



D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

Strategies for the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation to Promote Healthy Eating and Nutrition

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Combating hunger and obesity demands a comprehensive approach with elected officials, government agencies, business, places of worship, community-based organizations, and residents working together. This is especially the case in Wards 7 and 8, where residents experience both the highest food insecurity and highest obesity rates in the city. In March 2010, the District released its first-ever state obesity plan, *Working Towards a Healthy DC: The District of Columbia's Overweight and Obesity Action Plan*.¹ The D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is a key city partner in the implementation of the plan.

In order to combat obesity, parks and recreation centers must play a role in tackling nutrition as well as fitness. DPR provides a wide variety of opportunities for physical activity at recreation facilities, fields, classes, and playground spaces throughout the city. This Issue Brief suggests that in order to better address the District's alarming rates of obesity and public health, DPR should expand its activities to promote both active living *and* healthy eating.

The Brief highlights:

- Current use of federal nutrition programs by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation.
- Findings from a nutrition environment assessment survey of Ward 7 and 8 D.C. recreation centers during summer 2010.
- Recommendations for policies and practices that can help transform recreation centers into hubs for healthy eating and nutrition education.

D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation centers have the potential to offer not only healthful, satisfying meals for children and teens, but also education in good nutrition, which can have a ripple effect throughout the most nutritionally-vulnerable wards of the District. The Summary of Findings and Recommendations show what DPR centers are doing now to meet hunger and nutrition needs and how DPR centers can promote healthful eating and nutrition as well.

¹ The plan is available at:

<http://newsroom.dc.gov/show.aspx?agency=doh§ion=2&release=19808&year=2010&file=file.aspx%2Frelease%2F19808%2FOBESITY%2520ACTION%2520PLAN.pdf>. Objective 4 of that plan is to ensure: "Each year, an increasing number of residents of all ages and abilities will have access to, and will use, safe and clean opportunities to be physically active."

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Nutrition Environment Assessment Finding	Policy Recommendation
<p>1.) Hungry children depend on the meals DPR serves.</p> <p>2.) All DPR centers participate in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program but center-based outreach of the program is limited.</p>	<p>Maximize participation in the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program by enlisting centers in community outreach.</p>
<p>3.) Summer meal quality should be improved to be more appealing to children and teens.</p>	<p>Improve the variety, appeal, and nutrition of the meals served through the federal nutrition programs—D.C. Free Summer Meals and the Afterschool Meal Program.</p>
<p>4.) All seven centers participating in the Afterschool Meal Program in the winter and spring of 2010 valued the program.</p>	<p>Enroll all centers in Wards 7 and 8 and in other eligible areas of the city in the Afterschool Meal Program.</p>
<p>5.) Cooking facilities at centers range from a full kitchen to a small refrigerator.</p>	<p>In centers where kitchens are available, explore the possibility of providing hot meals and holding cooking classes. At smaller centers without kitchens, ensure that facilities are fully equipped to provide adequate food service for participants.</p>
<p>6.) Nutrition education programs and healthy eating promotion are scarce.</p>	<p>Provide a nutrition education for all DPR center managers and staff members and nutrition resources (e.g., posters, recipes, resource guide) to all recreation centers.</p>
<p>7.) Vending machines contain unhealthy beverages.</p>	<p>Establish and promote a healthy vending policy for DPR centers and parks.</p>
<p>8.) Staff generally like the idea of a farmers' market or produce stand at centers.</p>	<p>Further assess the interest and ability of DPR centers to host produce stands, and identify pilot sites.</p>