

“Operation Participation” End Summary

Over this past summer, End Hunger Connecticut! was successful in launching a small grants program called “Operation Participation.” The program presented an opportunity for Connecticut Summer Food sites to apply for a \$500 grant for resources to increase participation at their Summer Food sites. The five grant recipients were Community Renewal Team of Middletown, Manchester Board of Education, New Opportunities Inc. of Meriden, Town of Groton, Department of Human Services, and Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group of North Grosvenordale.

Each site had a unique approach in reaching out to more children during the summer months. Groton hosted an interactive mystery puzzle called “Take a Bite Out of Lunch.” The program included guest police officers who read clues each session leading up to the last where a suitcase was unlocked revealing a “Take a Bite Out of Lunch” t-shirt for everyone. The site sponsor commented that “the program was extremely well received by the kids who then told their friends.” TEEG of North Grosvenordale used the grant to fund themed activity days including a “reading corner” with a book swap and their popular “Make your own Sundae” Fridays. Other sites were successful in holding raffles with prizes and purchasing sports equipment to promote physical activity.

Not only did the children benefit, but the site staff found the extra resources to be very effective in channeling their efforts to feed participants and welcome new ones. As one sponsor expressed, “...The children and parents are happy [and] volunteers have been abundant due to the excitement of the program. The ability to have activities and publicity [for the program] was the reason for the increase [in participation.]” Most importantly, “Operation Participation” engaged the community members in a comprehensive effort to initiate local change. It is clear the opportunity gave site staff and volunteers an outlet for their creative ideas generating excitement that will remain with the children when next summer comes around.