

# CHILDHOOD HUNGER

**IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA:  
AN OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT**



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
<b>I. Childhood Hunger in Mecklenburg County: An Overview.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Purpose of this Assessment	
Why are so Many Children in Mecklenburg County Food Insecure?	
Financial and Economic Factors	
Limited Access to High Quality Food	
Impact of Childhood Hunger on Children’s Health	
Impact of Childhood Hunger and Food Insecurity on Obesity Crisis	
Impact of Childhood Hunger and Food Insecurity on Educational Outcomes	
<b>II. Mecklenburg County Child Hunger Profile and Related Data.....</b>	<b>9</b>
General Population, Median Household Income, and Mecklenburg County Poverty	
Mecklenburg County and Distressed Urban Tracts	
Child Population and Poverty	
Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and Free and Reduced Meals Enrollment	
Mecklenburg County Food Insecurity Rate	
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Case Counts by Zip Codes	
<b>III. Economic Impact of Childhood Hunger.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>IV. Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Stakeholders .....</b>	<b>18</b>
National and State Stakeholders	
Mecklenburg County Stakeholders:	
<i>Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools</i>	
<i>Mecklenburg County Government</i>	
Department of Social Services	
Health Department	
<i>Food Banks and Pantries</i>	
Loaves & Fishes	
Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina	
Self-referral Food Pantries	
<b>V. Recommendations for Mecklenburg County: Collaboration and Communication for Sustainable Results.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>VI. Promising Practices from Other American Communities.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry Campaign	
Cooking Matters	
Cooking Matters at the Store	
Groceryships	
United Way of the Greater Triangle Innovative United Challenge	

After the Bell Legislation  
Hungry Tummy Café  
Kids Cruisin' Kitchens

VII. **Addendum: Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Stakeholders**.....28

National and State Stakeholders

Mecklenburg County Stakeholders:

*Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools*  
*Mecklenburg County Government*  
Department of Social Services  
Health Department

*Food Banks and Pantries*  
Loaves & Fishes  
Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina  
Self-referral Food Pantries

*Food Preparation and Distribution Organizations*  
Friendship Trays  
Friendship Gardens  
C. Ray and Cynthia M. Kennedy Foundation  
Society of St. Andrew

*Organizations Serving At-risk Children*

A Child's Place  
BELL  
Care Ring  
Charlotte Area Fund  
Child Care Programs  
Crisis Assistance Ministry  
Freedom School Partners  
Communities in Schools  
The Salvation Army  
YMCA  
YWCA

*Food-related Education and Advocacy Organizations*

Charlotte Action Research Project  
The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council  
Green Teacher Network

*Faith Community*

Mecklenburg Ministries

*Organizations Promoting Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Food Desert Areas*

Go-go fresco  
Sow Much Good

*Foundations/Funding Organizations*

United Way of Central Carolinas

VIII. **Acknowledgements**.....47



## Executive Summary

Food insecurity has emerged as a highly prevalent risk to the growth, health, cognitive, and behavioral potential of America's low-income children ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)). What exactly is food insecurity? The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines it as a household's lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle for all household members as well as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. A family experiencing food insecurity may appear to have enough food at times, but has scarcely stocked cupboards of cheap, empty calorie food at other times. Food insecurity not only affects the poorest, unemployed families. Many families who struggle to consistently put food on the table are fully employed, but in low paying jobs that require juggling bills and making choices about which necessities to prioritize until the next paycheck.

In a community where many see an abundance of resources (in addition to relenting information about childhood obesity), it is challenging to believe that there is a real, systemic problem. Despite regular media attention, billboards, and community engagement through food collection drives, hunger (and childhood hunger in particular) has been increasing in Mecklenburg County. This report documents the issue with data, trends, existing resources, and ideas for confronting the challenge.

### How bad is the childhood hunger problem in Mecklenburg County?

There were **242,487** children younger than age 18 in Mecklenburg County in 2012 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, March 2014).

Of these, **22.3 percent live in households at or below the federal poverty level**. (In Wake County the percentage of households at or below the federal poverty level is 15.4 percent.) Compare that to 2000, when the percentage of Mecklenburg County children living in households at or below the federal poverty level was 11.7 percent and in 2005 when that percentage was 15.9 percent. One in four residents lived in distressed neighborhoods in 2010, up from one in ten in 2000 (*Charlotte Observer*; Poverty Spreads Across Mecklenburg, North Carolina; August 2, 2014).

Mecklenburg County's childhood food insecurity rate was **22.3 percent** in 2012, compared to 21.6 percent during the same time period nationwide.

In July 2009, **22 percent** of Mecklenburg County children were receiving SNAP benefits; however, by July 2014, **31.4 percent** of all Mecklenburg County children younger than 18 years old were SNAP (food stamp) recipients. (In Wake County, 16.1 percent children younger than 18 received SNAP benefits during the same time period.)

CMS reported in November 2013 that 80,586 children (56.5 percent) were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Additional data indicates that only 20 percent of *eligible* children received free summer meals through CMS and 12 additional summer Mecklenburg-serving feeding sponsors in July 2014 (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, School Nutrition Services).

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps ([www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)) includes a Food Environment Index measure, a combination of food access *and* food insecurity. Mecklenburg County's Food Environment Index is 6.7, compared to the national high score of 8.7 (90<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the North Carolina average of 6.9 (scale of 1 for worst and 10 for best).

### **Why are 22.3% of Mecklenburg County children going hungry?**

- Children go hungry because their low-income families often find themselves having to make choices between paying the rent and utilities and purchasing food, especially healthy food.
- Nutritious, filling food is not always available or affordable, especially for families living in food deserts (neighborhoods with limited or no access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food).
- Food banks and food pantries attempt to provide as much fresh food as possible, but those often are the first food items to go and do not go far enough.

### **What are the implications to children of persistent food insecurity?**

In the youngest children (as well as for the fetus in the womb) hunger stunts physical development and impairs a wide variety of brain functions, often irreversibly and permanently.

Directly related to the childhood hunger crisis, the childhood obesity epidemic is reaching epic proportions. Childhood obesity among preschoolers is more prevalent among those from lower-income families (Centers for Disease Control, Childhood Obesity Facts, September 2014).

As hungry children enter elementary grades, they perform more poorly in school and have lower academic achievement because they are not well prepared for school and cannot concentrate.

Hungry children have more social and behavioral problems, as they feel bad, have less energy for complex social interactions, and cannot adapt as effectively to environmental stresses.

### **Suggestions for Strategically Addressing Childhood Hunger Crisis:**

- *Convene community leaders* to address the scope of the problem. Foundation For The Carolinas has indicated a willingness to initially convene community leaders from Mecklenburg County government, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations with an interest in childhood hunger and community collaboration.
- *Identify* the organization that will take the lead in moving the agenda of decreasing and ultimately eliminating childhood hunger in Mecklenburg County forward. Options include city or county department or operation, existing community organization, or new organization.

- Develop and articulate a *shared vision* and *consensus* around establishing a Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Council. This council will develop community-wide multi-faceted strategies to decrease and eliminate childhood hunger and malnutrition in Mecklenburg County and establish a timeline and benchmarks for measuring progress.
- Commit as stakeholders to *communicate and collaborate* solutions that are effective and efficient, regardless of organizational service boundary.
- *Present successful best practices* currently utilized in other similar urban American communities. Childhood hunger is not isolated to Mecklenburg Counties, and other communities with similar demographics have already implemented strategies from which one can learn.
- *Increase utilization of school breakfast, lunch, and summer meals*, market and provide outreach to the community about these meal opportunities, and work with community partners at non-CMS feeding sites to reach more children during out-of-school times.
- Increase grab-and-go breakfast stations and *help CMS strategize* about how to remove stigma and increase excitement and perceived importance of eating nutritious breakfasts and lunches.
- *Complete additional GIS mapping*, using data collected from organizations already involved in the effort, in order to identify specific neighborhoods in greatest need of assistance and to target strategies. Methodologies other communities and states have utilized to develop additional assessments and collaborative strategies are available through *No Kid Hungry*.
- Continue and expand *intentional conversations with those involved in operating both farmers' markets and community and school gardens*. Capitalize and expand on the community interest in gardening and eating fresh, local fruits and vegetables.
- *Increase education for families*, especially in low-income communities, on how to budget for, shop, and prepare nutritious food. Successful models (i.e. Cooking Matters, Cooking Matters at the Store, Groceryships, etc.) exist and are producing positive outcomes in other parts of the state and country.
- Create or *expand upon the community resource section* contained in the full report regarding the work of stakeholders around food insecurity issues and childhood hunger. Resources included in this report will be most helpful if expanded, maintained, and made available electronically for easy download and reference by both individuals and organizations.
- *Engage the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department in conversations* around hunger challenges in higher crime neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with more poverty are prone to higher crime rates. Additional research regarding urban communities with similar demographics will be beneficial.

As Mecklenburg County's post-recession economy continues to improve, the crisis of childhood hunger must be a high community priority. Every effort ought to be made to reduce and eliminate childhood hunger, both to make our children healthier and equipped for success, and to improve the community for its citizens and educational and economic development achievement.

## ***I. Childhood Hunger in Mecklenburg County: An Overview***

The “invisible problem” is an expression used by some to describe Mecklenburg County’s childhood hunger crisis. Typical images of starving children in third world countries with swollen, bloated bellies and emaciated arms and legs are not what hungry and malnourished children look like here. Yet it is not a truly hidden problem, given that more than *one in five* Mecklenburg County children lives in a household with food insecurity, a number that has increased over the past several years. Food insecurity refers to the United State Department of Agriculture’s measurement of a household’s lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods (Feeding America). A food insecure household may have enough food at times, but have scarcely stocked cupboards of cheap, empty calorie food at other times when money is tight. In a community where many see an abundance of resources as well as a childhood obesity crisis, it may be challenging to believe that there is a real problem. However, when children become ill at school, yet do not want to leave school to go home because they will miss their only opportunity to eat lunch (an actual situation that was described by a CMS employee), there is a tangible problem.

Mecklenburg County’s childhood food insecurity rate was 22.3 percent in 2012, compared to 21.6 percent during the same time period nationwide. According to 2012 USDA data, 15.9 million children younger than 18 in the United States live in this condition – unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life. Food insecurity, even at the least severe household levels, has emerged as a highly prevalent risk to the growth, health, cognitive, and behavioral potential of America’s poor and near poor children ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)).

### **Purpose of this Assessment**

While the local economy has improved, and childhood hunger-fighting campaigns have increased, childhood hunger remains a significant problem in Mecklenburg County. This report will document the most current childhood hunger-related data and statistics for Mecklenburg County and describe the work of national, state, and local organizations that influence the issue.

Ideas to help Mecklenburg County children be well nourished and food secure are shared and promising practices for addressing the crisis other communities have implemented are explored.

## Why are so Many Mecklenburg County Children Food Insecure?

### *Financial and Economic Factors:*

According to the National Employment Law Project, low-wage jobs represent nearly half of all jobs created as part of the recovery from the Great Recession. During the labor market downturn (measured from January 2008 to February 2010), employment losses occurred throughout the economy, but were concentrated in mid-wage and higher-wage industries. By contrast, during the recovery (measured from February 2010 to February 2014), employment gains were concentrated in lower-wage industries.

Children go hungry because their low-income (although employed) families often find themselves having to make choices between paying the rent and utilities and purchasing food, especially healthy

food. Even with government assistance in the form of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) families often make tradeoffs to secure essential household goods. The food stamp program was never intended to cover all of a family's needs, rather to supplement low wage incomes and help households rise above the challenge of making a living wage. In 2013, the average recipient in North Carolina received \$122 per month, hardly enough to eat a nutritious well-balanced diet for an entire month.



MORE THAN HALF THE FAMILIES THAT RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS TAKE JUST TWO WEEKS TO USE UP THEIR FULL BENEFIT. IN 2013, THE AVERAGE RECIPIENT IN N.C. RECEIVED \$122 PER MONTH.

