

Program offers free lunches to young people in need in Aurora

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Phillips Park in Aurora is one of the sites for the Meals on the Move Program in the city, which provides free lunches to young people in need over the summer. (City of Aurora / HANDOUT)

Free lunches are available for young people in need who are 18 years old or younger at parks around Aurora as part of a Northern Illinois Food Bank program which started for the season Monday.

Being held through Aug. 12, the lunches will be distributed Monday through Friday at four parks throughout the city: 10 to 11 a.m. at McCarty Park, 350 E. Galena Blvd.; 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Phillips Park, 1000 Ray Moses Drive; 1 to 2 p.m. at Blackhawk Park, New York Street and Blackhawk Street; and 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Greene Field Park, 630 N. Russell Ave.

All meals are completely free for children 18 years old and under. No registration or identification is required for the Meals on the Move Program, organizers said. Weekday meals must be eaten on site.

Clayton Muhammad, chief communications and equity officer for the city of Aurora, said the program began in the summer of 2018 and ran as planned through 2019 before the pandemic hit the following year, which led to a drive-thru model in 2020 and 2021.

“We’ve taken all the lessons we’ve learned from the last four years and the data that we use and really looked at how to fine-tune the program,” he said. “It is now a daily distribution at four parks, five days a week throughout the city of Aurora. It becomes a convenience for parents to have a set, daily location and time that they can go to as opposed to different days and times that we had through the years.”

Muhammad acknowledged that “food insecurity and food needs are growing” due to inflation.

“We’re seeing the rising in prices of groceries, gas, things across the board and parents are facing that dilemma when children are home for summer and where are they getting those meals from that were provided by the school districts during the year,” he said.

New this year to the program will be the Northern Illinois Food Bank “bringing in its fresh market.”

“Kids still need meals on the weekends and so when they leave and take their lunch on Friday, they can take home meals for Saturday and Sunday, plus fresh fruits and vegetables,” Muhammad said. “It really becomes now that Aurora children can have lunches or meals seven days per week. As a parent, you can breathe a little easier. The burden is that much less on your pocketbook to provide meals during the daytime.”

For more information, including menus, go to www.aurora-il.org/SummerMeals.

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