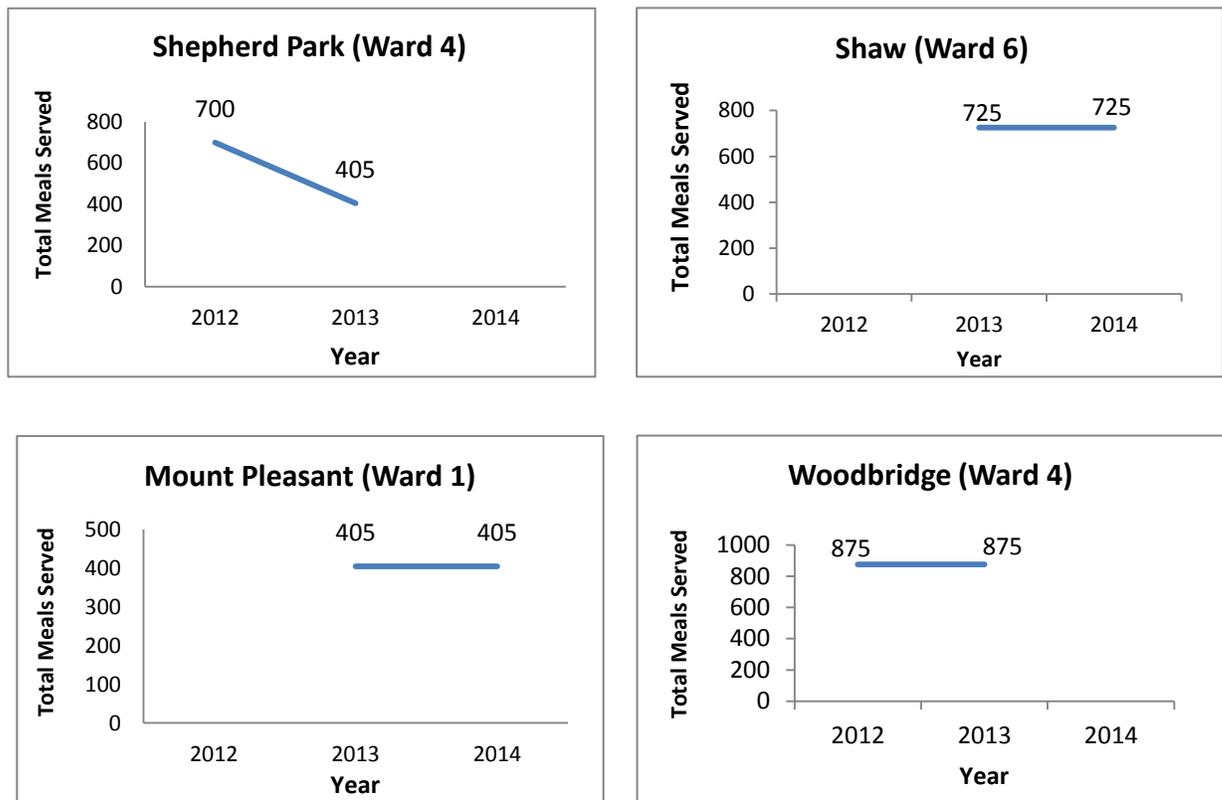
Generally, the total number of meals served by each library varied each summer. D.C. Hunger Solutions could not quantify all of the external factors that impacted the fluctuation in the numbers of meals served. However, factors that likely impact meal participation at each library include whether that library is close to another summer meal site, especially a site that serves lunch earlier than library lunch time of 1 PM, the number of children in the service area, and the percentage of youth enrolled in day camps. Libraries that were open for meal service on Saturdays - not surprisingly - generally served more meals as they were open on more days.