Even with assistance programs in place, spikes in hunger happen toward the end of each month when food stamp and other government checks begin to run out. A 2011 report by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, which oversees the SNAP program, found that more than half the families that receive food stamps take just two weeks to use up their full benefit, making for lean times and dependency on food pantries and other charitable donations during the second half of the month. It is easy to comprehend how a family struggling to make ends meet would feel they have no other options than to choose cheap, empty calorie foods as opposed to high quality fresh foods, fruits, and vegetables.

Since 2006, a series of interrelated factors, including spikes in prices for food commodities and energy, major weather events, shocks to global commodity markets, and the U.S. economic recession and subsequent recovery, have caused price inflation for food to outpace many other consumer-spending categories. Between 2006 and 2013, the Consumer Price Index for food increased more than 21 percent. Only prices for medical care rose faster than food prices (USDA, Economic Research Division). When families find themselves making choices about spending limited resources, the food budget often has more flexibility than options such as housing, medicine, or transportation.

### *Limited Access to High Quality Food*

National statistics indicate that 80 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed at grocery stores (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org), June 2014); however, that is not always a feasible option, especially for families living in areas considered as food deserts. Food deserts



A HOUSEHOLD IMPACTED BY FOOD  
INSECURITY LACKS ACCESS TO ENOUGH  
FOOD FOR AN ACTIVE, HEALTHY LIFE FOR ALL  
HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AND LIMITED OR  
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ADEQUATE FOODS.

are defined by the USDA as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. In 2010, UNCC researchers identified 60

of Mecklenburg County's 373 census block groups as food deserts, where residents had very limited or no access to full-service grocery stores and farmers' markets (Mecklenburg County *Community Food Assessment 2010*, Elizabeth Racine, DrPH, RD; Qingfang Wang, PhD; Devonda Gomez; University of North Carolina at Charlotte). The most recent Charlotte Mecklenburg Quality of Life Dashboard indicates that only 38 percent of the county's population lives within one-half mile of a full service grocery store.

Food banks and food pantries, including those here in Charlotte, provide as much fresh food as possible, but those often are the first food items to go and do not go far enough. It is much easier to store shelf-stable, processed food than it is to store fresh food. In addition, even if fresh food were more readily available, recipients may not have the knowledge or kitchen equipment needed for its preparation. It is faster and easier to heat a can of processed pasta than it is to make a fresh salad or wash and cut fresh vegetables when there are other stressors weighing on these families, such as time and finances. It is likely that many low-income parents also grew up in poverty, eating poor quality diets, and are challenged to break the pattern of eating cheap, processed foods in order to make ends meet.

### **Impact of Childhood Hunger on Children's Health**

Children's brains are hardwired during the first five years of their lives, and if children are exposed to constant stressors of hunger and food insecurity, the damage is often irreversible. Poor nutrition weakens the immune system and undermines overall health. In the youngest children (as well as for the fetus in the womb) hunger stunts physical development and impairs a wide variety of brain functions, often irreversibly and permanently. Health problems such as asthma and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are made worse by child hunger with little chance to undo damage done during those years. In people of all ages, poor nutrition exacerbates the risks from a whole range of chronic illnesses such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, depression, and psychological problems. ([www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com), America is Facing a Hunger Crisis, October 7, 2013). Dr. Thomas Irons, associate vice chancellor at Brody School of

Medicine in Greenville, NC, claims that, even if you take a child at age seven or eight and make sure they have a nutritious and adequate food supply, negative effects of hunger and malnourishment of their early years will remain, especially in the areas of anxiety disorders and attention deficit disorder.

## Impact of Childhood Hunger and Food Insecurity on Obesity Crisis

What some find perplexing is that, even during the childhood hunger crisis, the childhood obesity

**CHILDHOOD OBESITY AMONG PRESCHOOLERS IS MORE PREVALENT AMONG THOSE FROM LOWER-INCOME FAMILIES (CDC).**

epidemic is also reaching epic proportions. Nationally, obesity among children two to 19 years old is about 17 percent and has not changed significantly since 2003-

2004. Childhood obesity among preschoolers is more prevalent among those from lower-income families (Centers for Disease Control, Childhood Obesity Facts, September 2014). And most people who are overweight are actually undernourished, with a diet that's high in calories but low in nutrients - a diet that is frequently the least expensive to maintain ([www.thefoodeffect.org](http://www.thefoodeffect.org)).

Families with young children are the group most likely to be food insecure. In turn, children whose families are food insecure are more likely to be at risk of overweight or obesity as compared to children whose families are food secure. Research found that if a family with young children experienced food insufficiency at any point during the child's toddler years, the child was 3.4 times more likely to be obese at 4.5 years old. This increase in risk was greater than the 2.5-fold risk increase associated with having an overweight or obese parent ([www.nokidhungry.org](http://www.nokidhungry.org)).

## Impact of Hunger and Food Insecurity on Educational Outcomes

National studies show that students who eat breakfast miss 1.5 fewer days of school per year, score 17.5 percent higher on math tests and are 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school. *Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation* (John Cook, PhD and Karen Jeng, AB, 2009) reports that hungry children ages birth to three years cannot learn as much, as fast, or as well because chronic under-nutrition harms their cognitive development during this critical period of rapid brain growth, actually changing the fundamental

neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system. As hungry children enter elementary grades, they perform more poorly in school and have

lower academic achievement because they are not well prepared for school and cannot concentrate. Furthermore, hungry children have more social and behavioral problems because

**HUNGRY CHILDREN AGES BIRTH TO THREE YEARS CANNOT LEARN AS MUCH, AS FAST, OR AS WELL BECAUSE CHRONIC UNDER-NUTRITION HARMS THEIR COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT DURING THIS CRITICAL PERIOD OF RAPID BRAIN GROWTH.**

they feel bad, have less energy for complex social interactions, and cannot adapt as effectively to environmental stresses. One study conducted in Chicago showed that disciplinary problems like fighting, vandalism and weapons possession among children in families that receive food stamps increased by almost 50 percent in the final week of the month compared with the first week after food stamps ran out ([www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com), American is Facing a Hunger Crisis, October 7, 2013).

## II. Mecklenburg County Child Hunger-Related Profile

### General Population, Median Household Income, and Poverty

	Mecklenburg County	North Carolina	Wake County
Population, 2013 Estimate	990,977	9,848,060	974,289
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2013	24.8	23.2	25.3
Median Household income, 2008-2012	\$55,961	\$46,450	\$65,826
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2008-2012	14.5	16.8	10.9

(Mecklenburg County QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau)

### Mecklenburg County and Distressed Urban Tracts

According to the most recent Center for Urban and Regional Studies report, *North Carolina's Distressed Urban Tracts: A View of the State's Economically Disadvantaged Communities*, four of the most economically distressed urban tracts in North Carolina are located in Mecklenburg County. When both rural and urban tracts are considered, four of the most economically distressed tracts in North Carolina are in Mecklenburg County. The rankings are calculated by taking the average of each tract's ranking on three criteria: poverty rate, per capita income, and unemployment.

Urban Tract Rank	Overall Rank (both urban and rural combined)	County	Neighborhood or Area
1	2	Mecklenburg	Lockwood
2	3	Mecklenburg	University City South and College Downs
3	4	Guilford	Leonard Ave.
4	5	Forsyth	Waughton and Columbia Heights
5	6	Mecklenburg	Grier Heights
6	8	Mecklenburg	Capitol Drive, Jackson Homes, and Boulevard
7	9	Wake	Central Raleigh and South Park
8	10	Forsyth	Northeast Winston
9	11	Forsyth	East Winston
10	11	Guilford	Cumberland

*Child Population and Poverty*

**There were 242,487 children younger than age 18 in Mecklenburg County in 2012** (Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, March 2014), representing 10.6 percent of the entire child population of North Carolina and a seven percent increase since 2008.

**Of these, 22.3 percent live in households at or below the federal poverty level.** Compare that to 2000, when the percentage of Mecklenburg County children living in households at or below the federal poverty level was 11.7 percent and in 2005 when that percentage was 15.9 percent. As a whole, 25.8 percent of all North Carolina children younger than 18 years old live in households at or below the federal poverty level. In Wake County that percentage is 15.4 percent.

*Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Enrollment and Free and Reduced Lunch Enrollment*

According to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), there were 142,612 children enrolled in the system (164 schools) in the 2012-2013 school year. CMS reported that 80,586 of these children (56.5 percent) were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (11/22/2013). This number is likely under-reported by families with students in middle school and high school because of perceived stigma or embarrassment.

Federal income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced school meals for July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015:

Household Size	ANNUAL INCOME		MONTHLY INCOME		WEEKLY INCOME	
	Free	Reduced Price	Free	Reduced Price	Free	Reduced Price
1	\$15,171	\$21,590	\$1,265	\$1,800	\$292	\$416
2	\$20,449	\$29,101	\$1,705	\$2,426	\$394	\$560
3	\$25,727	\$36,612	\$2,144	\$3,051	\$495	\$705
4	\$31,005	\$44,123	\$2,584	\$3,677	\$597	\$849
5	\$36,283	\$51,634	\$3,024	\$4,303	\$698	\$993
6	\$41,561	\$59,145	\$3,464	\$4,929	\$800	\$1,138
7	\$46,839	\$66,656	\$3,904	\$5,555	\$901	\$1,282
8	\$52,117	\$74,167	\$4,344	\$6,181	\$1,003	\$1,427

For each additional household member:

Add:	\$5,278	\$7,511	\$440	\$626	\$102	\$145
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The following chart compares CMS students enrolled in free and reduced lunches compared to Wake County, a comparable size school system, as well as three neighboring counties to Mecklenburg. The chart also tracks free and reduced lunch enrollment over five school years, spanning the time period as well as the recovery of the great recession. To be eligible for free lunch under the National School Lunch Act, students must live in households earning at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. To be eligible for reduced price lunch, students must live in households earning at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines. This data excludes charter schools.

### Percent of CMS Students Enrolled in Free and Reduced Lunch Program

County	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
<b>Mecklenburg</b>	47.9	48.8	53.3	51.7	54.0	56.8
<b>Wake</b>	33.3	33.0	37.1	36.5	38.6	34.8
<b>Cabarrus</b>	33.4	35.1	38.5	40.3	48.3	42.9
<b>Gaston</b>	48.9	54.2	57.6	58.9	59.9	61.5
<b>Union</b>	30.3	30.3	35.7	34.3	36.1	35.8

(Kids Count Data Center, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014)

(2012-2013 percentages are from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Child Nutrition Services, Free and Reduced Student Data by Site)

During summer 2013, of the 80,586 children with documented eligibility, only 9,000 (11 percent) actually received summer meals through CMS. During July 2014, CMS served approximately the same number of lunches at CMS school locations in addition to approximately 3,000 meals per day at other community sites through its picnic bag lunches.

According to the UNC School of Government (Dr. Maureen Berner, 2013), 79 percent of children eligible for free and reduced lunch are actually getting lunch, while only 35 percent of eligible children are actually getting free and reduced price school breakfast.

Additional data indicates that 20 percent of eligible children received free summer meals through CMS and 12 additional summer feeding sponsors in July 2014 (N.C. Department of Public Instruction, School Nutrition Services).

Month	Number of Sponsors	Number of Sites	Total number of lunches served	Total number of children served	County total number of eligible children	% of needy children receiving summer meals
June 2014	11	213	114,673	13,829	81,632	17
July 2014	13	223	331,694	16,509	81,632	20

An alarming amount of federal funding available to CMS to feed children remains underutilized in Mecklenburg County. An estimate of the amount of funding available but not utilized by CMS for children who qualify but do not participate in meals is:

- **\$88,418**/school day for free and reduced price school lunch.
- **\$47,482**/school day for free and reduced price school breakfast.
- **\$200,658** for summer lunch.

