



Food For Thought



National Program Feeds Hungry Children's Bodies And Minds

(NAPSA)—Elaine Long, 68, still clearly remembers one telephone call she received more than a decade ago as the manager of a housing project in Savannah, Georgia.

“Late one night, someone called me and said, ‘Someone has broken into the housing project’s community center!’” recalls Long. “When I got there, I saw two young boys sitting in the kitchen with the refrigerator door open. I asked them what they were doing, and they said they were hungry.”

The incident spurred Long into action. Working with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Coastal Georgia, she helped to create Kids Cafe, a safe place where the neighborhood’s hungry children were served free, hot and nutritious meals after school. Long encouraged individuals and area churches to donate food, pots and pans and cooking services. She brought in local organizations like the health department to lead educational classes. Soon, 45 boys and girls were eating and learning at the new Kids Cafe every day.

These Savannah children represent hungry youth all across the country. Approximately 13 million children in the U.S.—or nearly one in five youth—live in households that are hungry or at risk of going hungry.

That’s why, in 1993, Long’s single project was adopted as a national model by America’s Second Harvest, the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization. The Kids Cafe program, which is sponsored nationally by ConAgra



Foods, provides hungry children with healthy meals as well as positive educational and social experiences.

“The national Kids Cafe program celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, with more than 1,200 sites across the country, serving more than 12 million meals to hungry children every year,” says Robert Forney, president and CEO of America’s Second Harvest. “The Kids Cafe program helps not only to fight child hunger, but it also helps to prevent its harmful health, social and behavioral consequences.”

The impact of hunger on children’s overall well-being is alarming. According to *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children*, a review of recent scholarly research, food-insecure and hungry children have poorer overall health and, as a result, miss more days of school and are less prepared to learn when they are able to attend. They also are more likely to have poorer mental health, be withdrawn or socially disruptive and suffer greater rates of behavioral disorders.

New research conducted this winter by the Center on Hunger

and Poverty, the leading scholarly institution addressing hunger policy and programs in the U.S., shows that the Kids Cafe program not only fights child hunger by providing free meals to youth, but it also serves as a critical support system for families. Both children and parents/caregivers identified improvements in learning, behavior and overall nutritional and physical health as benefits of the Kids Cafe program.

“The teachers and staff help us to do better in school and make better grades,” says one Kids Cafe participant who took part in the study. “I can concentrate better in long classes, also.”

“We are proud to support a program that has proven to be effective in improving children’s overall well-being,” says Lynn Phares, president of the ConAgra Foods Feeding Children Better Foundation, the organization that commissioned the study. “We hope that its success will encourage communities across the country to adopt Kids Cafe as one way to address one of the most serious issues facing our country.”

“There are still many hungry children who are not being reached because they do not know about Kids Cafes,” says Long. “We must continue raising awareness of the program and encourage people to get involved. Like the first Kids Cafe in Savannah, it takes a team effort. No one can do it alone.”

If you want to help fight child hunger, go to www.FeedingChildrenBetter.org.