

Food for Success: Promoting Summer Feeding Programs for School Children in Robeson  
County, NC

Honors Project

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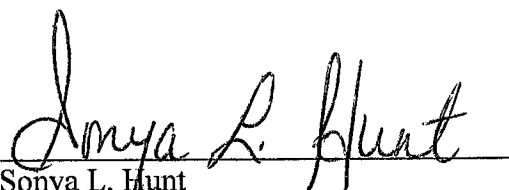
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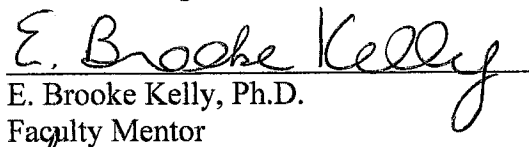
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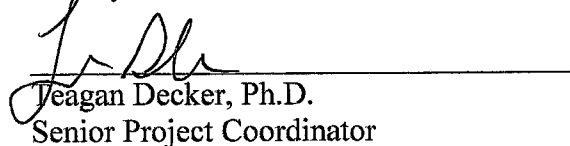
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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE OF PROJECT: FOOD FOR SUCCESS: PROMOTING SUMMER FEEDING  
PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ROBESON COUNTY, NC**

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Robeson County is ranked #1 in poverty in North Carolina, with 1 in 2 children living below the poverty line (Census Bureau, 2014). Thirty-four percent of children are living in food insecure homes (Feeding America, 2014). Food insecurity presents negative consequences for children's health, behavior, and academic performance in school. Free and reduced lunch programs provide meals for low-income children during the school year, but not during summer months. Summer feeding programs aim to fill the gap, providing children with nutritious food over the summer. With such high child poverty and food insecurity rates in Robeson County, are current summer feeding programs meeting children's needs? What barriers and obstacles do current and potential feeding sites face in their efforts to effectively feed children in Robeson County? To answer these questions, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with the Board of Education, Public Schools of Robeson County, current feeding sites, potential feeding sites, and NC House Officials. Findings revealed there are not enough summer feeding sites in the county to meet children's needs. Barriers and challenges included food allergies, picky eaters, while some children asked for extra food to take home, parental involvement, promotion, and transportation. Possible solutions on how to resolve problems of access to summer feeding sites to help feed the children in Robeson County are addressed.

## **Food for Success: Promoting Summer Feeding Programs for School Children in Robeson County, NC**

Food insecurity is the lack of ability to afford nutritious, adequate, and safe foods to maintain a healthy and active life (Seligman, Laraia, and Kushel, 2009). According to Casey, Szeto, Lensing, Bogle, and Weber (2001), food insecurity is directly linked to a shortage of money and resources to access enough food. Even with the plentiful food supply that the United States has available, there are still children here in the U.S. living in food insecure homes. According to WHO (2016), poverty, in absolute terms, can be defined as a low level of income, which leads to many negative health problems, such as malnutrition. No doubt, food insecurity and poverty are closely related, although not the same. Feeding America (2014) reported that in the United States there are forty-eight million Americans living in food insecure homes. This number includes fifteen million children under the age of eighteen years old. That leaves nearly twenty-one percent of children living in poverty in the United States.

Moreover, Feeding America (2014) reported that food insecurity occurs in every county in the United States. Food insecurity varies by counties from four percent to an extraordinary thirty-three percent in some counties. Sixteen percent of homes in the state of North Carolina are food insecure. The North Carolina Justice Center (2012) reported that there are 1.7 million Americans living below the federal poverty line in North Carolina. Within the one hundred counties in the state of North Carolina, Robeson County is ranked the highest in poverty. However, there are many programs that address the needs of children in areas with such high rates of poverty and food insecurity. Free and reduced lunch programs provide meals for children during the school year, but what happens during the summer months when school is not in session? Summer feeding programs serve to bridge the gap in food access during the summer

that occurs for children who qualify for free and reduced lunch programs during the school year. The purpose of this paper and research project is to determine if there are enough summer feeding sites to meet the needs of the children in Robeson County and what barriers or challenges current programs face. After describing the demographics of Robeson County, I provide more information about summer feeding programs. Then I review the current research on the impacts of food insecurity on children before describing the research methods I used to investigate current summer feeding programs in Robeson County. Finally, I describe what I found through semi-structured interviews and the implications of my findings for future research and action to improve children's access to adequate summer nutrition in Robeson County.

### **Robeson County Population Facts**

Robeson County is a predominantly rural area. Its geographical area covers 949 square miles. (Public Schools of Robeson County, 2016). According to The North Carolina Justice Center (2012), Robeson County steadily holds the title of the highest poverty county year after year, out of the 100 counties in North Carolina. Approximately 32% of Robeson County, or one in three residents, live below the poverty line (Census Bureau, 2014). An even greater percentage of children experience poverty: 46% (Census Bureau, 2014). This is equivalent to almost 1 in 2 children living in poverty in the county (NC Justice Center, 2012).

According to Feeding America, the population in Robeson County living with food insecurity is 21.7% (2014). While Berner (2013) reported that children living in food insecure homes is 34%, and the population living below the food stamp threshold is 84%. In addition, within Robeson County, the Census tract which includes Pembroke has the highest poverty and child poverty rates. The Pembroke Census tract reported poverty at 53.6% and child poverty as high as 70.9% (Census Bureau, 2014).

Several factors are associated with high poverty rates. According to Hossfeld, Legerton, and Keuster (2004), Robeson County lost forty one percent of its manufacturing jobs, which in turn, led to a high increase of unemployment and bankruptcies. They also reported illiteracy rates as high as 38% percent. Therefore, not only is job loss a factor, but the low levels of education in Robeson County can be a contributing factor to the high poverty rates. Feeding America reported that certain demographic characteristics, such as unemployment, can lead to higher rates of food insecurity. This is where programs such as summer feeding sites can benefit rural areas such as Robeson County. They can be imperative to a child's nutrition during the summer months while school is out of session.