### **Mecklenburg County Food Insecurity Rate**

The food insecurity rate is the percentage of children in a geographic area who lack adequate food for an active, healthy life on a consistent basis. Nationally, the most recent food insecurity rate among children is 21.6 percent (2012), while **Mecklenburg County's** food insecurity rate among children **for the same year was 22.3 percent**. (Of all ages, Mecklenburg County's overall food insecurity rate was 18.1 percent.) In 2009 the Mecklenburg child food insecurity rate was 23.9 percent, decreasing slightly to 22 percent in 2010, but increasing again in both 2011 and 2012, the most recent year available ([feedingamerica.org/mapthegap](http://feedingamerica.org/mapthegap)).

The upswing is likely attributed to the increase in individuals and households living in poverty in Mecklenburg County during the same time period. The number of Mecklenburg County residents living in poverty increased 5.28 percentage points from 2000 to 2010 (from 9.2 percent to 14.48 percent). One in four residents lived in distressed neighborhoods in 2010, up from one in ten in 2000 (*Charlotte Observer*; Poverty Spreads Across Mecklenburg, North Carolina; August 2, 2014).

Of the 52,380 children who are food insecure, an estimated 38 percent were income *ineligible* for federal nutrition programs due to household income, evidence that many families who are having a hard time consistently putting food on the table are employed. Even though an estimated 62 percent of food-insecure children in Mecklenburg County are eligible for federal nutrition programs, generally only 75 percent of eligible individuals participate, due to factors ranging from lack of awareness about the program, the realization that they are eligible, or embarrassment they anticipate by applying.

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps ([www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)) includes a Food Environment Index measure, which is a combination of food access *and* food insecurity. Mecklenburg County's Food Environment Index is 6.7, compared to the national high score of 8.7 (90<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the North Carolina average of 6.9 (scale of 1 for worst and 10 for best).

	Limited Access to Healthy Foods (%)	Food Insecurity (%)	Food Environment Index
Range in North Carolina	0-26	11-28	4.4 - 8.7
Overall in North Carolina	7	19	6.9
Mecklenburg County	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6.7</b>
Wake County	4	15	7.7
Union County	4	13	8.3
Cabarrus County	6	15	7.5
<b>Other Counties Outside N.C.</b>			
Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa)	7	17	7
Travis County, Texas (Austin)	8	18	7
Baltimore County, MD (Baltimore)	3	12	9
Hennepin County, MN (Minneapolis)	5	12	8.3
Henrico County, VA (Richmond)	4	13	8.3

Mecklenburg’s 6.7 score is based on seven percent limited access to healthy foods combined with 19 percent food insecurity (Map the Meal Gap, 2011). Food insecurity represents the percentage of the total population without access to a reliable source of food during the past year. Limited access to healthy foods captures the proportion of the population who are low-income and do not live close to a grocery store. Living close to a grocery store is defined as living less than one mile for non-rural areas. Low-income is defined as having an annual family income of less than or equal to 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold for the family size (County Health Rankings).

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) provides a safety net for America’s low-income population and aims to alleviate hunger and improve the nutritional status of participants by increasing the resources available to individuals and households to purchase food. It is the USDA’s largest food assistance program. Nationally, nearly 50 percent of SNAP beneficiaries are children, and 49 percent of America’s youth will be enrolled in SNAP before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday (*Snap to Health: A Fresh Approach to Strengthening the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress’s Health and Medicine Program). Households must meet income tests unless all members are receiving Title IV (TANF), Supplemental Security Income, or in some places general assistance.

Most households must meet both the gross and net income tests, but a household with an elderly person or a person who is receiving certain types of disability payments only has to meet the net income test. Gross income means a household's total, non-excluded income, before any deductions have been made. Net income means gross income minus allowable deductions.

Households, except those noted, that have income over the amounts listed below do not qualify for SNAP benefits. ([www.fns.usda.gov/snap/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/))

**Income Chart for SNAP Eligibility** (Oct. 1, 2013 through Sept. 30, 2014)

Household size	Gross monthly income (130% of poverty)	Net monthly income (100% of poverty)	Maximum Monthly Benefit (November 2013)
1	\$1,245	\$958	\$189
2	\$1,681	\$1,293	\$347
3	\$2,116	\$1,628	\$497
4	\$2,552	\$1,963	\$632
5	\$2,987	\$2,298	\$750
6	\$3,423	\$2,633	\$900
7	\$3,858	\$2,968	\$995
8	\$4,294	\$3,303	\$1,137
Each additional member	\$436	\$335	\$142

**In the best case scenario, an individual who qualifies for the maximum SNAP benefit would receive the equivalent of \$6.27 per day. The average monthly SNAP benefit paid to North Carolina recipients in 2013 was \$121.85 (\$4.02 per day).**

SNAP - July 2014:

- There were 76,362 SNAP cases in Mecklenburg County, representing 161,982 individual recipients (16.3 percent of county population).
- 76,263 of the recipients were children younger than 18 years old (47 percent of all Mecklenburg SNAP recipients).
- **31.4 percent of all Mecklenburg County children younger than 18 years old were SNAP recipients.**
- 16.1 percent (39,173) of Wake County children younger than 18 received SNAP benefits in the same time period.

SNAP - June 2009:

- 12 percent of Mecklenburg County residents were receiving SNAP benefits (now 16.3 percent).
- 22 percent of Mecklenburg County children were receiving SNAP benefits (now 31.4 percent).
- Mecklenburg County population was 918,055 residents (990,977 in 2013).  
(*New York Times*, Food Stamp Usage across the Country, November 28, 2009)

**Mecklenburg County Child SNAP Participation, 2001-2014**

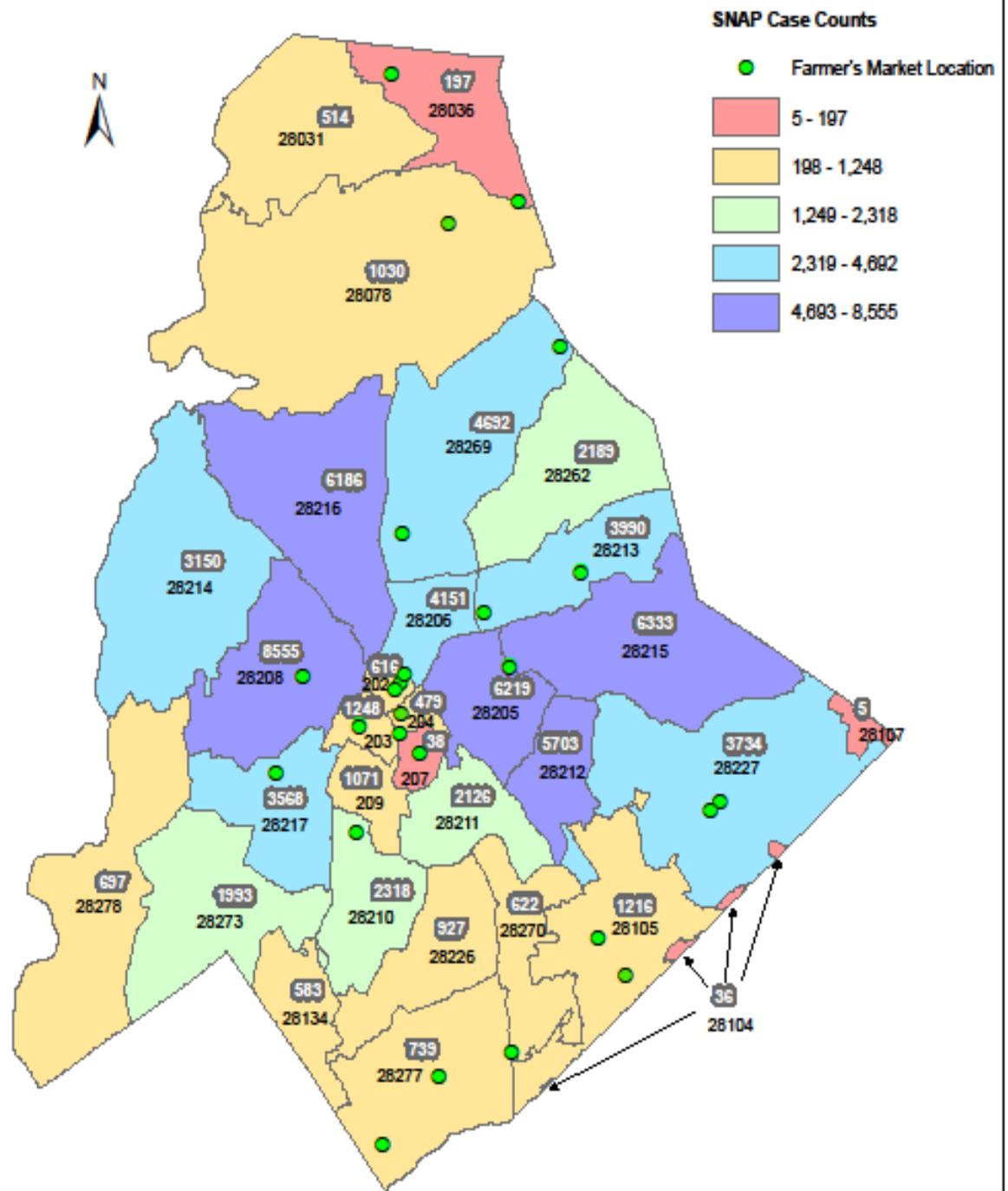
<b>Mecklenburg County</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Children &lt;18, SNAP Participants</b>	18,690	32,067	34,268	37,306	53,453	67,970	76,263
<b>Children &lt;18 Population *</b>	174,249	207,842	226,646	234,789	234,954	237,313	245,762
<b>% of Children &lt;18 on SNAP</b>	11	15	15	16	23	29	31

(\*2014 Child population data reflects 2013 estimate, the latest estimate available.)

Source: Child Care Resources Inc., Mecklenburg County Early Care & Education Demographics Report, December 2006, December 2007, June 2009, and December 2012; and Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services.

The following map indicates the zip codes in which Mecklenburg SNAP recipients live and where farmers' markets are also located. Several zip codes with high concentration of residents receiving SNAP have no farmers' markets nearby.

# Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Case Counts by Zip Code Area



Notes:  
The locations of 3 of the 24 farmer's markets are approximated.

\*SNAP refers to NC's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)

Map prepared by RPE  
Mecklenburg County DSS  
July 2014



## *Economic Impact of Childhood Hunger*

While Mecklenburg County specific data does not currently exist, nationally, hunger costs at least \$167.5 billion per year due to:

- lost economic productivity;
- more expensive public education due to rising costs of poor education outcomes;
- avoidable health care costs; and
- cost of aid organizations to keep families fed.

Those costs include:

**\$130.5 billion:** Illness costs linked to hunger and food insecurity in America.

**\$19.2 billion:** Value of poor educational outcomes and lower lifetime earnings linked to hunger and food insecurity in America.

**17.8 billion:** Value of charitable contributions to address hunger and food insecurity in America. ([www.nokidhungry.org](http://www.nokidhungry.org))

Children's Health Watch, a nonpartisan pediatric research center, identified the following economic factors related to childhood hunger in addition to the health and development factors previously discussed:

1. Childhood hunger insecurity is associated with poor child health, delayed development, and decreased intellectual and emotional readiness to start kindergarten.
2. Food insecurity negatively impacts school engagement and behavior at each educational level, hurting a child's chances of graduating from high school.
3. Food-insecure children are at higher risk of growing into unhealthy adults.
4. Adult food insecurity is associated with poor physical and mental health, burdening families economically and harming children's development.
5. Food insecurity is an expensive public health problem. Childhood and adult food insecurity increase immediate and future costs to private businesses and taxpayers. In the past two decades, chronic conditions associated with child and adult food insecurity – diabetes, obesity, hypertension, heart disease, etc. – have been primary contributors to increased Medicare costs.

