

Child Hunger Alliance

**Child Care Meals Readiness
Survey**



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Ending Child Hunger in Yavapai County

How can we bring nutritious meals to our young food-insecure children?

Report Series

The Child Hunger Alliance created an action plan to reduce child hunger in Yavapai County beginning in 2013. This report is the fourth in a series that started with the initial study, *Ending Child Hunger in Yavapai County, 2012*. These reports update the status of child nutrition and hunger in our county. Each report evaluates progress achieved through various community programs. This report focuses on the Child Nutrition Initiative led by the Yavapai Food Council in planning ways to fill meal gaps for child care centers.

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FINDINGS

This report updates data about the prevalence and severity of child hunger in the Quad City area of Yavapai County based on child care center meal gaps. The Yavapai Food Council utilized a \$7,330 grant from First Things First to perform a survey of child care centers in the Quad City

area to identify the numbers and types of meals offered to young children and identify *meal gaps* where child care providers could utilize federally funded meals, but did not.

The survey assessed those centers *not* utilizing Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) federal funds to identify centers *willing* to apply for CACFP and other federal meal programs.

- The survey contacted 24 child care centers in the Quad City area of Yavapai County, finding three centers had closed, leaving 21 centers to survey. Nineteen of 21 centers responded to the survey, yielding an 90% response rate.
- Five centers out of 19 (26%) reported that they already participated in the CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program). One center was in the process of applying for CACFP.
- Fourteen centers (67%) did *not* participate in CACFP, although one center had received a grant from the Department of Defense Fresh Fruits and Vegetables program.
- Of 14 centers offering meals, 5 centers furnished their own food, 3 centers furnished food from parents, 5 centers furnished food from public schools, and 5 centers furnished food from a combination of sources including the center, parents, and schools.
- The centers reported *four barriers* to utilizing federal meals programs: 1) Lack of administrative staff; 2) Lack of a certified kitchen; 3) Lack of start-up funds; and 4) Concern about ADE inspections.
- The Yavapai Food Council (YFC) offers the Daily Diner catering program to assist a center in overcoming these barriers to utilize CACFP and other federal meal programs.
- Nine centers expressed *willingness* to receive assistance from YFC in participating in CACFP and other federal meal programs.
- Five centers remained *undecided* about participating in CACFP and other federal meal programs.
- Three centers decided *against* participation in CACFP and other federal meal programs.
- It's important to recognize that assisting even one center in participating in a federal meal program not only improves nutrition for food-insecure children but also creates an ongoing economic stimulus to the county.

Child Care Meals Assessment

A \$7,330 First Things First grant allowed the Yavapai Food Council (YFC) to design and conduct the Child Care Meals Readiness Survey from October 2013 to February 2014, utilizing a part-time AmeriCorps member. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the meals that child care centers and schools offered to children and to identify *meal gaps* that could be filled by YFC assisting child care centers and schools *not* utilizing federally funded meals to apply for and offer

such meals to improve nutrition available to low-income, food-insecure children. This report focuses only on meal gaps in child care centers.

In November 2013, YFC obtained a list of child care centers from the Arizona Child Care Resource and Referral website staff. Out of this list, YFC selected 24 child care centers operating in buildings and excluded home-based centers. This selection was based on the premise that a child care center located in a building would be more likely to obtain and maintain a federal meal program than a home-based center.

Survey contacts by telephone, email messages, and site visits determined that three centers had closed, leaving 21 centers to be surveyed.

Out of the 21 centers, 19 centers participated in the survey, and 2 centers did not, either refusing at the outset or failing to respond to phone calls and emails. Survey data derive from the responses of 19 child care centers. The survey response rate was 90%.

Centers Offering CACFP

Of the 19 centers responding to the survey, *five* centers (22%) participated in the CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program) administered through the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), leaving 14 centers *not* participating in CACFP.

The five child care centers participating in CACFP were:

- Valley Learning Center in Prescott Valley.
- Busy Bee Learning Center in Prescott Valley.
- Del Webb Family Enrichment Center at Yavapai College.
- Trinity Lutheran Church in Prescott Valley.
- Granpa's Farm in Prescott Valley.

The Prescott Child Development Center was in the process of applying for CACFP, with ADE approval likely occurring in 2014.

CACFP funding furnishes year round meals that meet federal and state nutritional standards. This funding brings standards and requirements that a center must meet. CACFP requires a higher level of professionalism in child care, and many centers in our county have *not* felt prepared to achieve those higher standards.

