



Grab & Go Success Stories - Missoula Food Bank & Community Center, Montana

Through child nutrition programs, direct distribution, and home delivery for seniors, [Missoula Food Bank and Community Center](#) (MFB&CC) serves thousands of children and families throughout Missoula County, Montana. Jamie Kocsondy is the Program Manager at MFB&CC, leading child and community nutrition programs including their summer meals program. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MFB&CC was well positioned to feed children and families in their communities. Under Kocsondy's leadership, MFB&CC reimagined summer meal operations and leveraged key federal waivers to offer non-congregate meals (where meals are consumed off-site) with the option of caregiver pick-up. MFB&CC saw participation significantly increase from 38,317 meals served in summer 2019 to 55,225 meals served in summer 2021.

Grab and Go Service Models

MFB&CC utilized a mix of grab and go models to meet the needs of their community.

- **Curbside:** Lolo School District and Frenchtown School District operated curbside, drive-up meal service models. MFB&CC delivered cold meals to sites where they were safely stored in coolers. When families arrived, site coordinators provided breakfast and lunch for all children who needed them.
- **Walk-up Grab and Go:** EmPower Place, a hands-on family learning center located at MFB&CC, operated a walk-up, grab and go program. Here, meals were stored in a refrigerator, and one breakfast and lunch per child were provided to families visiting the site and to customers with children shopping at the food bank's on-site pantry.

- **Grab and Go Mobile Meals:** MFB&CC was able to repurpose their branded bus retrofitted with seating and refrigeration. Prior to the pandemic, they used the bus to run a mobile meals program where children ate on the bus. With the availability of waivers and flexibilities, the bus was able to make more efficient stops at five sites across Missoula County. Breakfasts and lunches were offered grab and go style to children and families at the sites making food even more accessible to Montanans.

Staff & Volunteers

MFB&CC leverages full-time employees, AmeriCorps members, No Kid Hungry Youth Ambassadors, and volunteers to make their summer meals program a reality. Staff, AmeriCorps members, and Youth Ambassadors are primarily used as site coordinators, drivers, and monitors. MFB&CC's vast volunteer network supports meal portioning and packing. On any given day, you may find an assembly line of volunteers making turkey and cheese sandwiches and washing apples. Meals are packed into brown paper bags and onto rolling racks for storage in the walk-in refrigerator. Now a refined, and well-working operation, MFB&CC had to pivot to this style of operation in 2020. Before grab and go was allowed, meals centered communal eating and place-based services. Now all meals are unitized and stored for post-pandemic safety, efficiency, and greater accessibility for families unable to stay and eat.

When summer meals must be consumed by children on-site, too many lose access to the program. Narrow meal service times are difficult for working families, and having to bring children to the site is a strain for childcare providers watching many children, individuals with disabilities, and families without reliable transportation. Much of MFB&CC's service area is considered metropolitan and therefore is ineligible to offer grab and go meals under the new [non-congregate meal service in rural areas option](#). However, Koscondy is hopeful that in the future, grab and go meal service will be expanded and made available to more communities and the families they serve. Koscondy shared how impactful grab and go meals can be, "The ability to say 'yes' and meet people where they are at is a game changer for fighting food insecurity effectively and equitably."