Childhood food insecurity creates additional future costs as it diminishes educational attainment, reduces adults' capacity to secure gainful employment, and increases costs of unemployment insurance (Children's HealthWatch Research Brief, *Feeding our Human Capital: Food Insecurity and Tomorrow's Workforce*).

### *III. Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Stakeholders*

A number of key stakeholders advocate for, feed, and otherwise serve Mecklenburg County children. Following are some of those organizations and agencies, both nationally and locally, that are resources in the fight against childhood hunger. More detailed resource information and additional resources are included in the addendum.

#### **National and State Stakeholders**

**Share Our Strength** originated in 1984, in response to the 1984-1985 famine in Ethiopia. The strategic focus on ending childhood hunger in the United States began in 2004 and the **No Kid Hungry** campaign began in 2008. In September 2011, Share Our Strength partnered with the North Carolina Governor's office and other hunger leaders in North Carolina to launch No Kid Hungry North Carolina.

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#### **Mecklenburg County**

The following organizations are Mecklenburg County-based and are involved in educating, feeding, providing services to and/or serving children in some other way to become healthy and successful.

#### ***PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM***

**Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools** is the second largest school district in North Carolina, enrolling 142,612 children during the 2012-2013 school year in 164 schools.

CMS participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a federally assisted meal program operating in more than 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions.

CMS serves approximately 30,000 breakfasts, 94,000 lunches, and 8,500 afterschool snacks daily. Its Child Nutrition Services department operates year-round, and fed approximately 7,200 breakfasts and 12,100 lunches daily during July 2014 at both CMS school locations and community sites.

#### ***MECKLENBURG COUNTY GOVERNMENT***

**Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services** administers Mecklenburg County's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. Funding comes from the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. SNAP provides food assistance to households with limited income and resources.

**Mecklenburg County Health Department** is involved in child nutrition through several of its departments and functions:

1. **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.
2. **School nurses** work in all CMS schools, and provide health care to students and staff, perform health screenings and coordinate referrals to a student's medical home or private healthcare provider.
3. A **school health nutritionist** works with CMS students who need more intensive nutrition intervention. Either the school nurses or a child's pediatrician refers students for individual counseling, group education, and family education nights at school.
4. **Nutrition and Physical Activity Services** include community education initiatives aimed at encouraging Mecklenburg County citizens to lead a healthy lifestyle, including its Healthy Weight Healthy Child initiative, which is working to reverse the pediatric obesity trend in Mecklenburg County.

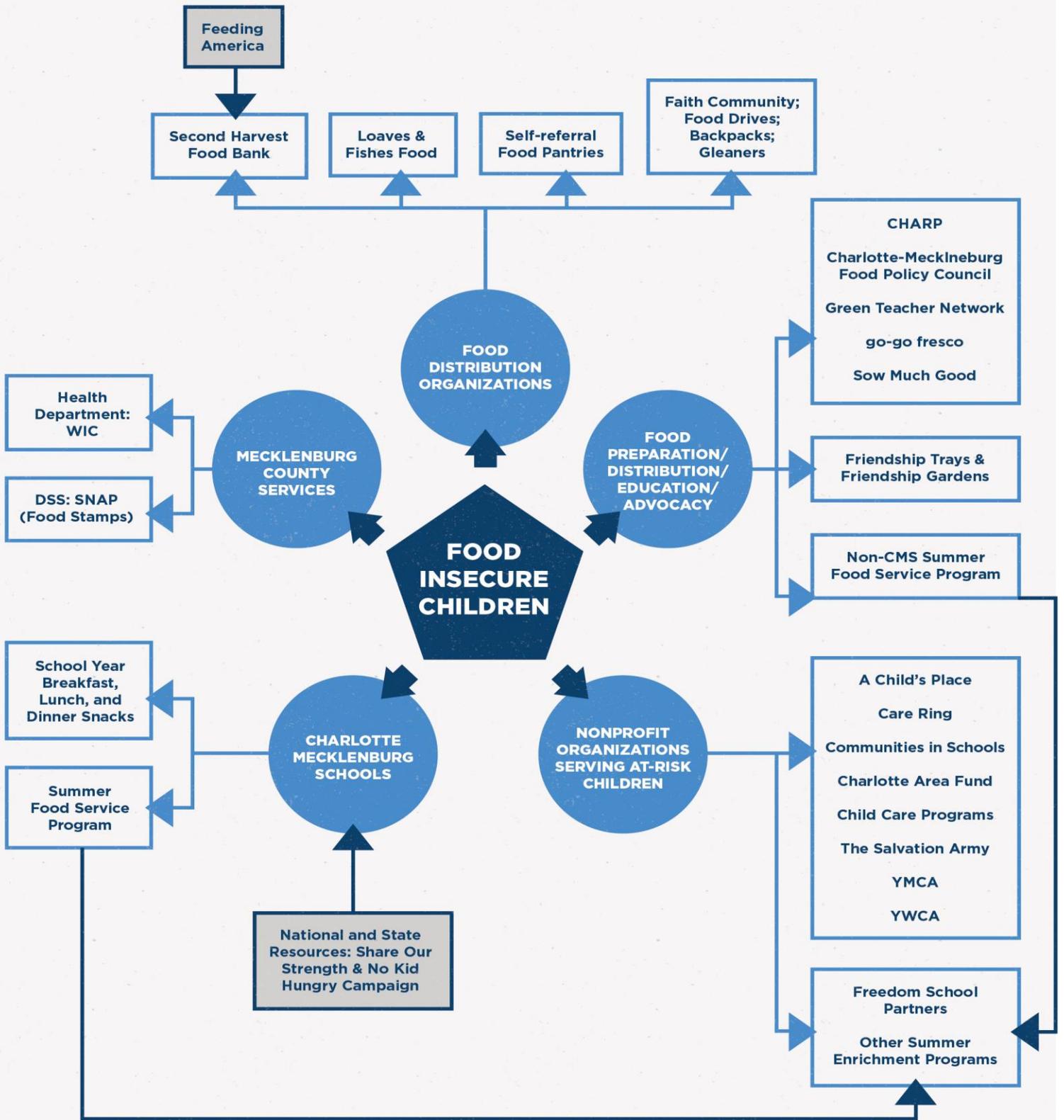
### ***Food Banks and Pantries***

**Loaves & Fishes** is a nonprofit emergency food pantry that provides a week's worth of nutritious groceries to individuals and families when in a short-term crisis and who have a place to prepare the food. Loaves and Fishes was founded and operated by local religious congregations and community organizations and grew out of an effort in 1975 at Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in response to the growing hunger problem in Mecklenburg County.

**Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina** is one of six food banks in North Carolina and one of four in South Carolina and is the major source of food for 650 food pantries, emergency shelters, and other organizations that distribute food in 19 counties. Second Harvest Food Bank is headquartered in Charlotte and distributes to 200 agencies in Mecklenburg County alone. Founded in 1981, it is a member of Feeding America, a network of more than 200 food banks and food rescue programs in the United States.

**Self-referral Food Pantries:** In addition to Loaves & Fishes food pantries there a number of self-referral food pantries operating in Mecklenburg County. Pantry locations and eligibility criteria is maintained by the Department of Social Services for distribution to nonprofit organizations that work with low-income clients.

# Key Resources in Mecklenburg County That Address Food Insecurity



#### ***IV. Recommendations for Mecklenburg County: Collaboration and Communication for Sustainable Results***

A determined and collaborative countywide plan will be an important step to address the challenge of reducing and irradiating Mecklenburg County childhood hunger and food insecurity and to improve the overall nourishment of all children.

##### **Educate and Engage Community**

In a community with the financial resources of Mecklenburg County, there *is no excuse for a crisis of childhood hunger*. While nonprofit organizations, individuals, and businesses are concerned about hunger and the childhood hunger crisis in Mecklenburg County, efforts are often in silos with too little collaboration across the community. Silos exist not because of lack of concern, but rather lack of communication and resources (time and financial). Mecklenburg County needs to rally as a community to eradicate childhood hunger as quickly as possible.

##### **Convene, Collaborate, and Communicate**

The Foundation For The Carolinas will convene community leaders to determine a countywide response and strategy. As a respected and neutral organization, the FFTC is poised to facilitate conversation and next steps that are collaborative and bridge agencies. Creation of a Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Council will be vital to strategize countywide strategies and to decide collectively an appropriate organization or agency to take on the lead role in the efforts. This group will be comprised of a broad cross section of stakeholders, including leaders from Mecklenburg County Government, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, Health Department, Department of Social Services, Second Harvest Food Bank, Loaves and Fishes, the medical community, UNC Charlotte, child-serving nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith congregations, farmers' markets, and civic groups concerned about the crisis of childhood hunger in Mecklenburg County.

While this report is a first step in documenting needs and existing resources, it will be most effective long-term if it continues to expand, to ensure that information to inform strategies is as comprehensive and useful as possible. Additional GIS mapping, using data collected from existing organizations involved in the effort, would be beneficial in targeting next steps. *No Kid Hungry* has information available about methods that other communities and states have utilized to create additional assessments and develop collaborative strategies. Quantifying the economic impact to Mecklenburg County specifically could be a beneficial strategy for additional engagement by the corporate and business community.

##### **Increase Community Access to Healthy Food**

Strategies to decrease the number of Mecklenburg food deserts and make sure that all citizens have ready access to fresh foods are necessary for sustaining efforts to both decrease childhood hunger and increase healthy outcomes. The City of Charlotte is already engaged in dialogues regarding food deserts, and continued planning will be vital to the aforementioned Childhood Hunger Council and its recommended stakeholders. UNCC researchers have identified food

desert locations in Mecklenburg County, an important step toward ensuring adequate access to high quality and fresh food needs. Expanded conversations with those involved in operating both farmers' markets as well as increased support for community and school gardens will be vital.

A community resource guide that documents the work of various stakeholders around food insecurity issues and childhood hunger will be a valuable (albeit time consuming) resource. The resource section included in this report is a good starting point, but will continue to be relevant if expanded, maintained, and made available electronically for easy download and reference by both individuals and organizations. For example, many, if not most, congregations are involved in the issue of hunger through food pantries (other than Loaves & Fishes), weekend backpack programs (both connected to as well as unaffiliated with Second Harvest Food Bank), food drives, holiday food boxes, community gardens, etc. but there is no single resource that documents those efforts.

### **Assist CMS with Efforts to Increase School Meal Utilization**

CMS officials indicate a commitment to increasing utilization of school breakfast, lunch, and now dinner snacks, but lack the resources necessary to market and provide outreach to the community regarding these meal opportunities. More aggressive and focused strategies to make breakfast utilization more accessible (and eliminate the stigma associated with eating school breakfast) to document, by school, resources that exist for each school. This obviously requires buy-in and enthusiasm from the entire school, from administration to food service personnel to instructional staff to decide that breakfast is important and necessary in order for children to prepare for a productive school day. Exploring ideas from other similarly sized school systems of best practices could provide insight on building such enthusiasm in CMS.

In addition, engaging community partners and providing technical assistance to assist in the implementation of successful summer feeding programs will increase participation at those sites. The Childhood Hunger Council will work with CMS on outreach and marketing ideas and increased utilization for school-year breakfast participation as well as summer food service program participation. A volunteer childhood hunger coordinator at each CMS school will assist in the effort to make sure school faculty and personnel know of available resources and serve as a liaison between the schools and the outside food and nutrition resources (food bank, food pantries, and corporate sources).

### **Coordinate Efforts with Law Enforcement in Unsafe Neighborhoods**

A challenge of decreasing food insecurity in low-income neighborhoods is that of reaching children in communities that are in food deserts where there is also increased crime. The issues typically go hand in hand, as areas of poverty are prone to more crime. If schools are in lockdown on a regular basis during the school year, it is unrealistic to expect children who live in high crime neighborhoods to leave their homes in the summer for food, even within a short walking distance. Additional research into what other similar urban communities are doing to protect children as well as feed them will be beneficial. Engaging law enforcement in conversations around hunger challenges will be vital. As different areas of the county have their own unique characteristics, challenges, and resources, working with each of the municipalities as well as the city of Charlotte will maximize efficiencies and effectiveness of targeted strategies.

