



YMCA of Silicon Valley Paves the Way for Local Parks and Recreation Department

How can local parks and recreation departments participate in summer meal programs? For many municipalities, it can seem a rather intimidating endeavor. But with the right support, it doesn't have to be.

In 2010, while participating in the Santa Clara Safety Net Nutrition Collaborative, the YMCA of Silicon Valley (the Y) partnered with the City of San Jose's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) to expand summer meal service in San Jose. Having a few years under its belt as an SFSP sponsor and having learned a lot along the way, the Y was well prepared to help the City of San Jose bring summer food service into its

summer camps.

"We've seen firsthand the positive benefits that participating in SFSP can have on summer programs," says Jennifer Puthoff, YMCA's Director of Child Care and After School Programs. "We hoped that by sharing our experience we could help other organizations boost their summer programs while tackling the issue of food insecurity in our community by offering free, healthy meals."

Getting started: San Jose PRNS decided to get its feet wet as a site sponsored by the Y. Recreation Program Specialist Darren Tan met with the Y team for assistance getting the necessary systems in place, such as completing paperwork, finding and working with a food vendor, and training staff. Tan says things happened very quickly, citing learning reimbursement rules the biggest challenge.

Fast forward to Summer 2011. PRNS completed its first summer as a sponsor, hosting five of its own sites and serving between 250-300 meals per week. Tan's advice to parks and rec departments considering a summer meal program:

- **Start out as a summer meal site.** Starting out as a site allowed PRNS to leverage the Y's expertise and become familiar with SFSP without the administrative demands of being a sponsor. After one summer as a site, PRNS was ready to become a sponsor and customize a summer meal program to better fit its needs.
- **Training is critical.** Making sure that staff is well-trained on reimbursement rules and managing paperwork is crucial to keeping your summer meal program running smoothly and successfully.
- **Start off small.** As a new sponsor, Tan suggests taking a conservative approach by starting with a small number of feeding sites. With more experience, departments can expand to more programs in their district. Darren Tan says that PRNS's experience as a summer meal provider has been positive, noting his appreciation for the Y's ongoing support. "Summer Food Service is a very valuable asset to communities, and we were glad that we could offer that support to families," reports Tan. "It was also nice to be able to provide kids with foods that were higher quality than what we could previously provide ... and get reimbursed for it."