

# Healdsburg sites offer free lunches during summer

By Amie Windsor, Staff Writer, [amie@sonomawest.com](mailto:amie@sonomawest.com) Jun 26, 2017 Updated 6 hrs ago



**HAPPY NOT HUNGRY** — Children dig into lunches provided by Redwood Empire Food Bank through the free lunch program it offers throughout the summer months. Photo Maggie Sowell

Photo Maggie Sowell

## **Community organizations partner to close nutrition gap**

Are there hungry children in affluent Healdsburg? The answer is yes, but there are programs that can help. With summer vacation fully on the go, 10,513 Sonoma County children, representing 76 percent of all children who benefit from free or reduced-price lunches during the school year, will miss out on similar lunches while not in school, according to a new report by the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA).

That number represents about one-third of children who are eligible for free or reduced lunch, according to Itzul Gutierrez, senior programs manager with the Redwood Empire Food Bank.

In effort to combat child hunger during the summer, the REFB teams up with local organizations, including the Sonoma County Library and Boys & Girls Club of Central Sonoma County to provide free, nutritious meals to children in need.

“Our mission is to end hunger,” Gutierrez said. “When school is out, resources are limited. We provided hot and cold meals for children in an effort to address the nutrition gap.”

According to the report, more than 2 million children statewide live in households that struggle to put enough food on the table; that equates to nearly one in four children going to bed hungry. While school meals help shield students from struggling with hunger, the summer months are more difficult to stave it off without the free or reduced price meals.

Through their collaboration, REFB feeds about 1,300 children daily throughout the county at various locations. Lasting 10 weeks, the program provides more than 39,000 meals and more than 32,000 pounds of fresh produce to children who risk experiencing hunger during the summer months.

The program began June 5 and runs through August 4. It is open to all children 18 and younger. According to Gutierrez, the meal can be an opportunity for families to bond and learn about what is available in the community.

“Families gather and children come out, not just for food but to learn about other resources available to help,” Gutierrez said. “They can find out about programs like MediCal, for example.”

In Healdsburg, kids can seek meals at the Healdsburg Clubhouse, Healdsburg Junior High School, Alliance Medical Center and the Healdsburg Regional Library.

The library program is called Lunch at the Library and encourages kids to enjoy nutritious meals while engaging in literacy and learning activities.

“We’ve planned our summer reading program activities to be near the meals,” said Kathy DeWeese, children’s services coordinator with the Sonoma County Library.

DeWeese said the program wouldn’t be possible without REFB. “We have to give so much credit to Redwood Empire Food Bank. They work so hard to make sure kids are fed,” DeWeese said.

While the food is provided by REFB, Gutierrez said the Healdsburg Unified School District has taken on the responsibility for preparing the food distributed in and north of Healdsburg.

“People think we prepare the food, but it’s the school districts,” Gutierrez said. “It’s a lot of work.”


Gutierrez said the program tries to encourage kids to try new foods while providing meal options they know kids will go for.

“This week in Healdsburg we served cheesy bean tacos, turkey sandwiches with lettuce and maple waffles and yogurt,” Gutierrez said. They also serve fresh fruit, including jicama, watermelon and cucumbers.

“It’s a USDA-funded program,” Gutierrez said, meaning the program must meet certain nutritional requirements.

To find Sonoma County’s summer meal sites, visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/sn/ap/summersites.asp?year=2017&countynome=Sonoma>.

#### RELATED LINKS

 [Find a list of Sonoma County’s summer meal sites for kids](#)