## V. *Promising Practices from Other American Communities*

### **Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry Campaign**

Locally, area restaurateurs have been involved in fundraising for Share Our Strength's NKH campaign, through Taste of the Nation and other special dinners. On September 20, Tom Sasser (of Harper's Group) hosted a dinner to benefit No Kid Hungry at Mimosa's Grill in Charlotte that featured four renowned chefs from the southeast, with proceeds going to No Kid Hungry.

*Cooking Matters* are hands-on courses that empower families with the skills to be self-sufficient in the kitchen. Participants and volunteer instructors come together each week to share lessons and meals with each other.

Courses meet for two hours, once a week for six weeks and are team-taught by a volunteer chef and nutrition educator. Lessons cover meal preparation, grocery shopping, food budgeting and nutrition. Participants practice fundamental food skills, including proper knife techniques, reading ingredient labels, cutting up a whole chicken, and making a healthy meal for a family of four on a \$10 budget. Adults and teens take home a bag of groceries after each class so they can practice the recipes taught that day.

Community partners that serve low-income families offer six-week *Cooking Matters* courses to adults, kids and families. (To date, the only *Cooking Matters* classes in Mecklenburg County were prior to 2014 and delivered by Inter Faith Food Shuttle out of Raleigh.) Share Our Strength provides seven specialized curricula that cover nutrition and healthy eating, food preparation, budgeting and shopping. *Cooking Matters'* culinary and nutrition volunteers teach these courses at a variety of community-based agencies—including Head Start centers, housing centers and after-school programs—with neighborhood locations that make it easy for families to attend.

*Cooking Matters at the Store* is based on its 20 years of experience serving low-income families in hands-on cooking courses. Courses typically include a field trip to the grocery store, which always proves to be eye opening for participants. In 2010, Share Our Strength spun off the grocery store tour into a stand-alone program, *Cooking Matters at the Store* (formerly *Shopping Matters*). Any individual, in any community, anywhere people shop for food, can lead tours. It includes two specialized curricula - one for adults and one for WIC (Women, Infants and Children) parents.

During the 1.5 hour-tour, participants are empowered with four key food skills:

1. Reading food labels
2. Comparing unit prices
3. Finding whole grain foods
4. Identifying three ways to purchase produce

*Cooking Matters at the Store* often ends in a \$10 Challenge, an activity where participants use the skills they have learned to buy a healthy meal for a family of four, for under \$10.

Participants take home a booklet with recipes and shopping tips, a reusable grocery bag, and \$10 worth of healthy groceries.

Inter-Faith Food Shuttle in Raleigh delivers both Cooking Matters and Cooking Matters at the Store classes in the Triangle, and reports that, after a course, adult and teen graduates report that:

- 64 percent are eating more vegetables
- 70 percent are eating more fruits
- 52 percent are eating more whole grains
- 83 percent improved their cooking skills
- 97 percent would share things learned in this course with others

### **Groceryships**

Similar to Cooking Matters at the Store, Groceryships is a relatively new program in Los Angeles. For six months, ten South L.A. families receive weekly allowance to spend on plant-based groceries, in the form of gift cards allowing them to buy fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, seeds, and nuts. In addition to financial help, the families attend weekly classes on health, nutrition, and cooking, focusing mainly on plant-based foods. They also receive assistance, including “group support, a peer-buddy system, and mentoring.” The program is based on the idea that healthy eating is a spectrum and it is usually possible to find something better to eat than fast food and junk food, even in under-resourced areas. The program has plans to expand to New York City in 2015. (civileats.com)

### **United Way of the Greater Triangle (Durham, Johnston, Orange, and Wake counties) *Innovate United Challenge – 100,000 Kids Hungry No More***

United Way of the Greater Triangle (UWGT) is committed to addressing the challenge of childhood hunger in the Triangle (an area that has less food insecurity than Mecklenburg County). In May UWGT announced a competition aimed at reducing childhood hunger in the Triangle area with the winning idea receiving \$50,000. “The *Innovate United Challenge – 100,000 Kids Hungry No More* challenged the community to innovate and create solutions with a lasting impact towards addressing childhood hunger.

Four finalists were announced in July:

- **Durham Public School System** to innovate the way breakfast reaches students
- A new way to engage shoppers with **Pennies 4 Progress** developed by NC State students
- **Grocers on Wheels**, a creative idea to overcome food deserts
- **Urban Ministries of Wake County** partnered with two socially conscious entrepreneurs to create efficiencies by streamlining food distribution.

The finalists were chosen from a group of 12 semi-finalists selected from the original 40 applications received.

Each semi-finalist team presented their idea in front of a panel of judges that included business

and community leaders, entrepreneurs, along with food industry and nutrition experts. The proposals were evaluated on social impact, break-through potential, feasibility, sustainability, and scalability.

The finalists engaged in a five-week accelerator where they received mentoring and professional assistance to continue to develop their ideas. They made final presentations of their ideas during the UWGT's CEO Sleep Out on September 11, 2014 and the winner was announced in mid-September.

Child Nutrition Services of Durham Public Schools was selected by a panel of five judges to receive the \$50,000 award in the Social Innovation Challenge—100,000 Kids Hungry No More. Their innovative approach to delivering breakfast to all students will enable more students to receive a morning meal, eliminate the stigma associated with “free and reduced cost meals,” and directly impact educational success. By making breakfast free for all students and delivering meals to classrooms, they anticipate that the investment will impact more than 2,500 students immediately with expected growth over three years to impact 25,000 students daily. With the award, Child Nutrition Services plans to outfit five schools with equipment that will allow for breakfast in the classroom, second chance breakfast, grab and go meals, and food kiosks.

### **After the Bell Legislation (Colorado)**

Many school districts and schools across Colorado have implemented a breakfast after-the-bell nutrition program in elementary, middle and high schools with great success. Breakfast after-the-bell is intended to enable schools and school districts to design a breakfast-serving model that fits the needs of the students, staff and school. The meals are easy to serve and designed to make little or no mess and minimal disposal. Typical breakfast after-the-bell options include:

- Breakfast in the Classroom: Food is delivered by staff, students or volunteers to each classroom after school begins and students are permitted to eat breakfast in the classroom.
- Grab and Go: Students pick-up bagged or boxed breakfast from carts or specified areas and are permitted to eat in either designated areas or the classroom.
- Breakfast After First: An extended passing or breakfast period is offered in the cafeteria, following the first or second period of the day.
- Other options include serving breakfast during an early recess or outdoor lesson. As long as breakfast is offered to all students after the instructional day has begun, schools and districts have great flexibility in serving breakfast after-the-bell.

### **Hungry Tummy Café, Brunswick County, NC**

Brunswick County, NC found a fun and innovative way to ensure children are well fed during the summer. Hungry Tummy Café is a summer food service initiative that provides free mobile meal service for all children up to age 18. Three buses make three stops each weekday in different communities throughout the county. School leaders said the mobile summer meals program gives them the opportunity to reach more hungry students. By July 29, 2014, they had served nearly 13,000 lunches, more than doubling where they were at the same time

in 2013. Every department within the operations division of Brunswick County Schools helped bring the concept to life, using a retired yellow school bus named ‘Yummy’ decked out in robust colors and a friendly caterpillar mascot. Children can also find a variety of books on board, in English and Spanish. The school district reported spending about \$8,000 to retrofit the bus (Time Warner Cable News).

Nationally, mobile feeding units have gained momentum and have proven successful in getting food directly to children where they live. Programs similar to the one in Brunswick County, N.C. have begun in places like Sarasota, Florida; New York, New York; Dallas, TX; and northeast Tennessee.

### **Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen, Nebraska and Iowa**

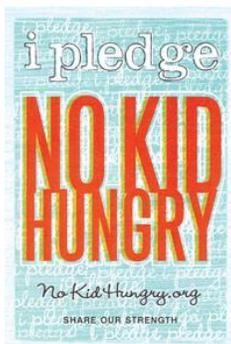
In 2011, The Salvation Army, Food Bank for the Heartland, and Hunger Free Heartland (HFH) joined forces to bring free, nutritious summer meals to children in underserved neighborhoods. Instead of asking the children to walk, Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen delivers hot meals to places where children already congregate such as pools, parks, and apartment complexes. They use food bank trucks (sponsored by ConAgra Foods Foundation) and Salvation Army Disaster Relief vehicles to bring meals to kids in need and receive federal funding through the SFSP and through local sponsors.

HFH utilizes a vended model, where hot food is purchased daily from a food vendor and delivered to the trucks. The vendor unloads the food, checks it in, and loads it onto the Salvation Army trucks each morning. The vendor then picks up the empty food containers the next day. HFH acknowledges that serving hot meals is more logistically challenging, but continues to do so considering that this will be the only hot meal of the day for many of the children.

## VI. *Addendum: Mecklenburg County Childhood Hunger Stakeholders*

### National and State Stakeholders

**Share Our Strength** originated in 1984, in response to the 1984-1985 famine in Ethiopia. Brother and sister Bill and Debbie Shore started the organization with the belief that everyone has a strength to share in the global fight against hunger and poverty, and that in these shared strengths lie sustainable solutions. The strategic focus on ending childhood hunger in the United States began in 2004 and they unveiled the **No Kid Hungry** campaign in 2008. In September 2011, Share Our Strength partnered with the North Carolina Governor's office and other hunger leaders in North Carolina to launch No Kid Hungry North Carolina. Its first program focus areas included increasing participation in school breakfast and summer meals programs. It does this through outreach and advocacy and some grants to assist schools in innovating ways to increase participation, such as *Grab and Go* mobile breakfast stations. It has assisted CMS with grant money and technical assistance for mobile breakfast carts in order to increase breakfast participation at locations in the schools that are more convenient for students than going to the cafeteria.



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### Mecklenburg County

The following organizations are Mecklenburg County-based and are involved in educating, feeding, providing services to and/or serving children in some other way to become healthy and successful. Most of the information was documented through face-to-face meetings with organizational leadership; however, when that was not possible, information was collected via telephone, email, and/or additional independent research.

#### ***PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM***

**Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools** is the second largest school district in North Carolina, enrolling 142,612 children during the 2012-2013 school year in 164 schools.

CMS participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a federally assisted meal program operating in more than 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. NSLP provided nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more

than 31 million children each school day in 2012. In 1998, Congress expanded the NSLP to include reimbursement for snacks served to children in afterschool educational and enrichment programs to include children through 18 years of age.

The Food and Nutrition Service of the USDA administers the program at the Federal level. At the State level, the NSLP is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, which operates the program through an agreement with CMS.

CMS serves approximately 30,000 breakfasts, 94,000 lunches, and 8,500 afterschool snacks daily. Its Child Nutrition Services department operates year-round, and fed approximately 7,200 breakfasts and 12,100 lunches daily during July 2014 at both CMS school locations and community sites.

### **School Breakfast Participation**

CMS implemented free universal breakfast for all students in the 2013-2014 school year. Participation increased slightly, but remained relatively low. In an attempt to understand and increase breakfast utilization among CMS students, researchers at the UNC School of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention utilized a grant funded by the Aetna Foundation and partnered with three CMS elementary schools: Pinewood, Montclair, and Berryhill. In spring 2014, researchers held a series of planning meetings with the principals and cafeteria managers and staff from the three schools, and then gathered data from teachers, parents, and students to inform specific goals and strategies for each school. In July, they met again with each principal to share the data, set goals, and select from a menu of strategies, including programming and support for cafeteria staff, teachers, and parents. The plan was to implement strategies in the coming weeks and over the first couple of months of the 2014-2015 school year, and then collect follow-up data to evaluate the impact.

