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Bridging the summer lunch gap: 200 more youth to be served

Some 200 more Santa Cruz-area children can count on eating lunch this summer, thanks to Community Bridges.

Responding to increased community need, La Manzana Community Resources, based in Watsonville, has expanded its Summer Lunch Program from 12 to 15 sites this year, adding locations at San Andreas, First Christian Church and Sunny Meadows.

La Manzana Community Resources, a program of Community Bridges, expects to serve 18,000 meals to 600 youth this summer, up from 14,000 meals to 400 youth last year.

La Manzana Community Resources has been sponsoring this program for 22 years. For the second summer in a row, the program has extended its service to ensure there is no gap between the end of school and the beginning of the Summer Lunch Program. The lunch program now runs from June 9 through August 21.

In addition to a free, nutritious lunch, each of the 15 sites provides games, activities and food demonstrations to encourage healthy eating and physical exercise, while keeping children engaged.

“It’s so important to step up in the summer months, especially with a growing portion of kids in our community relying on free meals at school,” said Raymon Cancino, CEO of Community Bridges, a nonprofit organization that operates La Manzana Community Resources and nine other human services programs throughout Santa Cruz County. “We know how strongly food, poverty and hunger can affect the wellbeing of our kids, and we’re proud to be a part of the programs, schools, and community volunteers who come together to make this work possible.”

According to the 2014 Santa Cruz County Community Assessment Project, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced cost meals in Santa Cruz County increased from 45 percent during the 2007-08 academic year to 55 percent in 2013-14.

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District and Live Oak Elementary School District had the greatest percentages of students receiving free or reduced cost meals in 2013-14 (77 percent and 60 percent respectively). (2014 CAP, p. 164).

Funding for La Manzana Community Resources' Summer Lunch Program comes from the California Department of Education, the United States Department of Agriculture, the County of Santa Cruz, the cities of Watsonville and Santa Cruz, and Community Bridges.

However, La Manzana is reimbursed for only 67 percent of the costs for providing meals, and is seeking donations from the public to make up the difference. Individuals can also support the Summer Lunch Program by volunteering to serve food at the various sites.

To learn more, please visit CommunityBridges.org/LMCR

La Manzana Community Resources' Summer Lunch Program sites are as follows:

South County Sites (days and times vary):

1. **Callaghan Park** 225 Sudden St., Watsonville, Tuesday-Friday 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.
2. **City of Watsonville Neighborhood Services** 30 Maple Ave., Watsonville, Monday-Thursday 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.
3. **La Manzana Community Resources** 521 Main St. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:15 - 1:15 p.m.
4. **Marnovitch Park** 120 Second St. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:45 – 1:45 p.m.
5. **San Andreas (new this year)** 259 San Andreas, Watsonville, Monday-Thursday 11:45 – 12:45 p.m.
6. **YMCA** 340 E. Beach St. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:15 – 1:15 p.m.
7. **Ramsay Park** 1301 Main St. Watsonville, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 12:15 – 1:15 p.m.
8. **Stonecreek Apartments** 300 Bree Ln. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
9. **YMCA- Pajaro Park** 27 San Juan Rd. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
10. **First Christian Church (new this year)** 15 Madison St. Watsonville, Monday-Friday 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
11. **Sunny Meadows (new this year)** 220 Ross Ave., Freedom, Tuesday-Friday 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

North County sites serve lunch Mondays through Fridays, from noon to 1 p.m. They include:

1. **Nueva Vista Community Resources (beach flats site)** 133 Leibrandt Ave., Santa Cruz
2. **Boys and Girls Club of Santa Cruz** 543 Center Street, Santa Cruz
3. **Nueva Vista Community Resources (lower ocean site)** 711 East Cliff Dr., Santa Cruz
4. **Santa Cruz Teen Center** 301 Center Street, Santa Cruz

ABOUT LA MANZANA COMMUNITY RESOURCES

La Manzana Community Resources is part of the Community Bridges family of programs. At La Manzana, our compassionate staff build a warm, friendly, safe place for the Pajaro Valley community to access resources that offer stability and hope for the future.

La Manzana is one of four family resource centers in the Community Bridges Family Resource Collective. The others are Live Oak Community Resources in Live Oak, Mountain Community Resources in Felton, and Nueva Vista Community Resources in Santa Cruz.