### **What are Summer Feeding Sites?**

During the school year, children are able to receive a nutritious meal at breakfast and lunch through the free and reduced lunch programs. However, “during the summer [--when these programs are not available--] children are at a higher risk of both obesity and hunger” (No Kid Hungry, 2014). Henceforth, poor nourishment sets kids up for poor academic performance, higher risks of illness and behavior problems (USDA, 2015). This is why summer feeding sites can have a vital impact in a county. Summer feeding sites are facilities such as schools, camps, and private nonprofit organizations that already provide services to the community. They also have good management practices to run food services and a capable staff (USDA, 2013). These programs assist in “ensuring that low-income children continue to receive healthy and nutritious food while school is out of session during the summer” (USDA, Food and Nutrition, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, “promoting summer feeding sites in your community is one of the most important things you can do to ensure that no child goes hungry in the summer. The more parents, children and teenagers know about where sites are located, the

more children will come and eat” (USDA, 2015). Summer feeding sites provide a way to help bridge the gap for children that might not have access to a healthy nutritious meal in the summer for various reasons. Furthermore, it is imperative that a child continues to receive adequate nutrition in the summer. Access to summer feeding sites can significantly decrease the risks associated with food insecurity for children.

### **Risk Factors Associated With Food Insecurity**

#### **Health Issues**

Health problems can be a serious issue for children in food insecure homes. Seligman et al. (2009) reported that food insecurity can lead to many health complications in children, such as anemia, chronic illness and acute infections. This also includes developmental and mental health problems, which will be addressed later. Furthermore, Casey et al. (2001) reported food insecure children also have higher cholesterol intakes and higher levels of obesity. This is possibly linked to consumption of less fruit and longer periods of watching television. Food insecure children will likely suffer more from illnesses such as fatigue, ear infections, colds, impaired growth, impaired cognitive development, and unintended weight loss. These types of health problems lead to more frequent trips to physicians, thus more absences from school. In addition to falling prey to sickness more often, food insecure children will be hospitalized more frequently and have a tendency to recover more slowly from illnesses. Furthermore, lower bone density has been found in preadolescent boys that are food insecure (Gitterman et al., 2015). There are even more instances of oral health problems in food insecure children (Feeding America, 2016). Gitterman et al. also reported that childhood malnutrition has been linked through ample research to adult diseases. These diseases include cardiovascular disease and



diabetes. Evidently, all of these health issues in children will lead to higher absences from school, thus hindering a child's education.

### **Behavioral Issues**

As mentioned earlier, food insecure children may also suffer from developmental and mental health problems more often than those in food secure homes. Gitterman et al. (2015) reported that adolescents are more apt to experience suicidal ideation or chronic depression in food insecure homes. This could be in relationship to the effects poor nutrition has on the neurotransmitters in the brain. Younger children have more behavioral problems, which could be attributable to their mother's high levels of anxiety and depression. Feeding America (2016) reported that children in food insecure homes have difficulty engaging with their peers and participating in daily activities. In addition, they are at higher risks of behavioral problems such as bullying, hyperactivity, anxiety, fighting, social difficulties, mood swings and aggression. Jyoti et al. (2005) reported these children also have more frequent visits to a psychologist due to psychosocial dysfunctions. In addition, Slack and Yoo (2015) reported food insecure children are more apt to have a past or present history of mental health counseling than their food secure counterparts.

### **Academic Achievement**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Hunger is one of the most severe roadblocks to the learning process" (2016). This is why it is imperative to make sure that no child goes without nutritious food, even during the summer months. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) aims to fill gaps in children's food access to assure their academic performance does not suffer. Feeding America (2016) reported children who suffer from food insecurity have difficulty learning in their first two years of life. Furthermore, this could also hamper their participation in other activities in school. They might not be able to function normally in school

due to the lack of proper nutrition. Poor school performance can also lead to tardiness and missing school altogether. If a child does not attend school, then obviously they cannot learn.

Several studies suggest a relationship between food insecurity and poor school performance. Gitterman et al. (2015) reported that a lack of nutritious food can weaken a child's ability to learn and even concentrate in school. Furthermore, longitudinal studies over a four year span in kindergarten students revealed reduced academic achievement in reading and math. Jyoti, Frongillo, and Jones (2005) reported that food insecure children suffer from poorer reading skills. However, this was more evident among girls. In addition, it is also linked to a higher rate of repeating grades. Winicki and Jemison (2003) reported that "...even moderate undernutrition can have a lasting effect on children's cognitive development and school performance" (pg. 145). Children from food insecure homes score lower at the beginning of the year and absorb less over the course of the year than their counterparts of children in food secure homes. Even though children are typically not in school during the summer, these studies suggest that food insecurity during summer months can have a lasting effect on learning outcomes during the school year. Therefore, it is evident that children in food insecure homes suffer academically due to the shortage of an adequate nutritious diet. That is why it is imperative to try and find solutions for children in food insecure homes to continue to eat healthy when school is out of session during the summer months.

### **Possible Solutions for Rural Counties with Feeding Sites**

According to (SCHOOL BUS BRINGS SUMMER MEALS TO RURAL STUDENTS, 2012), children in rural area districts are the ones that benefit from summer feeding sites the most. They are also the ones that do not have the means of transportation to easily access summer feeding sites. Even though summer feeding programs do benefit children, there are still students that live over ten miles from a summer feeding site. Mike Boone, who is a child

nutrition associate director for a Texas school district, purchased a school bus by the surplus fund of the child nutrition department. The bus transported meals to an additional five feeding sites in a neighborhood that served approximately 100 more children daily. They determined this was the most cost-effective way to feed children without opening another feeding site. SCHOOL BUS BRINGS SUMMER MEALS TO RURAL STUDENTS reported that if it was not for programs such as these, many children would not be getting a meal at all due to circumstances beyond their control.

In another example, White (2012) reported that child nutrition director Billy Reid received a donated RV, which was renovated to transport food to children as a mobile summer feeding site. Since they cannot transport hot meals, they serve cold foods such as fruit, milk, sandwiches and vegetables. This provides them another way to reach children that otherwise cannot come to a summer feeding site. They have a goal to one day be able to serve up to sixteen kids inside the RV and use it as a nutrition education center. It is important to mention that they only need one staff member to drive the RV and one to serve the children. However, when it gets busier, there are times they have an additional staff member to handle the paperwork. This RV helped them to serve an additional 15,000 more meals over an eight week course than the summer before.