The survey was administered electronically to 246 fifth graders at the three schools as they visited the media labs as part of their regular schedule. Researchers reported that the online survey was a useful tool in gathering information directly from students. Data collected from student surveys provided principals a closer look at what was happening with their students:

- **One third of fifth graders surveyed reported not having eaten breakfast on the morning of the survey.**
- **More than half (53 percent) reported skipping at least once in a typical week.**
- Twenty percent reported skipping breakfast four to five times per week.
- Thirty-five percent reported drinking a sugar-sweetened beverage at breakfast.
- Sixty-five percent of fifth graders reported that there wasn't enough time to eat breakfast at school.
- Thirty-one percent reported that it was embarrassing to eat breakfast at school, indicating a lingering stigma attached to eating breakfast at school, as doing so was previously associated with only low-income children.
- **In addition, 25 percent of parents surveyed reported that they did not know breakfast was free for all children.**

Based on this data and concerns about long lines at breakfast, all three principals expressed interest in implementing a *Grab and Go* breakfast. *Grab and Go* breakfasts are packaged in paper bags, boxes or trays. Students can pick up their *Grab and Go* breakfast from the cafeteria or from carts located in the hallway, school entrance, or other high traffic areas. Students can pick up the breakfast and, depending on policies set by each school, can eat it in the cafeteria, outside, in the hall, or take it to their classroom to eat there. At Montclair and Berryhill, principals wanted to make this option available for all students. At Pinewood, the principal wanted to start out by making *Grab and Go* available for students who arrive late or attend special morning tutoring sessions.

All three principals agreed to training for the cafeteria manager and staff that was offered through the grant by the UNC researchers. Training focused on research-informed strategies for creating a pleasant mealtime atmosphere and encouraging healthy choices. The goal of the training (delivered the week before school started in August) was to empower staff to build enthusiasm for breakfast at their school and troubleshoot issues that may come up with *Grab and Go*. Montclair and Berryhill started *Grab and Go* breakfast service on the first day of school as planned. UNC project researchers continue to provide technical assistance as the schools fully implement the new breakfast procedures and are working with teachers and hallway monitors to help them build enthusiasm for breakfast.

Successfully increasing breakfast participation depends on the willingness and commitment of each school's entire staff, including administration, teaching faculty, food service, and janitorial to create a culture that encourages and embraces innovative strategies.

### **Summer Feeding Sites**

In addition to hot food prepared and served during the summer at 55 of its schools (for summer enrichment programs), CMS prepares and delivers nutritious breakfasts and sack lunches at its Oakdale Elementary production facility to non-school sites throughout Mecklenburg County. To participate in the Summer Food Service Program, a site must be located within three miles of a school that has enrollment of 50 percent or more students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. In addition, those responsible for each non-CMS lunch site must commit to having two volunteers present each day and to having refrigeration available to store lunches when they are delivered each morning. Some type of shelter is also required, although it can be as simple as an outdoor



picnic-type shelter. A site may participate as many days per week as wanted or needed and determine the weeks that best meet the site needs (if not all are needed). The lunches must be eaten on-site and are available to children from age one to 18.

Preliminary reports indicate that CMS delivered 46,185 breakfasts to 71 community sites and 64,419 lunches to 81 sites over an average of 19.4 days in July 2014. (Not all sites participate in both breakfast and lunch.) The lunch meal contains a protein entrée sandwich or wrap, a shelf stable fruit, shelf stable vegetable, one percent white or skim milk, and a small treat, such as animal crackers or crispy rice cereal treat. Children may take anything they do not eat with them except for the entrée and the milk, as there is no way to guarantee that they will be refrigerated; and therefore, no way to ensure that children will not eat unsafe food later in the day. Meals delivered to the non-school sites are also reimbursed to CMS by the USDA.

One new site this past summer (2014) that signed up to participate was Albemarle Road Presbyterian Church, located very close to Albemarle Road Elementary School (ARES) as well as several large apartment complexes where ARES students live. Church members are committed to serving children who live in this low-income area and signed up to participate as many days as the lunches were available. They used their family life center as a distribution area and made the lunches available from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Initial participation was low (average of seven per day in July) yet church members remained committed to outreach and learning more regarding where the children were staying during the day and why participation was low. Located close by, the Simmons YMCA was also a summer feeding site as well as ARES, where hot food is served to children enrolled in summer enrichment programs as well as any children who walk in in order to eat breakfast and/or lunch. In spite of this, combined summer meal participation at ARES, YMCA, and the church did not come close to the number of children who are enrolled in the school breakfast and lunch program during the school year (approximately 1,100). Where and what the other hundreds of children, who depend on ARES during the school year, are eating during the summer and out-of-school times is unknown.

### **Snack Supper Feeding Sites**

Fifty-two schools piloted snack supper meals at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year in order to feed children a hot evening meal in the schools' after school programs before they go home. Initial reports (first week of school, August 25-29, 2014), showed that a daily average of 1306 snack suppers were served at the 51 elementary schools and one middle school.

### **Mobile Pantries and Backpack Programs**

Mobile food pantries and weekend backpack programs, provided by Second Harvest Food Bank as well as other faith community partners, are designed to help children and families who may be at risk of not having enough food at home. Some schools also have small pantries on site, stocked by faith congregations, individual volunteers, and civic groups, to deal with emergency situations that arise. Classroom teachers are typically best equipped to identify children most in need of limited resources and who may be most at risk of not having enough food at home. At Albemarle Road Elementary School, for example, with enrollment of more than 90 percent of its 1,200 students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, only 75 backpacks are sent home each week, so teachers triage students they feel are most in need. As in other CMS schools similar to ARES, hunger is an indisputable issue.

## **MECKLENBURG COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

**Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services** administers Mecklenburg County's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. Funding comes from the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. SNAP provides food assistance to households with limited income and resources. The amount of the benefit is dependent on several factors, including the number of household members, income, rent and utility expenses. SNAP benefits are issued via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards monthly to help eligible low-income households purchase food.

Food and Nutrition Services is an entitlement program, so all eligible individuals and households can receive assistance. Benefits may be used to purchase most foods at participating stores. They may not be used to purchase tobacco, pet food, paper products, soap products, or alcoholic beverages ([www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/foodstamps/](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/foodstamps/)). Snap benefits can be redeemed at participating grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets.

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**Mecklenburg County Health Department** is involved in child nutrition through several of its departments and functions:

5. **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** provides federal grants to states (and ultimately, counties) for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. WIC was established as a pilot program in 1972 and made permanent in 1974 as a public health program, not an entitlement program, to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age five who are at nutrition risk ([www.usda.gov/wic/](http://www.usda.gov/wic/)).

To be eligible for WIC, applicants must have income at or below 185 percent of poverty or be determined income-eligible based on enrollment in Medicaid or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Two major types of nutritional risk are recognized for WIC eligibility:

- Medically-based risks (designated as "high priority") such as anemia, underweight, maternal age, history of pregnancy complications, or poor pregnancy outcomes.
- Diet-based risks such as inadequate dietary pattern.

**In Mecklenburg County, 21,712 participants were served in July 2014. Of those served, 5,634 were infants and 11,509 were children who were one-year-old but less than five-years-old. The balance were pregnant women, and post-partum women (both breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding).**

WIC participants are issued monthly vouchers to purchase infant cereal, iron-fortified adult cereal, vitamin C-rich fruit or vegetable juice, eggs, milk, cheese, peanut butter, dried and canned beans/peas, and canned fish. Soy-based beverages, tofu, fruits and vegetables, baby foods, whole-wheat bread, and other whole-grain options were recently added to better meet the nutritional needs of WIC participants. The amount of the voucher is \$40 per month per participant.

WIC recognizes and promotes breastfeeding as the optimal source of nutrition for infants. For women who do not fully breastfeed, WIC provides iron-fortified infant formula. Special infant formulas and medical foods may be provided when prescribed by a physician for a specified medical condition. The formula voucher is \$150 per month.

Some North Carolina counties also participate in the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides supplemental vouchers for farmers' markets so participants may purchase fresh fruits and vegetables as well as become familiar with purchasing at farmers' markets. Mecklenburg County is not currently part of this promising program.

6. **School nurses** work in all CMS schools, delivering expertise and oversight of school health services and health education promotion. The school nurse provides health care to students and staff, performs health screenings and coordinates referrals to the medical home or private healthcare provider. The school nurse is a liaison between school personnel, family, community and healthcare providers to advocate for health care and a healthy school environment (American Nurses Association & National Association of School Nurses, 2011). According to Health Department Director, Dr. Marcus Plescia, there will once again be a school nurse in each CMS school, coming closer to meeting the Centers for Disease Control standard of one nurse for every 750 students. County budget shortfalls in recent years decreased the number of school nurses assigned to CMS. School nurses are able to identify children who are under-nourished or malnourished and intervene by encouraging breakfast and lunch participation, according to school nurse Juanita Pyant, school nurse at Walter G. Byers, where all students are encouraged to go by the cafeteria in the morning when they arrive at school. Walter G. Byers has 536 students, 100 percent who qualify for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Pyant also indicated that Second Harvest Food Bank distributed food three times at Walter G. Byers Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year.
7. A **school health nutritionist** works with CMS students who need more intensive nutrition intervention. Students are referred by either the school nurses or a child's pediatrician for individual counseling, group education, and family education nights at school. There is currently only one school health nutritionist serving all CMS schools, and 90 percent of

referrals are made for obesity issues. The service is available to any CMS child, but predominantly the children served are from low-income households. The school health nutritionist works individually with the student and family to set goals and make gradual changes in diet (based on USDA guidelines) and exercise that lead to a healthy weight and lifestyle. She maintains a caseload of 125-150 children per school year.

8. **Nutrition and Physical Activity Services** include community education initiatives aimed at encouraging Mecklenburg County citizens to lead a healthy lifestyle, including its Healthy Weight Healthy Child initiative, which is working to reverse the pediatric obesity trend in Mecklenburg County.

The Mecklenburg County Fruit and Vegetable Coalition, established in 2005, has the goal of encouraging 25 percent of county residents to regularly eat five fruit and vegetable servings each day. Coalition members come from various organizations, agencies, and interested community members and meet on a quarterly basis at the Health Department. Current initiatives include: 1) increasing the number of local farmers markets and community gardens, 2) advocating for improved policies regarding fruits and vegetables, and 3) educating the community on the benefits of fruits and vegetables.

Another initiative sponsored by the Mecklenburg County Fruit & Vegetable Coalition, (in addition to CMS, Fuel Pizza, and LandSculptors, LLC) is the Health Department's *Field to Fork Program* that promotes child wellness by growing a healthy pizza garden with elementary age children. A program coordinator works with participating teachers to help students learn to identify key components of gardening and recognize how a vegetable pizza meets the *MyPlate* method for building a healthy meal, learn about natural pizza dough, and create healthy pizza with vegetables from their school garden.

## ***Food Banks and Pantries***

**Loaves & Fishes** is a nonprofit emergency food pantry that provides a week's worth of nutritious groceries to individuals and families when in a short-term crisis and who have a place to prepare the food. Loaves and Fishes was founded and operated by local religious congregations and community organizations and grew out of an effort in 1975 at Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in response to the growing hunger problem in Mecklenburg County.

In 2013, Loaves & Fishes provided groceries to 105,015 people, of which 48 percent were children. The average family served has 3.2 members and must be referred by a pastor, DSS social worker, doctor, CMS, or another nonprofit agency. Families may be referred to Loaves & Fishes no more than once every 45 days. There is no cost to the family for the food they receive and approximately half of the families served are also receiving SNAP benefits, which are not sufficient to meet all of a family's needs each month. During 2013, Loaves & Fishes reports that 35 percent of clients visited a pantry only once, 19 percent visited twice, and 14 percent visited three times.

