

CAC Provides Lunches to Young County Residents

This summer, the Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC) is not relying solely on its Howard County Food Bank to help Howard County residents obtain ample, nutritious food. CAC is taking box lunches to the county's youngest citizens – from toddlers to 18 year olds – in two locations.

CAC's Summer Food Program, held in partnership with Community Homes Housing, began June 27 and continues every weekday through August 5.

The program is held from noon to 1 p.m. at Rideout Heath-Homework Club Townhouse (5891 Harpers Farm Road) or Roslyn Rise – Community Center (10339 Twin Rivers Road). Both Columbia locations are in Community Homes, which is owned by Community Homes Housing, but youth do not have to live there to attend.

Most children walk to one of the program's sites. After participants wash their hands, CAC staff or volunteers hand them refrigerated box lunches. Youth then settle into metal chairs with attached wooden eating areas or sit at tables where they open their box lunches and eat their provisions, which usually consist of a sandwich, fruit, snack, fruit juice, and milk.

Food is only one of the program's attractions. The younger set enjoy socializing while building with blocks and playing games, and are delighted when they are given stickers, rings, and small toys to take home. The teens relish chilling there. "I enjoy talking about sports with high schoolers," said a 16-year-old who will enter 11th grade at Wilde Lake High School in a few weeks.

CAC started the program this summer after finding a location that would meet the program's eligibility requirements which allows for federal funding support.

CAC felt this program would be a good use of its resources. "We want to ensure low-income children get fed nutritious food in the summer," said CAC's Director of Programs and Services Hillary Lindeman. "It's one guaranteed nutritious meal a day."

Eight youth attended at both locations on the first day, but, word of mouth and fliers distributed at the five Community Homes subdivisions is turning that trickle into a steady stream. By the third day, 25 youth took advantage of the program. CAC is hoping to turn that stream into a flood. "We tell children to keep inviting their friends," said Ms. Lindeman.

While finding children to participate does not seem to be a problem, getting them to leave can sometimes be a tad tricky. When one mother dropped by to say it was OK to send her daughter home, her six-year-old responded, "I want to stay and play."