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Feeding Kids In Livingston County Into The Summer *The Salvation Army's Summer Lunch Bunch*

Livingston County, MI: The end of the school year and the beginning of summer may look very different this year, but the plans for summer fun is still there; Vacations, camping trips and picnics at the park with friends. However, for many parents the stress of worrying about how their children are going to receive lunch, and some, at least one meal a day, is overwhelming. With the current situation, the stress of providing meals has been for several months.

On March 16th, The Salvation Army of Livingston County started the temporary Mobile Lunch Program serving prepared lunches each weekday at sites throughout Howell and Hartland. The purpose of the program was to ensure children, that were now home due to COVID-19, had the lunch they would have received at school. The program was temporary to meet the need of families affected by the pandemic and ended in June 5th.

With June 5th as the final day for the Mobile Lunch Program and the official last day of school for most Livingston County districts, The Salvation Army's prepares for the start of their Summer Lunch Bunch program.

11 years ago, 50 families throughout Livingston County participated in a new program to receive prepared meals and grocery pantry packs during the summer months. The new program came about because The Salvation Army of Livingston County saw an increase in families needing assistance during the summer months.

Families with children on free and reduced lunches depend on the meals that the school provides for them. Without those meals, families must choose between paying a bill or feeding their children. The choice is easy, feed the children and figure the rest out. The Salvation Army didn't want parents to have to choose, which is why the Summer Lunch Bunch program began.

Last summer the program served 3,312 prepared meals and sent home over 18,400 pounds of food, that included both shelf stable and fresh items. These are huge improvements from the 1,007 prepared meals and 788 pantry boxes of macaroni and cheese and peanut the first year of the program.

The Salvation Army's Summer Lunch Bunch program will start on Monday, June 15, 2020. It will run Monday through Friday at 5 locations throughout Livingston County until at least July 31, 2020. The program is typically a fun, social event for both the kids and parents. However, with the current situation and new guidelines, it will look different this year.

- All meals and grocery pantry packs will be "carry out" style
- It is requested that only 1 person from the family pick up for the entire family
- For everyone's safety, all staff and volunteers will wear masks and gloves
- For everyone's safety, social distancing will be practiced and required
- Previous onsite activities will now be take-home craft activities with an instructional video posted on Facebook each Monday

There will be a limited supply of grocery pantry packs and craft activities available, due to the anticipated increase in need and unknown number of families participating this year, these items will be distributed while supplies last each day.

As in the past The Salvation Army's Summer Lunch Bunch is a free program open to all Livingston County residents. There is no income requirement, registration or waiting list, all families will be served.

“It has been a blessing that we have been able to provide so many meals for Livingston County families over the past 10 years and especially these past 4 months.” Says Major Prezza Morrison “Because of the pandemic and the added programs like the Mobile Lunches, we had to make changes in the yearly summer programming. However, ensuring that the kids had food was a top priority and we were determined that no matter what, Summer Lunch Bunch was still taking place.”

The program is supported through monetary and in-kind donations as well as USDA and United Way grants. This year due to the increased need because of COVID-19, support through monetary donations is greatly needed. The program typically costs approximately \$45,000 to run. However, in the past 3 months The Salvation Army has provided over 10,000 prepared meals through the Mobile Lunch Program. This is triple the number of prepared meals served during the 2019 Summer Lunch Bunch program. Because of this, we anticipate the program participation to increase, as well as the expense.

We are reaching out to the community asking for support in any denomination for this much-needed program. Someone can support 1 child **ALL** summer for only \$65 or provide **ALL meals** at one site for **an entire week** for only \$650. The program is also seeking monetary sponsors for the craft activities. Sponsors are recognized onsite, on all social media, the website and in the smiling faces of the children that have something new to look forward to each week.

Support for The Salvation Army’s Summer Lunch Bunch program can be done online www.SalvationArmyLivingston.org, mailed to P.O. Box 647, Howell, MI 48844 or dropped off at our 503 Lake Street, Howell Corps office. To obtain more information contact April Dertian at 517-294-4344 or April.Dertian@usc.SalvationArmy.org

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