Loaves and Fishes has a main warehouse on Griffith Road in Charlotte, from which it distributes food to 20 pantries throughout Mecklenburg County. Seventeen of the pantries are located at churches and three are mini-pantries located at Crisis Assistance Ministry, Department of Social Services, and the Jewish Community Center. Approximately 2,000 volunteers help at the warehouse, in the phone center, and at one of the 20 community pantries each year.

Each family is provided with a shopping cart and a volunteer helps them navigate the pantry, choosing foods from the food categories based on their family size and points assigned to different food types. Whenever possible, and as available, fresh fruits and/or vegetables are also provided.

Loaves & Fishes procures food and supplies for distribution from donations, food drives, corporate donations (Publix provides a 33,000 pound truckload of food each month), Second Harvest Food Bank, and sources the remainder from wherever they can find a good value for resources available.

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**Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina** is one of six food banks in North Carolina and one of four in South Carolina. It is the major source of food for 650 area food pantries, emergency shelters, and other organizations that distribute emergency food in a 19 county area, covering counties in both North and South Carolina. Second Harvest Food Bank is headquartered in Charlotte and distributes to 200 agencies in Mecklenburg County alone. Founded in 1981, it is a member of Feeding America, a network of more than 200 food banks and food rescue programs in the United States. The main warehouse of Second Harvest Food Bank is located in Charlotte, with four additional warehouses located in Hickory, Dallas, Mt. Gilead, and Spartanburg, S.C. Funding comes from individual and corporate contributions (approximately one third of its revenue), foundations, and grants. Its regional food recovery program accepts and warehouses surplus products donated by the food industry and food and household goods retailers.

Second Harvest Food Bank distributed 10+ million pounds of food in FY14 in Mecklenburg County, and estimates that 35 percent of that amount went to feeding children. It is also involved in mobile school pantries (started in 2013-2014 at approximately one dozen elementary high poverty schools in Mecklenburg County), providing backpacks to elementary schools for children in need to take home on the weekends, and Kids Café, a dinner meal for at-risk children enrolled in after school programs. There are 24 Kids Café sites in Mecklenburg County, serving approximately 50,000 dinners and approximately 65,000 snacks in the 2013-2014 school year.

Kids Café sites during the 2013-2014 school year:

- A Better World
- Bethlehem Center
- YWCA Billingsville

- Lakewood Preschool
- Parkview Community Foundation
- Harris YMCA
- Johnston YMCA
- YWCA Park Road
- YWCA Leafcrest
- YWCA West Charlotte
- YWCA Tuckaseegee
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning – Lake Wylie Elementary
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning – Kennedy Middle
- YWCA Albemarle Road
- Seigle Avenue Teen Center
- Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club – Marsh Road
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning – Crompton Street
- Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club – Belmont
- YWCA Sunridge
- Stratford YMCA
- YWCA Sugaw Creek
- Project Embrace
- New Creation Youth Development
- YWCA Southside

Second Harvest oversees backpack programs at 26 sites in Mecklenburg County, some of which are affiliated with Kids Café sites and some are elementary schools with high free and reduced rate lunch populations. Examples include Devonshire, Reid Park, Albemarle Road, J.H. Gunn, Walter G. Byers, Highland Renaissance, Druid Hills, and Thomasboro Elementary Schools.

Its newest initiative, *Together We Feed*, addresses childhood hunger through increasing partnerships with CMS. Together We Feed’s School Pantry Program is a child hunger initiative to expand backpack and mobile pantry programs to ensure low-income families have access to healthy and nutritious food to prepare at home.

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**Self-referral Food Pantries:** In addition to Loaves & Fishes food pantries described previously, the following is a list of food pantries where individuals do not need a specific referral as long as they meet the eligibility requirements listed. This list is maintained by DSS and distributed to nonprofit organizations that are working with low-income clients.



## Mecklenburg County Self-Referral Food Pantries

ZIP	NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE #	HOURS	ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS
28105	Matthews Help Center	119 North Ames St	704-847-8383	Mon-Fri: 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. (by appointment only; walk-ins discouraged)	Photo ID (driver's license, state ID, or passport): if receiving assistance from this center for the first time, must schedule appointment with social worker for assessment prior to receiving assistance
28203	Catholic Charities	1123 S. Church St.	704-370-3262	Tues. and Thurs. starting at 9 a.m.; first come first served basis	First time clients complete a one-page application with basic demographic and household member information. Due to the overwhelming needs, we can only serve clients once a month.
28205	Faith Soldiers Word Ministries	835 Eastway Drive	704-567-2128	Mon-Fri: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; call to schedule appointment and discuss qualifications	Photo ID required along with proof of Mecklenburg County residency (utility or telephone bill with current address will do); those receiving food stamps are NOT eligible for this pantry; however, they will serve people who have applied for food stamps but have not yet received their cards
28205	Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte	1825 Eastway Drive	704-563-5810	Call at 9 a.m. on Thurs. only to schedule same day appointment; first come first served (typically serve about 8-10 families per week)	ID required for SS purposes; can use this pantry every 30 days
28205	St. Paul Baptist Church/ Pantry	1401 N. Allen St	704-334-5309 (for information only, food pantry does not have its own phone)	2nd Wed: 9 a.m.- 12 p.m. first come first serve; not by appointment; will give out food as people arrive until all food has been distributed	ID (does not have to have photo ID)
28206	If My People Mission Outreach	2511 Lucena Ave.	704-756-5176	Tues. & Thurs. 4:30 p.m.; walk-in time	Application; ID with address
28208	Jackson Park Ministries	5415 Airport Drive	704-392-4981	Must call on Monday at 1 p.m. for appointment. Open Tuesdays and Fridays by appointment.	ID and SS card; clients will speak with counselor who will review eligibility requirements.

28208	New Outreach Christian Center	3900 Gossett Avenue	704-398-1777	Open Wednesdays & Fridays at 7:00 p.m.	First come first served.
28214	Thrift United Methodist Church	8245 Moores Chapel Road	704-392-9807	Call after 9 a.m. on Thursday to schedule same day appointment	No documentation required; clients can be served once every 6 months; clients must call on their own to schedule an appointment, referrals not accepted
28217	Silver Mount Baptist Pantry	501 West Arrowood Road	704-522-1528	Tues. 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and Wed. 9 a.m.-12 p.m.; first come first served; hours vary during holidays, call to confirm	Clients must bring valid NC photo ID and a bill with their current address; clients must be Mecklenburg resident
28277	Ministerio Integral Hispano (Hickory Grove Baptist Church)	7424 E. W.T. Harris Boulevard	704-531-4060	T&TH: 10 a.m.-12 p.m.; walk-in time	Photo ID (any kind of photo ID; will accept expired IDs and can be from any country); Application.
					<i>Updated 09/2014</i>

***Food Preparation and Distribution Organizations***

**Friendship Trays** provides nutritious home delivered meals to individuals in the community who are unable to obtain or prepare their own meals because of age or infirmity. The meals are prepared in the Friendship Trays commercial kitchen at its South End production and distribution facility and delivered by volunteers throughout the county. More than 500 meals are delivered daily, with modifications made for special diets prescribed by participants’ doctors. Friendship Trays also prepares food daily for two nonprofit child care programs: Lakewood Preschool and The Learning Collaborative. The meals are balanced and nutritious and made with mostly fresh ingredients that are donated, or grown at its affiliate Friendship Gardens. (www.friendshiptrays.org).

**Friendship Gardens**, an initiative of Friendship Trays and Slow Food Charlotte, is an expanding network of approximately 75 community, school, faith-based, institutional, public, private, and backyard gardens. Most of its garden partnerships share their harvest for the benefit of Friendship Trays and its daily meal preparation. Friendship Gardens developed a mobile market in 2013 at the transit center in uptown Charlotte to sell fresh fruits and vegetables in that food desert. The mobile market accepts SNAP benefits,

beneficial to many who come through the transit center. Its urban farm at Garinger High School was established in 2014, where they grow food, train volunteers, educate the community, and have summer Farm Camp for children (four to ten-years-old). They also will grow fresh lettuce, for the benefit of Friendship Trays, in a new aquaponics system in the greenhouse at the urban farm throughout the winter.

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**C. Ray and Cynthia M. Kennedy Foundation** started as a Summer Food Service Program sponsor in 2010 and serves children breakfast and hot lunches at non-CMS locations during the summer. Food is prepared through its affiliate company, FoodCo Services, and has expanded to provide food to children in Mecklenburg, Catawba, Union, and Rockingham counties. In 2013, the Foundation served 100,000 meals and in summer 2014 served 135,000 meals to children in Mecklenburg County.

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The **Society of St. Andrew** operates a statewide, volunteer-driven gleaning network that coordinates with local farmers, volunteers, and food providing agencies. The North Carolina Gleaning Network salvages more than five million pounds of fresh produce for the hungry each year. Gleaners work to salvage everything from strawberries to sweet potatoes to collard greens. Volunteers across the state enter fields after farmers finish harvesting and pick up good produce left behind. In the Charlotte area, food is then donated to Second Harvest Food Bank, food pantries, Friendship Gardens, soup kitchens, and churches ([www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org)).

### ***Organizations Serving At-Risk Children***

**A Child's Place** (ACP) is a Charlotte-based 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that serves Mecklenburg County by working to erase the impact of homelessness on children and their education. During the 2013-2014 school year, ACP worked with and assisted more than 2,800 homeless children. Of that number, ACP case managed 877 children in elementary schools (Pre-kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade) and an additional 370 children in middle school (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade). Other children served by ACP may receive a referral to another agency or school supplies but not be fully assessed and not served regularly throughout the school year because their needs are either being met by another agency or their crisis abates.

Children served by ACP are provided snack bags several times each week that are provided by ACP community partners. In addition, Second Harvest partners with A Child's Place to provide food boxes in the spring, at Thanksgiving, and at Christmas for all of the families served by A Child's Place. In addition, a summer day camp program serves approximately 120 children for six weeks and provides lunch and snacks daily.

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**Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)** exists to transform the academic achievements, self-confidence, and life trajectories of children living in under-resourced, urban communities.

The two main program models, BELL Summer and BELL After School, are based on strong partnerships with schools and deliver small-group academic instruction, mentorship, enrichment activities, and community engagement. The BELL model also works with parents to become more engaged in their child's education.

In summer 2014, BELL offered academic summer programs to 893 students in eight Mecklenburg locations:

- Four Project LIFT schools:
  - Allenbrook Elementary
  - Ashley Park Academy
  - Statesville Road Elementary
  - Ranson Middle
- Devonshire Elementary
- Huntingtowne Farms Elementary
- Westerly Hills Academy (partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte)
- A Child's Place *My Place Summer Camp* program)

Participating children received breakfast and lunch through the school cafeteria (summer feeding program). In addition, the Westerly Hills Academy students enrolled in the BELL summer program at First Presbyterian Church received these two meals at the church, as part of the church's summer feeding program.

A Child's Place provided their participating children with a morning and afternoon snack as well as a snack bag to take home with them each day.

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**Care Ring**, while not directly involved in issues of childhood hunger, administers the Nurse-Family Partnership initiative, which works with first time mothers living in poverty to successfully change their lives and the lives of their children through evidence-based nurse home visiting. Working with 150-175 mothers, the goals are to improve pregnancy outcomes by helping women engage in preventive health practices, to improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care, and to improve the economic self-sufficiency of the family by helping parents develop a vision for their own future, plan future pregnancies, continue their education and find work ([www.careringnc.org](http://www.careringnc.org)).

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**Charlotte Area Fund** is Mecklenburg County's designated community action agency, and pilots programs based on the needs of the poor and helping them to become self-sufficient. CAF administers Community Service Block Grant funding through its Self-Sufficiency Project as well as its Nutrition Assistance Project. Clients who have completed money management training may participate in the CAF Food Club. Each month eligible clients may receive donated food from the Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina through their participation in the CAF Self Sufficiency

Project. In calendar year 2013, there were 266 children who received food assistance through their household's participation in the Self Sufficiency Project. By the end of August, 113 children received food assistance through the project in 2014 because their family was enrolled in the project. CAF provides emergency food through the CAF food pantry to individuals who do not qualify for the Self Sufficiency Project due to inability to seek employment, but are in need.