**Figure 3- Total # of Meals Served By Libraries Who Participated Each Summer from 2012-2014**



*\* Anacostia and Benning were open for meal service on two Saturdays in 2013 and four Saturdays in 2014. Capitol View & Bellevue were only open for weekend meal service in 2014, operating on two Saturdays.*

**Figure 4- Total Number of Meals Served By Libraries Who Did Not Participate Each Summer 2012-2014**



*\*Mount Pleasant and Shaw began operating the meal program during summer 2013. Shepherd Park and Woodbridge were closed for renovations during summer 2014.*

**Finding #3: Although 10 out of the 11 libraries that served meals during summer 2014 have sufficient physical space to grow summer meal participation, staff capacity and overlapping service areas should be considered when considering program expansion.**

During the visit to each library, D.C. Hunger Solutions assessed the space where meals were served to determine whether or not there was sufficient physical space for youth to eat if participation were to grow. All libraries visited, with the exception of Benning Road Library in Ward 7, which is already serving an average of 40 children per day, appeared to have sufficient physical space for program expansion. Additionally, as meal service lasts for over an hour, all youth participating in the program do not typically eat at the same time making it more likely that libraries with a smaller eating area could still serve more meals.

Other factors to consider when assessing the potential for program expansion include overlapping service areas and the staff capacity of the library to support expanded service while also fulfilling the core mission of the library, including daily operation of the branches and implementation of the extensive summer reading program. At present, the library would not be able to implement the program to the scale that it already does without the support provided by Summer Youth Employee Program participants.

**Figure 5- Average Daily Meal Count vs. Capacity**

<b>Library</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Avg. Daily Meal Count: 2014</b>	<b>Sufficient Physical Space to Accommodate Program Expansion</b>
<b>Mt. Pleasant</b>	1	16	✓
<b>Martin Luther King Jr.</b>	2	15	✓
<b>Petworth</b>	4	18	✓
<b>Watha T. Daniel/Shaw</b>	4	36	✓
<b>Lamond Riggs*</b>	5	20	✓
<b>Southwest</b>	5	16	✓
<b>Francis Gregory</b>	7	40	✓
<b>Capitol View</b>	7	37	✓
<b>Dorothy L. Height/Benning Road</b>	7	40	
<b>William O. Lockridge/Bellevue</b>	8	20	✓
<b>Anacostia</b>	8	34	✓

**D. Outreach**

**Finding #1: In addition to the citywide outreach efforts, and the promotion efforts conducted by the DC Public Library, each library participated in a wide variety of outreach practices to promote the DC Free Summer Meals Program at their site.**

During summer 2014, in addition to the city’s broad marketing campaign to advertise the DC Free Summer Meals Program (e.g. messaging on media channels, metro rail and metro buses, and information on various agency websites), and the promotional materials, including flyers and banners, given to libraries’ by their summer meals sponsor, the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, the DC Public Library conducted significant outreach. Efforts included promoting the program on the DC Public Library website, through social media, and on the summer reading logs distributed to thousands of youth across the city. Individual libraries also employed strategies at their respective sites to increase participation and spread the word about the program. Examples included making announcements before and during meal service, placing information on the library events calendar at their site, and utilizing Summer Youth Employment staff to approach families during library visits to share information about free meals.

Along with internal outreach, some libraries disseminated information about the summer meals program to the community and did at least one of the following: advertised their site to daycare centers nearby, conducted outreach at community events and schools before the program began, and placed information on their neighborhood list-serv. Although there were no clear trends associated with the outreach conducted and increased participation, it was clear that libraries are engaging in a variety of practices to promote the meal program.

**Figure 6- Outreach Strategies Utilized vs. Average Daily Meals Served**

Library	Ward	Utilized More than 3 Methods of Outreach	Staff/SYEP Approached Families	Worked with Outside Parties	Information on Program Schedule	Banner	Signage Inside Library
Mt. Pleasant	1		✓	✓		*	✓
Martin Luther King Jr.	2	✓	✓			✓	✓
Petworth	4					✓	✓
Shaw	4	✓	✓			✓	✓
Lamond Riggs	5				✓	*	✓
Southwest	5	✓			✓	✓	✓
Francis Gregory	7	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Capitol View	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Benning Road	7	✓			✓	✓	✓
William O. Lockridge/Bellevue	8					✓	✓
Anacostia	8	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