White (2012) also reported Chef Timothy Cipriano received assistance from a grant to purchase a food truck. This truck opened the doors for them to serve an additional 17,000 more children in one month. They set the truck up in parking lots at schools that are not open for summer feeding sites. They decided for the next summer they will probably get even more of a turn out if they go to parking lots in housing development areas and take the food to the children. It only took two staff members to drive the truck and distribute the food. They actually opened the back doors of the truck and served the food there. In order to promote the summer feeding

truck, they used local radio stations, newspapers, and television stations. They even used a local billboard to get the word out. White also reported Donna Martin, a school nutrition program director, distributes 3,000 meals each day around the county by using 16 school buses. They take the buses to different sites around the county and children then board the bus to eat and then exit. Recently they have purchased a bus that does the same for a supper feeding program, which serves 500 meals a day. This newly purchased bus for the supper program provides them the opportunity to serve hot meals.

Finally, No Kid Hungry (2014) addressed Senate policies for areas where summer feeding sites are hard to operate. For example, one of the policies can provide states the option to implement summer (EBT) funds. These are great examples of some ways that summer feeding sites can work more adequately in rural areas where transportation is clearly an issue.

### **Development of Research Interest In Summer Feeding Sites**

In the fall of 2013, I took a Sociology of Poverty service learning class. This was a life changing course for me. I used to think in order to make a difference with world hunger I had to go outside the United States. So in 2011 I traveled to Africa. However, with this class I found out hunger was in my own county, so I set out to make a difference right here. As part of the service learning course on poverty in 2013, we surveyed students on campus and found out that more than half of the students surveyed were food insecure, according to an adapted USDA measure. I was astounded by this finding. Then we learned of the child poverty rates in Robeson County. Later in the semester, I found out through a skype session in class with Dr. Maureen Berner, a professor in the School of Government from UNC Chapel Hill, that there was a large sum of unused funds for summer feeding programs in Robeson County, a topic which will be addressed with specific numbers later on in the findings section. In addition to that information, I learned of the struggles that food insecure children battle with in school, such as how it can hinder their

learning and education. This was how I became interested in this research project. I wanted to know why this money was going unused if there were nearly 1 in 2 children facing poverty in the county. A discussion with Cynthia Ervin, the Summer Nutrition Program Manager at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, revealed the need to gather data from within the county to investigate food insecurity needs and barriers. Further investigation into the above literature on food insecurity and available information on summer feeding programs, along with my service learning class, led me to two research questions I needed answered for this research project.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are there enough summer feeding sites operating in Robeson County to meet the needs of the children during the summer months?
2. What are the barriers or obstacles that exist for current feeding sites and potential feeding sites to effectively feed the children in Robeson County?

### **Research Methods**

Based on my previous investigation of the literature and discussion with Cynthia Ervin as an informant, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to gather data in the county to address my research questions. I began by thinking about who I should interview to find answers to these questions. I decided it was necessary to start at the Public Schools of Robeson County. I thought this would lead me in the direction of who I should interview for current feeding sites. Also, I knew it would be important to have formulated ideas of who to interview for potential feeding sites if the research revealed there were not enough summer feeding sites in the county to meet the needs of the children. In addition, after research revealed that policies had been implemented by other counties, I felt it would be beneficial to interview at least one NC House Official for Robeson County. I then constructed four sets of interview questions for the

following entities: Public Schools of Robeson County-PSRC (Appendix B), Current Feeding Sites (Appendix C), Potential Feeding Sites (Appendix D), and NC Officials (Appendix E). I formulated these questions based on what I thought was necessary information to obtain answers for my research questions and interest in summer feeding sites in the county. I then created an informed consent document (Appendix F) for these individuals to sign for permission to be interviewed and recorded. The participants could deny the interview or stop the interview process at any time. They could also deny being recording or quoted. Also, a greeting (Appendix A) was written, briefly discussing my research and reasons for interviewing them. After all of these documents were created, I submitted them to the IRB application process at UNC-Pembroke for approval of this research.

Upon IRB approval a sample was formed. The sample for this research was based on who I thought would be knowledgeable about summer feeding sites based on my research on the topic and my personal knowledge as a native of Robeson County. I thought it was necessary to find out if there are enough summer feeding sites in the county by starting at PSRC, Board of Education. The phone call directed me to Child Nutrition. Their office manages summer feeding sites in Robeson County. Therefore, my first interviews were with the child nutrition director and office manager of child nutrition. The child nutrition manager then suggested I interview cafeteria managers for current feeding sites, since they are in charge of the sites. This led to my interviews of four cafeteria managers and one assistant due to the sickness of the cafeteria manager for that school. I asked the office manager of child nutrition to give me the top most successful feeding sites in the county to interview. I wanted to see why they were so successful and asked to participate year after year. This led me to four interviews with cafeteria managers. However, I will later discuss how I eventually interviewed Pembroke Elementary which was not given, but was in fact the top feeding site in the county for summer 2015. All of these interviews

were conducted only on the information from summer feeding sites for 2015. I then interviewed one church that was participating in a summer feeding site. I thought this was necessary to see how a church performed as a feeding site.

Then my interviews proceeded to two potential feeding sites. The potential interview questions were geared toward people in the community who I thought might assist with summer feeding sites. To form my sample of potential feeding sites, I relied on my knowledge and networks in the area, since I am a native of Robeson County. However, one interview led me to an additional interview I did not anticipate. Therefore, three interviews with potential feeding sites took place. All these interviews were with pastors. As a Native of Robeson County, I know the pivotal role churches play in surrounding communities for the area. I also know how prevalent churches are in numbers throughout the county. According to Public Schools of Robeson County (2016) there are three hundred and fifty churches in Robeson County. Not only do they help individuals with their spiritual needs but also with their physical needs as well. For example, many needy families seek out churches to help them pay utility bills. Also, there are churches that have food pantries that help families. This is why I decided to reach out to local churches in the county to assist with this project.

As mentioned earlier, I also interviewed one of the North Carolina House of Representatives for Robeson County. I thought this was a necessary interview for a couple of reasons. First, I wanted to see if there were existing policies for summer feeding sites. Next, I wanted to see if any policies could be implemented for summer feeding sites if none already existed.

