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Community is served: Greenfield meals for kids program cooking again this summer

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GREENFIELD — School's out but there's still food, free, for youth who want it.

The Greenfield Public School food department serves lunch and in most cases breakfast at eight open locations in town, including three schools, the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area, the YMCA and three housing developments. The program is open to anyone under the age of 18.

"It's not a program designed just to cater to low-income folks ... its really for any child under the age of 18, you don't even have to be a Greenfield resident. If your cousin is visiting from Nebraska and they're under 18, they can have a free meal," said Greenfield Public Schools Food Service Director Madison Walker.

Walker said the program served 2,609 lunches last week at 13 locations — the eight open locations and five closed — an average of 520 a day, and 340 to 350 breakfasts a day.

New this year are "Farm Fresh Fridays," last week a salad with local carrots and lettuce and a dessert of local blueberries. The vegetables went over well despite what might be expected, Walker said. "We're trying to get them used to not only hamburgers and sandwiches but also good things like salads," she said.

Dino Schnelle, coordinator of the Center for Self Reliance food pantry in Greenfield, one of two Community Action food pantries serving Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region, said staff encourage pantry visitors to get their children to the school meals.

Talk of an improving economy hasn't lessened hunger in the area, he said.

"Even though supposedly the economy's getting better and everything is looking brighter, the number of households that we're feeding every month remains pretty much the same. We're still feeding somewhere between 500 and 575 families every month between our two programs, and that translates to about 1,500 people a month," Schnelle said.

The number of new enrollments is, however, slowing down. From a high of 30 or 40 new households per month, Schnelle said the program now sees 10 to 15 new families per month, sometimes 20.

About 60 percent of Greenfield Public School students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch under the state formula during the school year, Walker said, and not all who could actually take advantage of the summer meals. Why, she doesn't know; maybe the breakfast is too early or kids are away at camp.

Breakfast is served from 8 to 9 a.m. and lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the YMCA, 451 Main St.; Greenfield Gardens, Pray Drive; Greenfield Middle School, 195 Federal Street; Federal Street School, 125 Federal St.; The Discovery School at Four Corners, 21 Ferrante Ave.; Leyden Woods Apartments, off Leyden Road and Oak Courts, off Elm Street. The Green River Swimming and Recreation Area on Nashs Mill Road and Camp Kee-wanee at 1 Health Camp Road, off Leyden Road, host lunch only.

The Greenfield Summer Meals Program is funded by reimbursement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Children attending the summer camp at the Green River Swimming and Recreation area on Nashs Mill Road in Greenfield eat the free lunches provided by Starr Hurd, an employee of the Summer Food Service program and a Greenfield High School kitchen staff member during the school year, Tuesday July 21.
Recorder/Matt Burkhardt