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LOCAL

All Faiths Food Bank provides free summer meals for children

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For thousands of local children, summer means more than sunshine and free time – it also means the loss of school meals, often their most reliable source of daily nutrition. To address the need, All Faiths Food Bank is again partnering with the Sarasota and DeSoto County school districts and hundreds of community partners to provide free food to children all summer long.

"No child should have to trade summer fun for the pain of hunger," said Nelle Miller, president and CEO of All Faiths Food Bank. "Because of our community's compassion and commitment, thousands of kids will have the food they need to thrive while school is out."

With support from donors and partners such as the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and the Gould Family Trust Foundation at Gulf Coast Community Foundation, All Faiths Food Bank's annual Campaign Against Summer Hunger is bringing healthy meals to kids at dozens of schools and community sites across the Suncoast – including schools, libraries, early learning centers, summer camps, community centers and numerous other organizations.

From school pantries and hot meal sites to "BackPacks" and snack bags filled with kid-friendly foods, the Campaign ensures children don't go hungry when the school year ends. Last year, more than 35,000 children received food through the Campaign.

The effort is bolstered by the federally funded Summer BreakSpot program, run by Sarasota and DeSoto County Schools' Food and Nutrition Services departments. Summer BreakSpot reimburses organizations for meals through the USDA's Summer Food Service Program. At many locations, All Faiths provides additional food resources and operates on-site pantries.

“This USDA program and the community partnerships help support children during the summer months, when the majority of students and their siblings are out of school and have a greater potential to experience hunger,” said Sara Dan, Sarasota County Schools’ director of Food & Nutrition Services. “This program helps support students’ nutrition, so they are fueled up and ready to learn in the fall.”

For more information about summer meal resources, visit sarsotacountyschools.net or call 941-486-2199. For food distribution sites, visit allfaithsfoodbank.org/foodfinder. To help children and families experiencing hunger, visit allfaithsfoodbank.org or call 941-379-6333.

Submitted by Sharon Kunkel