There was also an informant with whom I spoke on the phone but who I did not formally interview and an additional interview with a current feeding site that I conducted as a result of that conversation. After my initial interviews and research revealed that the Pembroke area had

one of the highest child poverty rates in the county, I decided to call one of the directors of the Pembroke Housing Authority. I also found there were five subsidized housing projects and only one feeding site in the Pembroke area. Therefore, I wanted to see if the one Pembroke feeding site was meeting the needs of the children in this area, from the perspective of the director. After this call I then decided to interview the Pembroke Elementary feeding site, to inquire from the cafeteria manager's perspective if they thought the needs of the children in the Pembroke community were being met by their feeding site. I also did follow up phone calls with some respondents about some discrepancies I found with numbers or other questions that came up through the interview and analysis process whenever necessary.

What I found during the interview process was that additional probing questions came about that were unanticipated. This led me to ask a few additional follow up questions during the interviews. These follow up questions emerged because of reoccurring themes that were discussed by the cafeteria managers as barriers or obstacles to their summer feeding site. Also, to get a more accurate representation of the number of children utilizing summer feeding sites, I called each cafeteria manager for each feeding site to get an average child participation rate.

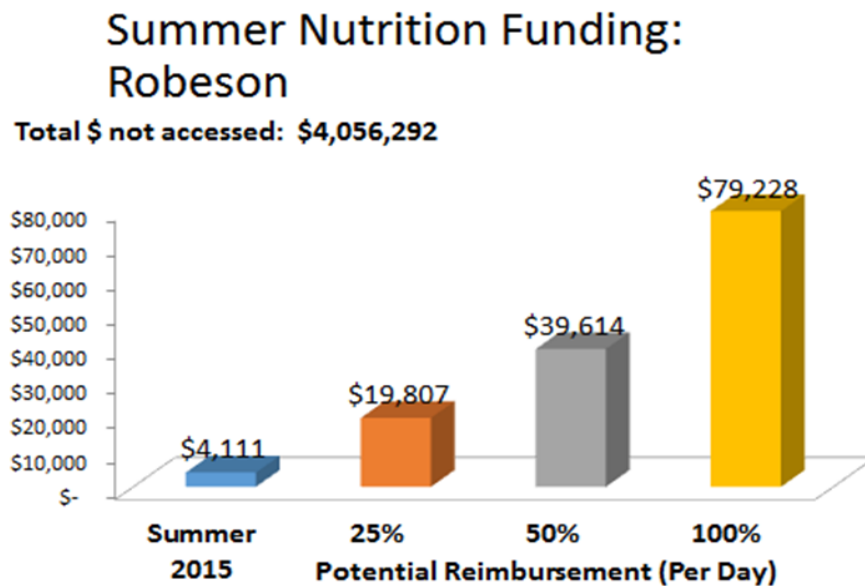
I conducted a total of twelve semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded with the respondent's permission. Upon completion of each interview, I transcribed the recorded interview, beginning to think about how the interview findings addressed my research questions. After completing the transcriptions, I reviewed all transcripts, analyzing the content for common themes and answers to my research questions.

### **Research Findings**

**Research Question 1: Are there enough summer feeding sites operating in Robeson County to meet the needs of the children during the summer months?**



One way to address the above research question is to consider potential lost revenue to the county based on the gap between those children in Robeson County who qualify for summer feeding services and those who actually access those services. The lost revenue resulting from such a gap is illustrated in the graph below, provided by Cynthia Ervin, Summer Nutrition Program Manager of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.



According to the above chart, Robeson County lost out on potential reimbursements of over four million dollars over the course of the summer of 2015. The bar graph above indicates how much potential reimbursement funds were used per day (in the first bar) in comparison to how much was available based on eligibility. The \$4,111 used per day during the summer of 2015 compares to \$19,807 had 25% of potential funding per day been used, \$39,614 had 50% of potential funding per day been used, and \$79,228 had all eligible funds per day been used. According to this chart, clearly children in the county are not accessing all the summer feeding funding available based on eligibility. Not utilizing these potential funds not only leaves children at possible risks for hunger over the summer, but accessing these funds could also potentially stimulate the economy in Robeson County.

To determine if there were enough summer feeding sites in the county, it was important to know how many summer feeding sites were operating and approximately how many children were participating in the summer feeding sites. My research indicated that all summer feeding sites in Robeson County are located in schools. Below is a list of the summer feeding sites in Robeson County. This list provides all 18 schools that served as summer feeding sites for the summer of 2015. The list was retrieved from the Public Schools of Robeson County’s website. These feeding sites could change year after year. Whether or not a feeding site is deemed successful for the summer determines whether or not it is chosen again to participate. Success depends on how many children participate in the summer feeding site. Child nutrition reported that they need at least 100 children participating to reopen that feeding site for the next summer. They also reported that a feeding site is not successful if only 35-40 children participate. When that occurs, the feeding site will be reevaluated and probably will not be asked to participate again. When asked why this is the case, Mr. F. McKinnon reported that the criterion is the budget. “We are not here to make money, but we can’t lose money either.”

**Table 1: Schools Serving as Summer Feeding Sites, 2015**

<b>Breakfast/Lunch</b>	<b>Lunch Only</b>	<b>Transition High Schools- Breakfast/Lunch</b>	<b>Operating Times</b>
<b>Rosenwald Elementary</b>	<b>Townsend Middle School</b>	<b>Lumberton High School</b>	<b>June 22<sup>nd</sup>-July 31<sup>st</sup> Aug. 3<sup>rd</sup>- Aug. 5<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>*Pembroke Elementary</b>	<b>Magnolia Elementary</b>	<b>Fairmont High School</b>	<b>June 22<sup>nd</sup>-July 31<sup>st</sup> June 22<sup>nd</sup> –June 30<sup>th</sup></b>

<b>Tanglewood Elementary</b>	<b>*Deep Branch Elementary</b>	<b>St. Pauls High School</b>	<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup> June 22<sup>nd</sup>- June 30<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>Peterson Elementary</b>	<b>Union Elementary</b>		<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup></b>
<b>Southside/Ashpole Elementary</b>	<b>Oxendine Elementary</b>		<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup></b>
<b>*Lumberton Jr. High</b>	<b>*Prospect Elementary</b>		<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup></b>
<b>St. Pauls Elementary</b>	<b>Rex Rennert Elementary</b>		<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup></b>
<b>*W. H. Knuckles Elementary</b>			<b>June 22nd-July 31<sup>st</sup></b>