Centers Offering Their Own Meals

The following centers offer their own meals in various ways, when food is provided by the center, by parents, and by district schools.

Center-Provided Meals

These 5 centers offer meals furnished only by the center:

- Cedar Tree Playhouse and Montessori - snacks only.
- Acorn Christian Montessori - breakfast and lunch.
- Acorn Montessori - breakfast and lunch.
- Grannie's House - breakfast and lunch.
- Gods World - breakfast, lunch and snacks.

Parent-Provided Meals

These 3 centers offer meals furnished by parents:

- Christian Academy of Prescott - lunch and snacks.
- American Lutheran Preschool - lunch and snacks.
- Growing Kids Preschool - snacks.

District School-Provided Meals

These 5 centers offer meals furnished by schools:

- Discovery Gardens - breakfast & lunch by Prescott Union High School.
- Prescott Child Development Center - Yavapai College.
- Kids Corral - snacks by Humboldt Elementary School.
- Kids & Co. - lunch by Miller Valley Elementary and Washington Traditional Elementary School.
- Sacred Heart - lunch by Prescott Union School District.

Combination-Provided Meals

These 5 centers offer meals from a combination of sources:

- Discovery Gardens - breakfast & lunch by PUHS; snacks by center.
- Cornerstone Christian Preschool - lunch by parents; snacks by center.
- Prescott YMCA Preschool - Prescott Union High School - lunch by school; snacks by center and parents.
- Learning Castle Children's Center - lunch by parents; breakfast & snacks by center.

Barriers to Participating in CACFP

Of the 14 centers *not* participating in CACFP, several cited barriers that kept them from utilizing that federal meal program:

- Lack of administrative staff.
- Lack of a certified kitchen.
- Lack of start-up funds.
- Concern about ADE inspections.

A center operating on a tight budget has limited administrative staff, usually a center director and an assistant. They focus on running the center and lack time, energy, and knowledge for applying for CACFP. When a director confronts the lack of a health-certified kitchen and lack of start-up funds to begin CACFP, applying for the program seems overwhelming.

A strategy for assisting a child care center needs to meet these needs in order to overcome these barriers. Center directors must be willing to accept outside assistance in applying for CACFP. They also need to perceive the value of having a professional, sustainable meal program in place instead of constantly struggling to raise funds for meals or snacks.

Their concerns about being held accountable to higher standards through ADE inspections can be resolved by hearing from program directors already participating in CACFP. With YFC providing technical assistance to a center during start-up as well as assisting with problem solving during a two-year period, a center director will find that utilizing a federal meal program will become routine and

Meal Site Readiness

The survey obtained data regarding several factors that constitute meal site readiness for participating in CACFP federal meals. These factors include:

- Willingness to receive assistance in applying for CACFP and other federal meal programs.
- Access to a health certified kitchen.
- Commercial kitchen equipment on site.
- Start-up funding for CACFP.

The following sections show the 14 centers that do *not* utilize CACFP and other federal meal programs, in consideration of the four factors listed above.

Willingness to Apply for CACFP and Other Meal Programs

The following 9 centers indicated their *willingness* to add meals for food-insecure young children:

- Discovery Gardens.
- Cornerstone Christian Preschool.
- Prescott YMCA.
- Acorn Christian Montessori - Prescott Valley.
- Acorn Montessori - Prescott.
- God's World.
- Kids Corral - Humboldt Elementary School.
- Prescott Kids and Co.
- Learning Castle Children's Center.

The next 5 centers were *uncertain* about seeking federal meal programs:

- Cedar Tree Playhouse and Montessori.
- Grannie's House.
- The Children's Garden.
- Del Webb Family Enrichment Center - Yavapai College.
- Sacred Heart.

The next 3 centers were *not* willing to add meals.

- Christian Academy of Prescott
- Growing Kids Preschool
- Trinity Christian Preschool.

The Yavapai Food Council will meet with the nine centers willing to add meals for food-insecure young children to determine the best prospects for receiving assistance in applying for CACFP and other federal meal programs.

Access to Health Certified Commercial Kitchen

The following 9 centers have access to health-certified commercial kitchens:

- Discovery Gardens - Taylor Hicks Elementary School commercial kitchen.
- Cornerstone Christian Preschool.
- Acorn Christian Montessori.
- Acorn Montessori.

- Prescott YMCA.
- God's World.
- Kids Corral - Humboldt Elementary School commercial kitchen.
- Prescott Kids and Co. - Prescott Union High School commercial kitchen.
- Sacred Heart Prescott Union High School commercial kitchen.