CAF distributed \$26,248 in emergency vouchers (average of \$260 per family) in FY ending June 30, 2013. (Most of those vouchers went to disabled residents, not necessarily families with children.)

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**Child Care Programs** served an average of 7,339 Mecklenburg County children each month in FY14 whose child care expenses were subsidized through funding from the N.C. Division of Child Development and Early Education (NCDCDEE). Children attending licensed child care programs are served snacks and meals that must meet nutritional guidelines established by NCDCDEE. Of those served through child care subsidy, approximately one-third are school age children who are served an after school snack (in addition to food they received at school). An additional monthly average of 4,694 children remained on a waiting list for child care subsidy in FY14 (Child Care Resources Inc.)

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**Crisis Assistance Ministry (CAM)** is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization with a mission to provide assistance and advocacy for people in financial crisis, helping them move toward self-sufficiency. Two hundred families seek assistance on an average day and are served through emergency financial assistance for housing or utilities, clothing, household goods, furniture and/or appliances. In FY13, CAM reports that **25,697** children benefitted from emergency rent and utilities assistance services. A CAM benefits counselor provides on-site prescreening to families to ensure they can access services they qualify for, such as SNAP (food stamps) and, if not, helps them apply online while they are at CAM. Families with an immediate need for food are referred to a Loaves & Fishes or self-referral food pantry, provided emergency food from the CAM-based Loaves & Fishes mini-pantry, or provided with a \$20 food card to a local grocery store, depending on the degree of crisis.

Throughout the year, area churches and other groups visit the CAM lobby to distribute breakfast and lunch to clients as they wait to see a benefits counselor.

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**Freedom School Partners (FSP)** is a 501(c) 3 organization that provides summer Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs for students in grades K-8 throughout Charlotte's communities. Freedom Schools provides at-risk children with a six-week, literacy-rich summer program. The following chart indicates the location sites and the food service vendor. (FSFP = Federal Summer Food Program.)

SITE	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SNACK *
Alexander Graham Middle	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	provided by volunteers
Friendship Missionary Baptist	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	provided by church
Montclair Elementary	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
Quail Hollow Middle	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
Shalom Park	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	provided by volunteers
Christ Lutheran	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	Fed on site by church by gets reimbursed by FSFP	provided by church
The Grove Presbyterian	Provided on site by church volunteers	FSFP at Hickory Grove Elementary	purchased through CMS
Mt. Carmel Baptist	FSFP at Tuckaseegee Elementary	FSFP at Tuckaseegee Elementary	purchased through CMS
Rama Road Elementary	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
St. John's United Methodist	CMS-FSFP - bag breakfasts on site	FSFP at McClintock Middle	purchased through CMS
CN. Jenkins Presbyterian	FSFP at First Ward Elementary	FSFP at First Ward Elementary	purchased through CMS
Highland Renaissance Academy	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
Pinewood Elementary	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
Reid Park Academy	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
Trinity Presbyterian	FSFP at Rama Road Elementary	FSFP at Rama Road Elementary	purchased through CMS

C Eastover Elementary	2 days bag breakfasts from CMS FSFP/3 days volunteers provide	FSFP at AG Middle	purchased through CMS
m The Family Tree	FSFP at Westerly Hills Elementary	FSFP at Westerly Hills Elementary	purchased through CMS
n Providence Day School	FSFP at Rama Road Elementary	FSFP at Rama Road Elementary	purchased through CMS
i Sedgefield Elementary	FSFP on-site	FSFP on-site	purchased through CMS
e UNC-Charlotte	FSFP at Nathaniel Alex. Elementary	UNCC cafeteria	purchased through CMS

**S**

\*The CMS purchased snacks consist of typically a packaged item (pretzels, crackers, gold fish) and a juice box.

**I** The sites that provide their own snacks through volunteers add fruit to their snack rotation.

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**Schools** (CIS) provides services to 6,000+ students annually in grades pre-kindergarten through 12 in 43 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Its mission is “to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.” The scope of current programming includes school-based dropout prevention; college access and career readiness; support for teen mothers balancing the challenges of child care and high school graduation; and working with youthful offenders to continue their education ([www.cischarlotte.org](http://www.cischarlotte.org)). At each of these schools, CIS employs a site coordinator based at the school, who works directly with the students, their families, school staff, community partners, and volunteers. CIS site coordinators are important liaisons, as they know the children enrolled at the school as well as the resources available (including food sources when needed) to serve these children.

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**The Salvation Army** utilizes CMS to provide for its children in summer programs. In July 2014, CMS prepared and delivered food to an average of 315 children daily to six sites, including the Center of Hope, the Salvation Army’s homeless shelter.

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**YMCA** serves low-income, at risk children through partnership with CMS at several of its Title I schools (those in which at least 72 percent of the student population has been designated as economically disadvantaged). The Y Readers program serves rising first, second, and third graders in eight Mecklenburg County elementary schools through an afterschool program focused on increasing reading proficiency as well as a six week summer camp program focused on keeping low-income children engaged and maintaining (and hopefully increasing) learning gained during

the school year. Students are recommended for Y Readers by their classroom teachers and principals based on need for the program. Approximately 250 children were served during the 2013-2014 school year and 500 children were served in summer 2014. During the summer the children receive breakfast and lunch and during the school year they are served a snack in the afterschool program. The summer 2014 Mecklenburg sites were: Albemarle Road, Cornelius, Hickory Grove, Hidden Valley, Highland Renaissance, Huntingtowne Farms, Nations Ford, and Reid Park elementary schools. CMS provides food at these schools during the summer.

The YMCA also operates Y Achievers, a national YMCA program designed to help teens set and pursue higher education and career goals resulting in graduation and acceptance into a post-secondary institute or adoption of a vocation. Y Achievers served 238 students during the 2013-2014 school year at four CMS high schools: Garinger, West Charlotte, West Mecklenburg, and Vance. During the school year, students participate in afterschool sessions two days per week and at monthly Saturday Summits. Students also take part in job shadowing opportunities and college tours. Snacks are served, with attempts made at incorporating more fresh and nutritious snacks to encourage healthy eating among the teens.

CMS also delivers food to four other YMCA programs, serving low-income and at-risk children: YMCA McCrorey (average 237 served daily, July 2014), YMCA Safe Alliance (average 11 served daily, July 2014), YMCA Simmons (average 112 served daily, July 2014), and YMCA University City (average 28 served daily, July 2014).

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**YWCA** serves low-income children, kindergarten through fifth grade, in nine Youth Learning Centers (afterschool and summer camp) in Mecklenburg County. Families qualify who have household incomes at or below the federal guideline for poverty (\$23,850 for a family of four), and 90 percent of the families earn less than \$15,000. The YWCA has capacity to serve **255** children at eight sites in Mecklenburg County. The YWCA has participated in the past with the Second Harvest Kids Café for afterschool food and with the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsor, Child Nutrition Program, Inc. for summer feeding, but planned to transition to a different CACFP sponsor, Freedom Within Walls, by October 2014.

### ***Food-related Education and Advocacy Organizations***

The **Charlotte Action Research Project (CHARP)** forges partnerships between the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and marginalized communities in Charlotte. CHARP-funded graduate students integrate teaching, research, and action to work toward an agenda of social justice, enable neighborhoods to advocate for themselves, and create sustainable neighborhood coalitions to implement structural change ([www.charp.uncc.edu](http://www.charp.uncc.edu)). One of its neighborhood projects is working with residents of Washington Heights to grow a community garden.

The **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council** is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that advocates for policies that build a sustainable, equitable and healthy local food system. Its stated goals are to enhance the health of Mecklenburg citizens, strengthen local economies and market opportunities, and reduce hunger and food insecurity ([www.cmfpcc.org](http://www.cmfpcc.org)). It promotes and is involved in school gardens and promoting guest chefs to teach CMS students how to prepare and enjoy eating fresh produce. CMFPC partners with other organizations, including, but not limited to, the Health Department’s Fruit and Veggie Coalition, Green Teacher Network, and Friendship Gardens, and local farmers’ markets. It is staffed by a .25 FTE director. During the 2014-2015 school year, CMFPC is hosting a FoodCorps service member, whose goals will be to teach children about what healthy food is and where it comes from, build and tend school gardens, and bring quality local food into public school cafeterias. The FoodCorps service member assigned to Mecklenburg County will be based at Friendship Gardens at Garinger High School.

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**Green Teacher Network**’s mission is to establish and facilitate a collaboration of educators in the Charlotte region to share information, network and collaborate to enhance hands-on learning, support local foods, and expand health and wellness initiatives through school-based gardening. The GTN hosts quarterly school garden workshops for teachers and has the goal to identify a location for an ultimate schoolyard garden display, where teachers and students can visit to acquire additional ideas for their garden experience. The GTN leadership team is comprised of a representative from the Health Department, Friendship Gardens, CMS, Charlotte Mecklenburg Food Policy Council, Field to Fork (Mecklenburg County Health Department initiative), and the Catawba River District.

### *Faith Community*

**Mecklenburg Ministries** was founded in 1987, and is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization of nearly 100 member congregations representing more than a dozen faith traditions. Its mission is to promote interfaith relationships, foster racial and ethnic understanding, and inspires collaboration to address social issues ([www.meckmin.org](http://www.meckmin.org)). As many congregations are engaged in some type of anti-hunger initiatives (food drives, food pantries, weekend backpacks for low-income children, etc.), Mecklenburg Ministries could be a vital partner in childhood hunger initiative communication with its members.

### *Organizations Promoting Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Food Deserts*

**Go-go fresco** is a mobile, locally sourced, missions-focused farmers market that donates profits back to nonprofit organizations where it sells. It operates at eleven locations in Mecklenburg County throughout the week, and at two of the locations, the YWCA and the Child and Family Services Center, has a “pay what you can” policy and accepts credit cards as well as

SNAP benefits cards. One of its locations is at the HeartBright Foundation, located in an identified food desert ([www.gogofresco.org](http://www.gogofresco.org)).

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**Sow Much Good** is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that operates an urban farm in Charlotte's northwest corridor on Sunset Road. The farm grows affordable, chemical-free produce for people living in urban food deserts or neighborhoods identified as food insecure. Its market is open on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. from April through October.

### *Foundations/Funding Organizations*

**United Way of Central Carolinas** (UWCC) serves the five-county region including Mecklenburg, Mooresville/Lake Norman, Cabarrus, Anson, and Union by providing support to three focus areas: children and youth, housing and poverty, and health and mental health. UWCC identifies the region's greatest needs in these areas, then serves as the bridge between donors and nonprofit organizations that best provide assistance to those who need it most. There are more than 83 partner agencies receiving and administering UWCC funding in the five-county area.

While none of its donor-raised funding is allocated specifically for childhood hunger initiatives, it is involved indirectly by being the local agency that administers federal funds under the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program for Mecklenburg County. In October 2013, UWCC was awarded \$486,056 by this program to help supplement local emergency food and shelter efforts. Qualifying agencies apply for funding through a per meal allocation (\$2.50). During the most recent funding cycle, Loaves & Fishes received approximately \$30,000 and Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina received approximately \$35,000. The Salvation Army's Center of Hope also received funding. The number of children served with the funding is not specifically reported.

Through the Critical Needs Response Fund (CNRF), administered by UWCC, agencies that deliver winter shelter, food, clothing, and warmth or basic needs to those in crisis, may receive additional funding. In October 2014, UWCC provided CNRF funding (dormant since 2012) to both Second Harvest Food Bank of the Metrolina (\$170,000) and Loaves & Fishes (\$30,000).

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