Filling the Summer Meal Gap

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By Jeff Kolsch

There is a great deal of food insecurity in our Queens community, especially among families with children. When summer comes, it gets worse. Many of our residents rely on schools to feed their kids breakfast and lunch, and once the school year ends they have to figure out how to make up the difference. If more people knew about the Summer Meals program it would help them tremendously.

Pantries like ours are the boots on the ground. In many ways we're the community centers of the neighborhood where people gather. So we have to take advantage of that reach and do everything we can to spread the word about Summer Meals.

Here at New Life we're getting the word out in several ways. We put multi-language flyers about Summer Meals into our pantry bags. We talk it up with our guests and ask them to tell their friends

and family. We put information in the church bulletin. We even place it on our outdoor electronic sign on Queens Boulevard that advertises the program.

This is our seventh year taking part in Summer Meals and the people in our community really appreciate it. Parents know that their children will get a nutritious and balanced meal here every weekday, with plenty of lean protein, fresh vegetables and fruit. When you're struggling financially, lunch for your kids may be a bag of chips and a soda if that's all you can afford. I'm glad that we can give families in our community a healthy and free alternative.

Jeff Kolsch is the director of New Life Food, Clothing and Homeless Pantry in Queens, a member of Food Bank's network of charities. New Life's Summer Meals program runs through August (Mon-Fri, 11:30-1:30).