**\*Indicates schools interviewed/ Second row of dates are listed for the high schools.**

**\*There are some discrepancies with the high school dates that are listed and what was reported.**

**Source: Public Schools of Robeson County  
(<http://www.robeson.k12.nc.us/site/default.aspx?PageID=1>)**

Therefore, out of the forty-two public schools, which service approximately 24,000 students in Robeson County, 15 schools are serving as summer feeding sites. They operate six weeks out of the summer. While eight of these schools are serving breakfast and lunch, seven schools are serving lunches only. In addition, the three high schools are providing both breakfast and lunch for eighth grade students that are transitioning to their local high school as uprising freshman. As noted, there are discrepancies between the information I gathered from my interviews and the dates of the high school that are listed on the website. The information of the high schools was transcribed from the interviews as only operating four days out of the summer, which is probably correct, being the listed dates above fall over the weekend.

One of the questions on the questionnaire for Public Schools of Robeson County child nutrition asked, “About how many students participate in your feeding sites?” This was important to get a general idea of participation in summer feeding sites for the county. It was reported that less than 10,000 students participate. To ensure a more accurate number, I called all the cafeteria managers from the other schools, who I had not interviewed. I asked them to give me an estimate of about how many children participated in their feeding site. I also asked them to give me a range, such as 100-200. I then took that number and used the largest number to get my final number for participants. After either interviewing or calling all cafeteria managers, my final number was 3,965 children participating in the county at summer feeding sites. It is also important to report that 600 of these numbers come from the high schools for the transitioning eighth graders. However, ages 0-18 are eligible to participate in summer feeding sites. Most schools in Robeson County have opened up free and reduced lunch access to all students because of the high rates of poverty and food insecurity in the county. This means that all or virtually all children in the county are eligible for corresponding summer feeding programs. According the Census data, this amounts to approximately 34,903 children in Robeson County as eligible for summer feeding programs. In contrast, less than 4,000 are using them.

In addition to the gap between the number of children who are eligible for summer feeding site access and those who are actually receiving food during the summer from this program, there are also gaps in current coverage over the course of the summer. In 2015, the public schools ended on June 10 and started back on August 25<sup>th</sup>. This led to 4 weeks in the summer that summer feeding sites were not available to the children. Also, the feeding sites only operate Monday-Thursdays, which in turn leads to three day weekends that children may not have access to a nutritious meal.

My interview with the child nutrition director and manager confirmed the gap in coverage. During the summer months employees work longer shifts Monday-Thursday, so they have Fridays off. The director explained that they try every year to increase the number of feeding sites; “We would love to have more feeding sites; we just have to have the participation.” (F. McKinnon, Child Nutrition Director).

Interestingly, I found out through this interview that many children access summer feeding sites through camps. This provides transportation to the summer feeding site for many children. This also provided access for children to breakfast and lunch. So if a child has the luxury to participate in camp, then this gives them access to the summer feeding sites. However, not all children have this amenity. Also, camps can only take a certain quota of children. I asked if there were any churches that participated in summer feeding sites and two church names were given. I was only able to contact one church. Before the interview, I assumed the church was actually a summer feeding site. However, I found out it was not a summer feeding site. The church had started a camp on their facility and transported the children to a nearby school feeding site. I later found out that a few other churches also transport children to nearby feeding sites. Currently there are no churches participating as a summer feeding facility in Robeson County, though several help children access summer feeding sites at schools through camp or other programs.

**Research Question 2: What are the barriers or obstacles that exist for current feeding sites and potential feeding sites to effectively feed the children in Robeson County?**

After answering research question one and determining there are clearly not enough summer feeding sites to meet the needs of the children in Robeson County, I had to move to the next question. In order to analyze this information, I found overall themes that seemed to be

reported by cafeteria managers and child nutrition. Some of these general themes were not what I had anticipated, but came up consistently.

### **Food allergies**

The first barrier or obstacle I noted was concern over food allergies. During the course of the school year, cafeteria managers are aware of the students at their schools with food allergies. However, there could be conditions of a child participating at a school by way of camp or church buses that is not in the same school district during the school year. This puts the cafeteria managers at risk of not knowing if that child has a food allergy, such as peanuts or fish. One cafeteria manager reported that child nutrition is getting better at this and not serving peanut butter at all and slowly diminishing serving fish.

### **Picky Eaters and More Food**

Another common theme that continually came up was some of the kids were picky eaters. I thought this was an unusual finding at first because I thought all the kids going to summer feeding sites were possibly in food insecure homes and would not be choosy over the food. However, my research revealed that most children participating in these summer feeding sites are coming by way of camps. Therefore, all of these children may not be food insecure. Some of my interviews with cafeteria managers suggested that the children may be unaccustomed to the recent shift toward healthier foods. The cafeteria has changed what they served in the past to all broiled, steamed, baked and whole wheat items. They also do not serve desserts anymore, only fruit. This change in nutrition could be a possible explanation of why there are more picky eaters, particularly if changes in the menu were not accompanied by education about the importance of eating healthier foods. Also, during the school year there is a choice between two meats; in the summer there is no choice.

At the same time some children complained about available food, other children asked to take extra food home because they say they do not have any food at home to eat. Such reports do support food insecurity among children who utilize these programs. Both of these seemingly contradictory issues—complaints about food and requests for extra food—were reported to me at every feeding site.

### **Parental Involvement**

Every cafeteria manager and child nutrition staff said they would love to see more parental involvement. “The children would get a good balanced meal if they come here. You just have some parents that are not going to do a whole lot.” (B. Hunt, Cafeteria Assistant). A lack of involvement from parents is not always a result of disinterest. Some parents are unable to take their children to a feeding site due to work schedules. Others may have transportation problems, such as not having a vehicle or being unable to afford to put gas in their car. In addition, there was a continual reporting that some parents are genuinely concerned for their child’s safety. Even in some cases where a child could walk to a summer feeding site near his/her house while the child’s parent(s) is at work, the parents are too afraid for their child or children to walk to the summer feeding site alone. Last but not least, some parents just do not know about summer feeding sites. This leads me to another huge obstacle for the success of summer feeding sites.

