

Café, library team up to feed students during summer

BY HAYLIE SMART

Staff Writer

Even in a town like Owasso, there are still children and teens who wonder when they'll receive their next meal. And sometimes that meal doesn't have a lot of nutritional value.

That disappointing truth is what moved Executive Director Melinda Foster of OpenTable Community Café to find a way to feed students during the summer, when they're away from the promise of a school lunch.

"Hunger during the summer is a large problem," Foster said. "We want to provide sustenance for as many children and teens as possible."

When Foster was a pastor at OpenTable United Church of Christ, she learned that over 200 el-

ementary children were receiving weekend snacks to keep them from being hungry while school was out. Foster figured that even more than 200 children and their siblings were food-insecure as well.

"Being hungry during the summer is a much longer period of time to suffer," she said.

With the help of Eastern Oklahoma Community Food Bank and Target, the café is able to provide an entrée, drink, piece of fruit, chips and a small dessert to students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. This is the second year the Summer Lunch Program has reached children.

"Every day is different," Foster said. "Some days we serve soup and sandwiches, and other days we will

have lasagna, spaghetti or mac and cheese."

When choosing a location for children to enjoy a free lunch, Foster wanted a place that was central in Owasso and a place that children frequent. When she approached Owasso Library Manager Jennifer McQuade, the answer was a quick "yes."

"This program was a perfect fit for the library," McQuade said. "We're not just feeding their bodies, but also feeding their minds in the library when they check out books. It's a great partnership."

Although McQuade wishes the program could be offered every day, students can enjoy a meal at 11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday every week until Aug. 12.

Foster has learned that



Dawn Cooper and eighth grader Seth Merrill, left, serve a student at the Summer Lunch Program, held at the Owasso Library every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

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many children are left home during the day and have no form of transportation to the library.

"We have two ideas to expand," she said. "Work with Owasso Public Schools and/or purchase or work with someone who has a food truck, so we could go to five areas

of town, so more children could be served."

Cook Dawn Cooper prepares the meals, and with the help of volunteers, is able to serve 12 to 25 children each day of operation.

"I like the kids," said Hannah Robbins, a ninth grade volunteer. "They're fun to see. It's cool."

Anyone interested in volunteering at either OpenTable Community Café or at the library for the Summer Lunch Program can contact the café at 918-376-4947 or opentablecafeowasso@gmail.com.

"It takes the whole community to provide the answers," Foster said.

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