

# ON THE GROUND WITH AT-RISK MEALS

Serving snacks or suppers during afterschool programs can be difficult - balancing packed schedules, tight budgets, and programming requirements is a challenge directors and staff face daily. This series of profiles on afterschool programs participating in the CACFP At-Risk Meal Program shed light on different approaches and models to inspire your program.



**Westminster Community Life Center's Get SET After School Program** - The Get SET After School Program at the Westminster Community Life Center plays a critical role in achieving successful education outcomes for youth in Trenton's East Ward. Westminster Community Life Center (WCLC) serves community members of all ages, through early literacy, summer camp, and college and career preparation programs. Get SET offers school age children homework assistance and mentoring, but also arts enrichment, including photography, music, and hip hop.

Ayo Johnson, Executive Director, explains that serving a meal to their students had been a need for some time. Many of the students eat lunch at school at 11 am, meaning they are very hungry by the end of the day. A lot of the students do not go home to meals either, so school lunches were the primary source of nutrition. Since November

2012, Get SET began serving a healthy supper through the At-Risk Meals Program. Prior to participating in the At-Risk Meal Program, students only received a snack, which WCLC paid for out of its budget. Enrolled students now receive a healthy meal daily, at a fraction of the cost to WCLC.

The CACFP At-Risk Meals Program provides reimbursements for snacks and/or suppers served at afterschool programs in eligible areas. In school attendance zones where at least 50% of students qualify for free or reduced price school lunch, every single child at a participating afterschool program qualifies for the full "free" rate of reimbursement - \$0.80 per snack or \$2.93 per supper.

Johnson researched the options for sourcing foods and determined Get SET would become

its own sponsor and contract with a vendor for prepared meals. Johnson was excited to be able to have full control of the menus and to find a food service company, Karson Food Service, which understood the mission of Get SET. In fact, Karson donated a convection oven and hot box to WCLC so that Get SET is able to serve hot suppers. Pre-portioned meals are delivered earlier in the day and WCLC refrigerates them until it is time to warm the food for serving.

Johnson explains that the paperwork requirements for self-sponsoring are not overwhelming and that the key to success is to ask lots of questions at the NJDA sponsor training and in communications with your Child Nutrition Specialist. NJSACC was another valuable resource along the way, providing technical assistance and research support.

Self-sponsoring for the At-Risk Meal Program can be daunting, but Johnson is encouraging - "Just go for it! There will be obstacles, but you can overcome them."

To learn more about the At-Risk Meals Program, visit us on the web at <http://bit.ly/K56qXA>.

Not sure where to start? Contact NJSACC (908-789-0259) or NJDA (609-984-1250).