### **Promotion**

Promotion seems to be one of the biggest obstacles Robeson County needs to overcome for more successful summer feeding sites. People simply are not aware of summer feeding sites in the county. After interviewing child nutrition, I found out how they promoted summer feeding sites. Child nutrition lists the summer feeding sites on their website and runs an ad in the local newspaper. As I pointed out to them, if parents are lacking resources, they probably do not have a computer or internet in the home or do not purchase the local newspaper either. They hope this

summer to give each child a flyer to take home before school ends. This led me to ask cafeteria managers what they thought about promotion and if they promoted in their schools. I found that they all agreed, with one exception, that promotion was a big obstacle that needs to improve for summer feeding sites. Cafeteria managers reported that they currently promote programs through word of mouth, by asking churches to make announcements, and by asking stores if they can hang flyers. Managers reported that some stores complied and others would not allow them to post flyers in their stores. In addition to the promotion they do in the community, cafeteria managers all promote inside their own schools in various ways. Some examples include flyers in the schools and marquee signs outside their schools.

### **Transportation**

After careful analysis of my findings it appeared the biggest obstacle to summer feeding sites was transportation, a common problem in rural areas. “The biggest obstacles are Robeson County’s land areas are so large and spread out. Even if you had a site at every school some people would still have a long way to travel.” (F. McKinnon, Director of Child Nutrition). There was a general consensus from every school that transportation hindered a lot of students from participating in summer feeding sites.

#### *Access Issues in Pembroke:*

A pattern emerged in which those summer feeding sites located in close proximity to subsidized housing had higher participation rates than those located further away from subsidized housing developments. Transportation did not present such problems for those children who lived close enough to a summer feeding site that they could walk there safely. “On this side of town, we have so many projects and it is walking distance, so a majority of my kids are walking here.” (G. Sinclair, Cafeteria Manager for, WH Knuckles Elementary). However, bad weather was an issue for walking children.



After the interview quoted from above, I became interested in the Pembroke area, where one summer feeding site serves five subsidized housing developments. Having grown up in the area and knowing the location of the school and a general idea of most of the subsidized housing locations, I had a hunch this area may be undeserved. My suspicions were validated after having an informal conversation with one of the directors of the Pembroke Housing Authority. The location of the school that serves as the only summer feeding site is not in close proximity to any of the subsidized housing developments. The director with whom I spoke said he has known some kids to walk for miles to get to the summer feeding site. Soon fewer children will have access in this area because most kids are getting to the summer feeding site by participating in camps, and now camps are making budget cuts and are taking less kids. Though the director reported some other sources of food for children, these sources were limited. There is a church in the local community that sporadically delivers food to one of subsidized housing developments, but it was not something the children could count on daily. Another nonprofit organization cooks food for families, but they have a quota each day and are limited in how many people they can feed.

These discoveries led me to interview the Pembroke feeding site, Pembroke Elementary, even though it was not suggested as a top feeding site by child nutrition. Interestingly, it ended up being the largest feeding site I interviewed. They had as many as 650 children participating because of the participation of an Indian Education camp. However, after that camp ends, they then have a boys and girls club camp that participate and two church buses that bring children to participate at the summer feeding site. This drops the number drastically to around 125-150 children participating. It is possible that Pembroke Elementary was not mentioned to me because during the previous summer, the summer feeding site was at a different location in Pembroke.

My interview with B. Hunt, the cafeteria assistant at the Pembroke Elementary feeding site, confirmed my previous findings and assumptions that the subsidized housing is too great of a distance for children to walk to get access to food. She stated, “Yes. Some children would walk if their parents did not care. If they had transportation there would be a lot more children using this feeding site. The distance is too far. I wouldn’t let my child walk that far.” Therefore, she confirmed that the Pembroke area is not in a good location for those living in subsidized housing. When asked, “Do you believe the summer feeding site is benefitting the children of Robeson County?” she replied, “Yes. The ones that use it, it does, but not the ones that can’t get to it. If they had a way to get here, it would benefit them.” (B. Hunt, Cafeteria Assistant, Pembroke Elementary). Therefore, my research suggests that transportation is clearly a barrier to accessing summer feeding sites in rural areas, as addressed in previous research and approaches (SCHOOL BUS BRINGS SUMMER MEALS TO RURAL STUDENTS, 2012).

### **Implications and Future Actions**

Finally, what does this research mean for summer feeding sites in Robeson County? I asked myself that many times while doing this research. It was hard and overwhelming at first, feeling as though there was nothing I could do as an individual to feed food insecure children in the county. Yet, this research project has led to answers and possible solutions.

Interviews and conversations with Cynthia Ervin, Summer Nutrition Program Manager of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, my pastor Jeff Blackburn, Dr. Mike Cummings, Director of missions at Burnt Swamp Baptist Association, and North Carolina House of Representative, Charles Graham, presented potential solutions that will hopefully prosper from this research. Better use of current media sources could improve promotion of summer feeding sites, by using all 7-newspapers, 6-radio stations, and 5-television stations to get the word out about summer feeding sites in Robeson County.

Local churches could serve as potential feeding sites and/or provide assistance in promoting or supporting sites. Jeff Blackburn, a local pastor, has agreed to go to child nutrition training, a program to train potential feeding site operators, to see what our church can do to help. Dr. Cummings, Director of Missions at Burnt Swamp Baptist Association, has also agreed to help with his churches, seeing how they can get involved with this mission of service to the community. Dr. Cummings stated, “I think there would be a number of churches who ... in their heart of hearts, it would be difficult for them to turn away the responsibility of serving their community.” He also discussed ways we could inquire about the possibility of using the budget from summer feeding programs to hire community coordinators. Community coordinators could assist the churches in setting up bus and van routes to either take the children to the summer feeding site or take the food to the children. Cummings expressed interest in exploring other possibilities of getting the 70 churches involved that he oversees in his ministry. Altogether, Robeson County has 350 churches that could possibly get involved to help children access food during the summer.