*\*Mount Pleasant library did not receive a banner for summer 2014 while Lamond Riggs was not able to put up banner due to architectural limitations.*

## E. Programming

**Finding #1: While programming was offered at each library serving summer meals, initial data suggest that having programs during or immediately preceding or following lunch service helps improve meal participation.**

All libraries offered some type of educational programming between two and five times per week, such as story time, crafts, and teen game nights. However, with the exception of the three libraries that offered activities during lunch and one – Anacostia - which offered activities directly after meal service, programming ended more than one hour before or after meal service. This may have affected meal participation as staff reported that families generally do not wait for meal time.

Shaw, Bellevue, and Petworth offered some type of activity during the time of meal service each day. Staff at these libraries reported that there was more consistency in the youth that ate lunch at the library. Consequently, offering programming during lunch may be a key to ensuring that youth return to the libraries for meals.

## F. Recommendations

The goal of this document is to report on the state of the DC Public Library participation in the DC Free Summer Meals Program and to offer recommendations to increase the number of meals provided and/or children served. We acknowledge that some of our recommendations may not be feasible at this time. For example, our recommendations for increasing the number of meals served by :

- 1) Offering meals during the entire period of the summer meals program
- 2) Reviewing serving a snack or supper , and

- 3) Adding a Saturday meal service are currently limited by staff capacity and a prohibition on volunteers performing union employees activities.

We do feel that efforts can be made to review future feasibility through creative uses of research or changes in policy. Each branch currently participating in the summer meals program has a Friends group and all are members of the Federation of Friends of the DC Public Library. This community group might be engaged in developing a solution.

### **Offer Summer Meals at the Libraries for the Entire Duration of the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program**

In order to ensure that libraries are maximizing participation in the DC Free Summer Meals Program, libraries should operate throughout the entire duration that the program is run citywide. Emphasis should be put on the libraries in Wards 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 with a focus on the four sites that operate the Program on Saturdays. Many of the libraries indicated that one obstacle in expanding the timeframe for summer meals was that summer youth employees did not start until at least the second week of summer vacation. This barrier could be addressed by increasing the number of library staff who have a food handler's license. If this is not feasible, DC Public Library could look into the possibility of recruiting volunteers from a nutrition program at a local university, or the local chapter of dietitians, who could fill the gap until the summer youth employees begin.

### **Assess the Opportunity for Libraries to Serve Snack or Supper**

As libraries open for meal service at 1 PM, later than many other meal sites the D.C. Public Library Foundation should assess which libraries are located near other summer meal sites that offer lunch and explore the possibility of serving of supper and a snack.

### **Grow Saturday Meal Service**

Saturday meal service at libraries expanded from summer 2012 to 2014 from two to four libraries. During summer 2014, four libraries located in wards 7 and 8 - Benning Road, Capitol View, Anacostia and William O. Lockridge/ Bellevue - operated the program on Saturdays. Eighteen DC. Department of Parks and Recreation Centers, also served Saturday meals. As this only totals 22 sites, out of the over 300 sites that participate in the program, the D.C. Public Library Foundation should explore the possibility of opening additional sites for Saturday meal service in Wards 4, 5, and 6 where percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced price meals is higher especially if there is not a recreation center nearby.

### **Set Goals for Each Individual Library to Maximize Meal Participation**

To ensure that libraries are serving as many meals as possible, the DC Public Library should considering working with each individual library to set a benchmark for participation based on the total number of meals they served in 2012, when the number of operating days was highest. It may also be helpful for the Foundation to incentivize participation by offering awards to libraries whose meal participation grows the most throughout the duration of the summer.

