

Masthead

Published Sat, Jul 03, 2010 05:00 AM

Modified Sat, Jul 03, 2010 05:05 AM

## Camp feeds kids' minds and bodies

For 11-year-old Dyani Debnam, getting fruit in her lunch is a highlight of the day. The soon-to-be sixth-grader is taking part in a summer camp sponsored by the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina that provides free, nutritious meals to children when schools are not in session.

"I think the meals are good because we actually have a fruit," said Dyani, who likes studying math and thinks she might want to be a doctor someday.

Children who participate in summer programming at sites registered with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern Carolina typically receive fruit three times each day - during breakfast, lunch and as an afternoon snack.

"What the kids tell us is a lot of them don't get three meals a day, so they're happy to come here, even with the fruit instead of chips all the time. It's more nutritious," said Damon Sterling, director of the J.T. Locke Resource Center summer camp in Raleigh, where Dyani goes.

The Locke camp, partially funded by the City of Raleigh, will serve meals for about 300 students over the course of the summer. That's just a small part of the more than 1,800 students and 109,000 meals expected to be served by the food bank before fall. The organization sponsors sites to provide meals through the federally funded Summer Food Service Program - meals many low-income students might otherwise miss.

Since last summer, the food bank has doubled its sponsorship of the Summer Food Service Program to 30 sites throughout 34 counties. But sustaining the food programs is more challenging during the summer.

"Donations tend to slow down during the summer, at the same time we need that service to increase," said Christy Simmons, manager of public relations at the food bank. "People are out of their normal pattern. People go on vacations and aren't thinking about food drives."

Other food pantries and rescue missions working with the food bank have seen a 30 percent to 60 percent increase in the number of people seeking hunger relief, Simmons said. The need among children is particularly prevalent during the summer.

'It's a really good camp'

The Locke camp provides nutritious meals for campers as part of its larger goal to build character and to support students academically.

Without the meals from camp, 14-year-old Khalil Smith would have to cook meals for himself and his 8-year-old brother while his mom works during the day.

The meals at camp are good, Khalil said, but the rising freshman in high school most enjoys the camp's academic programming and the opportunity to meet new people.

"It's a really good camp," Khalil said. "It gets kids off the streets; some were [making] really bad mistakes. They're improving, starting to get better."

[katelyn.ferral@newsobserver.com](mailto:katelyn.ferral@newsobserver.com) or 919-932-8746