Several proposed solutions address the way promoting feeding site access could also serve to stimulate the local economy. Conversations with Cynthia Ervin, Summer Nutrition Program Manager of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, revealed the possibility of area restaurants serving as summer feeding sites. For restaurants that experience lulls in business over the summer months, service as a summer feeding site during that time could assist the restaurant and local children simultaneously. The restaurants can be reimbursed by federal funds for the food. House of Representative, Charles Graham discussed ways we could stimulate the economy by hiring bus drivers to deliver food during the summer on their traditional school year bus routes (which some counties do). He has also agreed to see what we can do as a community to pull resources together, such as utilizing local church vans and buses

to transport children to feeding sites. This will be an ongoing process of finding solutions to help resolve the issue of food insecure children in Robeson County.

Since presenting my project at UNC-Pembroke, Chancellor Cummings has asked that I present my research for the Public Schools of Robeson County's board of education and his board as well. He is deeply concerned and is willing to help. He also wants the work published to get the word out about the summer feeding sites in the county and the issues we are facing. We have also discussed the possibility of UNC-Pembroke serving as a summer feeding site, since the campus is in closer proximity to some of the subsidized housing developments in the Pembroke area. Through consultation with Cynthia Ervin, I learned that if UNC-Pembroke were to serve as a summer feeding site, camps that take place on the campus could also take advantage of the summer feeding program for meals, reducing the cost of these camps to children in this area. This is all being further investigated.

Future research could stem from this project that would be beneficial to the county. For example, a similar project to this one could investigate the back pack program. These are programs that allow food insecure children the opportunity to take lunch bags home over the weekend. This research would be beneficial to see if the children in the county are facing food insecurity over the weekends while school is in session. How well are these current programs reaching food insecure children? If there are gaps in coverage of this program, future research could examine current barriers and challenges in expanding this program to access more children in need.

Findings about picky eaters and children not wanting to eat the more healthy foods provided by summer feeding sites suggest that future initiatives might help educate children about the importance of eating a healthy diet and what that can do for your health. This could be integrated into the curriculum at the school, and also at current feeding sites. Building such

curriculum might provide an opportunity for service learning initiatives through UNC Pembroke. Farm to school programs across the country provide models of opportunities to get local farmers involved in educating children on eating and growing fresh food. It may even be possible to incorporate these local farmer's vegetables into summer feeding programs.

While presenting this project at the Southern Sociological Society's annual meeting, an audience member shared an approach in which a mobile book bus visited summer feeding sites. The children received a free book, and had story time incorporated into their lunchtime. This example raises the possibility of incorporating other educational opportunities into the summer feeding program. Perhaps this approach could be incorporated into the literacy commons program at UNC Pembroke. I think these sorts of ideas could be beneficial to the children in Robeson County to enhance health and educational outcomes.

In conclusion, this research project has been very inspiring for me. I have learned how other counties in rural areas have made summer feeding sites even more successful. This gives me hope, being a Native of Robeson County and knowing the community that reside here, the church families and compassionate people for children. I will continue to persist on sharing this research with the right people. Afterwards, I believe we will rise to the top and make a difference with the children in Robeson County, and that difference can start by ensuring that these children do not go hungry during the summer months. Together we can make a difference in getting these children access to adequate nutrition. These children are our future. They are depending on us.

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## Appendix A

### **Greeting**

Hello. My name is Sonya Hunt. I am a student in the Esther G. Maynor's Honors College Program. I am working on my senior thesis project for completion of the program for graduation in May 2016. For my project, I wanted to conduct research that could address poverty and hunger in Robeson County, my home. As you probably know, many children in Robeson County do not get adequate food to remain healthy and active. They experience food insecurity or hunger. Research reveals that this greatly hinders their learning in education. In fact, forty-six percent of children in Robeson County face poverty that is almost 1 in every 2 children in Robeson County dealing with poverty (2014, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey). Free and reduced lunch programs provide crucial meals to those children during the school year. Unfortunately, those programs do not extend into the summer months, leaving many children with greater food insecurity during those months. Summer feeding programs serve to bridge that gap in need over the summer months providing children with meals. In a course I took on poverty, I learned that many children who qualify for summer feeding programs in Robeson County do not have access to those programs because a number of children in need outnumber current programs that exist. I would like to find out more about current feeding programs, potential summer feeding sites, and some of the challenges that those who currently run programs and may be interested in running or participating such programs face. I am conducting interviews with county officials, current summer feeding programs, and those who may be willing or interested in starting a summer feeding program. This research will involve answering some questions either involving your knowledge and expertise in the summer feeding programs in Robeson county or your interest in learning more about the programs. It will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time. You may withdraw at any time. Your information will be recorded upon your consent and your name will be used with your consent. However, if you wish for your information to be used and your name to remain confidential that will be granted to you.

(If yes :) Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this research, please feel free to ask me any questions you may have at this time.

1. First I will pass out two consent forms. Please read and sign it: The signed copy will be returned to me. And the other will be for your records.
2. Secondly, I will begin the interview at this time and it will be recorded upon your consent.

(If No :) I am sorry that you would not like to participate, have a great day.

## Appendix B

### **Robeson County Board Of Education**

1. How many school summer feeding sites are located in Robeson County?
2. What are the names of the schools and churches that participate?
3. When do the program begin and end, or does that vary by facilities?
4. Who is allowed to participate, other than children? (Parents, faculty)...
5. Is there a charge for those who participate?
6. Is there any transportation system provided to children for access to the summer feeding program?
7. About how many students participate in Robeson County?
8. Do you believe the summer feeding sites are a benefit to the children in Robeson County?
9. Do you believe there are enough summer feeding sites in the county?
10. Do you think that transportation prevents children in the county from participating in summer feeding programs? If yes, do you believe there would be more participation if transportation was provided?
11. Is the summer feeding program getting the funding that it needs? (I am asking because in the fall of 2013 I took a class called the sociology of poverty. We had a guest speaker say that there were a large amount of kids who meet this requirement for summer feeding sites yet there were unused funds because there were not enough of facilities participating. Do you know if this is true?)
12. Is there a need for more facilities to participate in the summer feeding programs?