### **Ensure Enough Staff Receive Food Handler's Certification and Training**

In order to simplify meal delivery and distribution, DC Public Library may investigate the option of increasing the number of staff that have food handler's certification so that libraries can be better equipped to host a larger number of youth during meals. Possessing a food handler's certification is also a professional development opportunity for staff. If staff are unable to attend the training run by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, DCPL may explore the covering the cost of ServSafe online food handling training for a limited number of staff (<http://www.servsafe.com/home>). Additionally, DCPL should work to ensure that staff is trained on how to communicate with DPR staff to change their meal count throughout the summer.



### **Utilize Shelf Stable Meals**

Many library staff indicated there are days when there are a surplus of youth comes to the library (e.g., a nearby day care attends story time wants to stay for meals or there is a special class for teens). In order to ensure that libraries have an adequate number of meals to use when numbers spike, the DC Public Library may consider storing shelf stable meals made available by their sponsor, the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, which staff can serve if numbers fluctuate frequently.

### **Increase Site Specific Outreach Efforts and Promotion**

2012 and 2014, the two years where there was concerted library outreach conducted by DC Public Library and D.C. Hunger Solutions, have made a difference in participation; DCPL should continue their city-wide outreach efforts and partner with DCHS. Branch managers and library staff should employ the efforts outlined in the “Best Practices One-Pager” in order to ensure they are taking full advantage of the outreach strategies available. It may also be useful for librarians to advertise the program when they visit schools to promote the summer reading program during the spring, and when talking to families about the summer reading program throughout the summer. Non-participating libraries should continue to post flyers listing the nearest sites in the neighborhood so that families and individuals know where they can access summer meals.

### **Connect Library Programming to Meals**

Though libraries already offer a variety of programming, staff reported that most youth came solely for the programming and did not stay for the meals if the program began or ended an hour before or after meal service began. Therefore, it may be valuable for libraries to consider offering programming during lunch or hold programs closer to the time of lunch so that participants can easily transition to lunch after the program ends. Library staff can build on efforts to work with the Summer Youth Employment Program employees who are there administering the meals set up the activity and monitor kids during the time of meal service; if holding a different activity each day of the week is not feasible, showing a movie or setting out games are simple activities that require little planning or set up. Further, if staff resources are limited, libraries may choose to work with an outside group to hold a special program related to nutrition education and healthy eating i.e., DC. Greens, DOH SNAP-Education staff. Lastly, libraries may also use the Summer Youth Employment Staff to expand programming to reach more teens and hold programs such as an open mic, games, or anime clubs, as some sites have done in the past.

### **Conclusion**

D.C. Hunger Solutions, the DC Public Library, and DPR have worked together to strengthen library summer meal involvement in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program over the past five years. Through grants and partnerships to promote the program, the program has expanded. However, there is still room for the Program to grow. Whether it be adding an activity to get youth excited about lunch at the library, or trying to partner with a neighborhood church to promote the Program, or hosting a summer meals kick-off event at a library, there are actions that libraries can take to ensure that not only are youth living in the District stay engaged during the summer, but have consistent access to nutritious meals that contribute to their health and well-being, ensuring that no child goes hungry over the summer.

## **Library Engagement in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program**

DC public libraries are helping to address the summer learning loss by connecting children and teens to programs, books, and in many cases nutrition. With 11 libraries serving DC Free Summer Meals under the sponsorship of the DC Department of Parks and Recreation in 2014, DC represented a national model for how a growing number of cities are connecting libraries to summer meals.

D.C. Hunger Solutions and the DC Public Library Foundation partnered to assess the current state of the meal program at the participating libraries and talk to you and your colleagues about some of the strategies being put in place to attract individuals and families to the summer meals program.