Four of these centers have access to school district commercial kitchens.

These 3 centers have access to a kitchen that is *not* a health-certified commercial kitchen:

- Cedar Tree Playhouse and Montessori.
- Grannie's House.
- The Children's Garden.
- Learning Castle Children's Center.

These 2 centers did not share information about kitchens:

- Christian Academy of Prescott.
- American Lutheran Preschool.

Commercial Kitchen Equipment on Site

The following 9 centers have kitchen equipment on site but not a commercial kitchen:

- Discovery Gardens.
- Cornerstone Christian Preschool.
- Cedar Tree Playhouse and Montessori.
- Acorn Christian Montessori.
- Acorn Montessori.
- Grannie's House.
- God's World.
- The Children's Garden.
- Learning Castle Children's Center.

These centers are *not* able to prepare meals, but can receive catered meals through YFC's Daily Diner program, described in the next section.

The Daily Diner Meal Program

In reviewing survey data, YFC designed a program that makes it possible for child care centers to offer CACFP and other federal meal programs. The name of this flexible model program is the *Daily Diner*.

When a child care center is ready to apply for a federal meal program, YFC employs the Daily Diner model to cater meals to a center that lacks a commercial kitchen. YFC trains center staff in meal record-keeping and submitting reimbursement claims, sets up a contract with local or regional commercial food services to supply nutritious meals, and helps the center solve problems that arise in program management during a two-year period. This approach simplifies demands on center staff and makes it feasible for them to operate one or more federal meals programs.

Start-up Funding for CACFP

YFC was *not* able to explore the need for start-up funding for centers willing to participate in CACFP. However, this issue remains a significant barrier to assisting child care centers in starting CACFP and other federal meal programs.

Federal meal programs are based on reimbursement of the costs of actual meals furnished by a child care center. Start-up costs for centers must cover the initial purchases of food and meal preparation that a center has to supply before receiving reimbursement. The center submits monthly claims based on the number of meals served times the percentages of children qualified as eligible for free meals, reduced cost meals, and paid meals.

Centers with lower numbers of children furnish fewer meals and are required to have less start-up funding, while centers with higher numbers of children are required to have higher amounts of start-up funding.

If a center has 100 children, the current meal reimbursement rates for breakfast, lunch, and snacks amount to \$5.31 per day per child receiving free meals, \$4.21 per day per child receiving reduced cost meals, and \$0.63 per child receiving paid meals. Taking an average daily meal cost of \$3.38 per child times 100 children times 23 days per month = \$7,782 needed for the center's start-up funding for the first month of the program. Because ADE claim processing takes an additional length of time, it is likely that reimbursement will not be received from ADE until an additional month has passed, doubling start-up costs to \$15,563.

Overcoming the start-up cost barrier for some centers may require a loan source, which can include local commercial banks. If that resource is not available due to loan policies or poor credit rating of a center, consideration should be given to creation of a *nonprofit fund* for making loans to cover child care center start-up costs for federal meals programs.

Concern about ADE Inspections

Some of the 15 centers expressed concern about being subjected to ADE inspections and financial audits, which they saw as “more red tape” that would distract them from managing their programs for children. Some center directors said that they would need additional administrative staff to handle the paperwork required by CACFP and other federal meal programs. YFC considered these concerns as realistic and a definite need that must be addressed in a strategy for assisting child care centers in offering federal meals to food-insecure children.

YFC has qualified as a *consultant* with ADE to be able to address the issues facing centers willing to apply for CACFP and other federal meal programs. In a consultant role, YFC will provide technical assistance to a center not only at the start-up in submitting an application but also in managing the meal program over a two-year period to ensure its stability and sustainability.



Economic Stimulus

Looking at the big picture of poverty and hunger, YFC recognizes that a weak economy produces greater poverty and hunger. By offering an economic stimulus to our county’s economy, a child care center’s decision to utilize CACFP and other federal meals programs directly contributes to its community’s and the county’s economy.

When a child care center decides to utilize existing federal funds for meals to provide nutritious meals to its food-insecure children, it draws into its community and county a new revenue stream. As shown above, one center serving 100 young children can draw in \$7,000 a month, amounting to \$84,000 a year. The center spends that money in local grocery stores, and those stores benefit from the additional income. In addition, those grocery stores pay more sales tax, which supports the local tax base for schools, municipal and county governments, and fire districts.

It's important for child care center directors to recognize that they can not only improve the nutrition they offer to young children, but they can also stabilize their budget for their meals program while contributing an economic stimulus to the county.