13. Who would a facility need to contact if they wanted to start a summer feeding program?
14. Are there special requirements the facility has to meet, such as size or location?
15. Do schools have an option to participate in summer feeding programs or are they just appointed by the board to have one?
16. I have done some research that supports that year around schools help with this issue of hunger in high poverty counties, because children do not have to go long periods of time without adequate nutrition. Has year around schools ever been discussed for Robeson County, do you think this might help with the issue?
17. What do you see as the biggest obstacles for the summer feeding sites of Robeson County?

## Appendix C

### **Current Feeding Sites**

1. When does your summer feeding site open at the beginning of the summer and end at the end of the summer?
2. On average how many children participate in your summer feeding site?
3. Do volunteers assist with your summer feeding site?
4. How do most of the students get to your summer feeding site?
5. What ages are allowed to come to your summer feeding site (do they have to be school aged)?
6. Are parents allowed to come and eat with their children? If so are they charged a fee, if so how much?
7. Do you think transportation is an issue for children to get to your summer feeding site?
8. Do you believe the summer feeding site is benefiting the children of Robeson County?
9. How many years have you had a summer feeding site?
10. Has your summer feeding site increased over the years or decreased in size?
11. How many workers (paid or volunteers) are needed to run your summer feeding site?
12. How did your facility get involved in opening a summer feeding site?
13. How are the meals prepared? On campus or off? Are they transported here?
14. Do you provide hot meals, cold meals, or both?
15. What type of general menu is provided for the summer feeding program?

16. What resources could your facility use to help with your summer feeding program?
17. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to addressing the needs of the children in your summer feeding program?

## Appendix D

### **Potential Feeding Sites**

1. Are you aware of the summer feeding sites in Robeson County?  
  
A summer feeding site “....ensures that low-income children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session....free meals for children 18 years and under....” (USDA, Food and nutrition service).
2. Would you be interested in learning about how to start a summer feeding site at your facility?
3. What do you see as some obstacles that would hinder you, from starting a summer feeding site in Robeson County, if you wish to do so?
4. If you find out that funding is available to help assist you with this type of program, would you be more inclined to start one. Why or why not?
5. Do you know of any other facilities that may be interested in learning more about summer feeding programs for Robeson County?

## Appendix E

### **North Carolina Officials**

1. Have there been any policies established that address the need for summer feeding programs in Robeson County, if not are there policies that could address this need?
2. What do you know about the summer feeding sites in Robeson County and what do you think the needs are?
3. Is it possible for transportation to be provided so children can have access to summer feeding programs?
4. Is it possible for transportation to be provided to take meals to students that do not have transportation to summer feeding programs?
5. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to address the need of food insecure children in Robeson County?

Appendix F

**Informed Consent**

University of North Carolina-Pembroke  
Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Adult Participants  
Social Behavioral Form

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IRB Study # 16-02-001  
Consent Form Version Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Study: Food for Success: Promoting Summer Feeding Programs

Principal Investigator: Sonya L. Hunt  
UNC-Pembroke Department: Sociology and Criminal Justice  
UNC-Pembroke Phone number: 910 775-4038  
Email Address: slh040@bravemail.uncp.edu  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brooke Kelly

Study Contact telephone number: 910-785-7613  
Study Contact email: slh040@bravemail.uncp.edu

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**What are some general things you should know about this research?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. If you decide to participate you will be asked some questions about the summer feeding sites in Robeson County. Those questions may include existing or potential feeding sites.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help with the issue of food insecure children in Robeson County. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be minimal risks to being in this research study.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time. You may decide not to participate, or to stop the interview at any time. Furthermore, you can skip questions you do not wish to answer, for any reason without penalty.



**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the summer feeding sites in Robeson County, addressing some of the following research questions. Are there enough summer feeding sites in Robeson County? What barriers do current sites face in feeding Robeson County's food insecure children? What other sites in the county might potentially serve as summer feeding programs? What barriers do potential sites and potential hosts of sites face that prevent them from hosting summer feeding sites? What resources might enable them to feed children during the summer?

You are being asked to participate in the study either because of your knowledge of current feeding sites or of your possible interest to assist in starting a new summer feeding site in Robeson County.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 10-20 people in this research study.

**How long will your part in this study last?**

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

You will be asked a series of questions about your knowledge, involvement, or interest in summer feeding programs, or challenges that you would face in hosting or serving a summer feeding program. You can stop the interview at any time, and you can skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Since the findings from this study will be used to inform those at state and county level who are interested in supporting summer feeding programs, your responses, in combination with others, could help improve the number and quality of summer feeding programs in Robeson County.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation in this study. Other than the participant's time, there are no costs involved in participating in this study.

**How will your privacy be protected?**

- o Your interview and consent form will be kept in a secure location.
- o With your permission, this interview will be recorded to ensure that we have your exact words and not what we thought you might have said.
- o Your recording will be used only with your permission.
- o The recorded interview will be kept in a secure location.
- o Once the transcript of your interview is complete and the content is typed the recording will be destroyed.

- o Your name will be used only with your permission. If you will allow your information to be used but wish your identity to remain confidential that will be granted to you.
- o Participants may ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Participants will only be identified by name or quoted directly by name in any report or publication about this study with their consent. Otherwise their identity will remain confidential. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Pembroke will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

- OK to record me during the study  
 Not OK to record me during the study

**Confidentiality or Disclosure of Your Name:**

- A.)  I agree to be quoted directly by name and to have my name shared with those at state or county level who are interested in providing resources to assist current and potential feeding sites.
- B.)  I agree to be named and quoted directly but do not wish to have my name shared with those at the state or county level who are interested in providing resources to assist current and potential feeding sites.
- C.)  I decline to be quoted by name but consent have my name shared with those at the state or county level who are interested in providing resources to assist current and potential summer feeding sites.
- D.)  I decline to be quoted by name or have my name shared with anyone outside the research team; my interview data will only be combined with interviews from others and reported together in the aggregate.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

There will be no costs for being in the study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 910.775.4359 or by email to [irb@uncp.edu](mailto:irb@uncp.edu).

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Title of Study: Food for Success: Promoting Summer Feeding Programs

Principal Investigator: Sonya L. Hunt

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent