

*Partnership for Providence Parks
Food Literacy Program
Overview of 2016 Summer Pilot*

The Partnership for Providence Parks' (PPP) Food Literacy Program is a multi-faceted health and wellness initiative that has been successfully piloted during the 2016 summer season. The impetus for the program was a desire to solve two main complaints about how the USDA Summer Lunch Program operates. Firstly, that the food given in the federally subsidized meals is of medium quality and that the kids have no sense of where it comes from or who makes it. Secondly, that the Summer Lunch Program begins roughly two weeks after school ends and ends roughly one to two weeks before school begins again in the fall. This leaves a gap at the beginning and the end of the summer where kids who rely on free lunch are not being fed at all.

Using these two main problems as a guide, PPP, along with our numerous partners, including our chief funder the EverHope Foundation, implemented a program that ran for two weeks in June until the Federal Summer Lunch Program began and will run again during the week of August 29th to fill in the last week before school begins again. The vision was for food to become part of the play and education in the parks. Older kids (14-18 years old) would shop for food from local stores and farms, would train and learn to cook meals with experienced professionals, and would feed their younger park friends and also explain to them what they are eating and why it is healthy for them. In this way, the Food Literacy program becomes more than merely a program that feeds kids; it becomes a way to educate kids to make healthy and thrifty food choices and a way to instill positive food habits in kids that are most vulnerable to falling into negative ones. There was an opportunity to all at once implement workforce development, nutritional education, and a practical lunch program to fill in a crucial "hunger gap" at the beginning and end of the summer.

The execution of the initial two week June program was an unequivocal success. Nine local teenagers were hired as Healthy Food Interns over the course of the two weeks, chosen based on applications PPP sent out and read through. Some of the interns were from the General Street Park neighborhood, and others came from nearby communities with parks. These interns received training in food safety and food preparation at Hope & Main from Pearl Farquharson, CEO of Delsie Catering. They used ingredients they shopped for at their local Stop & Shop and Little City Growers farm. These interns then fed approximately 25 kids who attend the General Street Park daily for two weeks, and explained to their friends what it took to make this healthy food. This comes out to approximately 250 healthy snack servings.

The interns were paid in gift cards to the same Stop & Shop where they did their shopping, again keeping this program circular and self-reinforcing. The week after this program ended, the Summer Meals program kicked in, successfully filling the hunger gap at the beginning of the summer and giving many kids their first exposure to cooking and to local produce. Two interns have since decided they want to attend culinary school.

Three park groups in the city have asked how they can bring the Food Literacy Program to their parks, and PPP is working with Whole Foods to possibly fund a Healthy Kids Program that will help expand this pilot.

Thanks to the careful budgeting of funding from the EverHope Foundation for this year's pilot, the program was able to run the week of August 29th as well, filling in the final hunger gap before school started once again.