### Feedback on the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program:

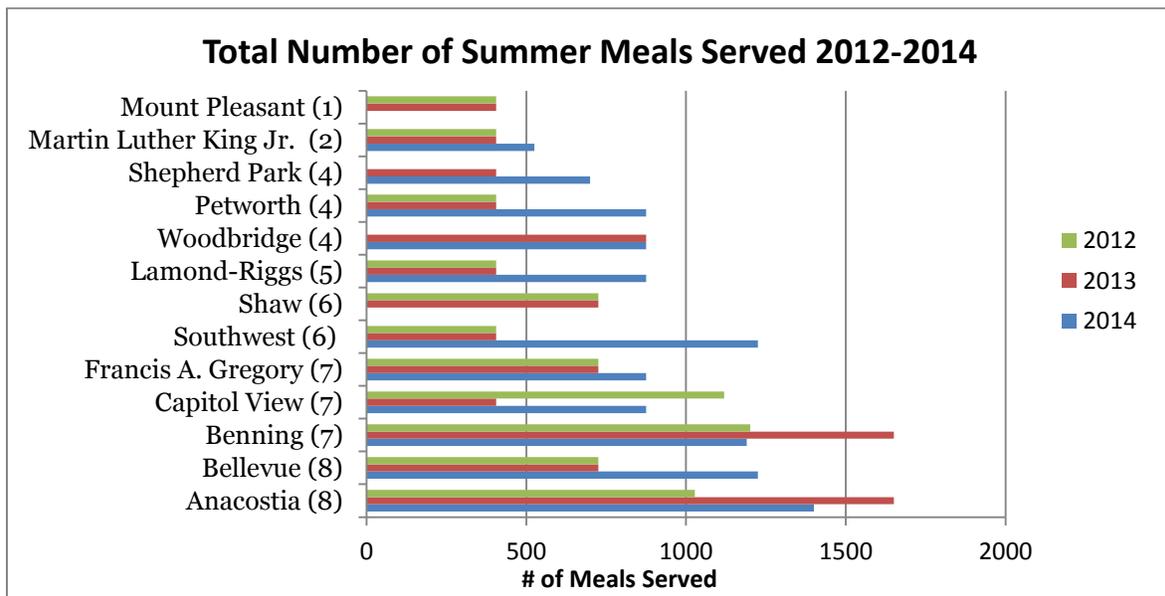
“The most beneficial part of the summer meals program is the intimate connection it allows us to have with our customers. The program breaks down barriers—we are no longer the ‘mean librarian’ but someone who they can talk and engage with.” –**Branch Manager**

“The meals themselves are the most beneficial part of the program because they provide nutrition to kids who might not otherwise be getting meals. The program also makes the library a one stop shop for books and meals, providing more incentive for families to come.” - **Librarian**

“The meal program is important because it allows the library to be a resource for kids; with the addition of the summer meal program we can provide more than books and computers. As we know, kids do better when they have healthy food and the summer meal program allows us to provide it to those who need it most.” - **Librarian**

### How Do You Compare?

The graph below shows the total number of meals served by each library participating in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program over the past three years. See how you compare and check out the other side of this sheet for actions you can take to increase meal participation at your library.



### Tips to Increase Summer Meal Participation at Your Library: Best Practices from Library Staff



Set a goal to increase meal participation at your site at the beginning of the summer.



Hold an event during summer to keep kids excited about summer reading and the summer meals programs.



Hang up the summer meals banner, provided by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, outside of your library and place signage about the meal program at the circulation desk.



Post information about the program on your printed weekly events calendar and post information about the summer meals program on the neighborhood list-serve.



Make announcements throughout the day and during activities e.g., story time to ensure that families and individuals know about the summer meals program.



Post the summer meals menu in a highly visible area and create a display of books related to nutrition and physical activity.



Work with your Summer Youth Employment Program Staff to promote the program by approaching families close to the beginning of meal service telling them about the meals and encouraging the children to eat the meals.



Provide activities during lunch for youth eating the meals. Ideas include coloring, games, showing a movie, or holding an open mic. If possible, work with your Summer Youth Employment Program Staff to plan and help implement the programming.



Work with the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation to ensure you have a number of shelf stable meals to use on days when you have a large spike in attendance. If your attendance is consistently increasing, call your site monitor to change your meal count.

Contact D.C. Hunger Solutions for more information:  
202-640-1088 or [info@dchunger.org](mailto:info@dchunger.org).

