

MARCH 9, 2021: USDA Extends Free Meals to Children through Summer, 2021

USDA announced the nationwide extension of several waivers that allow all children to continue to receive nutritious meals this summer when schools are out of session. These flexibilities are now available through Sept. 30, 2021.

The waivers extended allow for safe meal distribution sites that serve all children for free, regardless of income. In addition, the waivers:

- Allow meals served through the [Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\)](#) and [Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#) – collectively known as “[summer meal programs](#)” – to be made available in all areas at no cost;
- Allow meals to be served outside of the normally required group settings and meal times; and
- Allow parents and guardians to pick-up meals for their children, including bulk pick-up to cover multiple days of feeding children.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Hunger refers to a personal, physical sensation of discomfort, while food insecurity refers to a lack of available financial resources for food at the household level.

Listed below are some organizations, primarily local, working to address food insecurity in our communities. Individuals can help by: telling others about these organizations & their important work, giving excess food from your garden to one of the organizations, volunteering, donating purchased food (see websites), making a financial contribution.

BREMERTON BACKPACK BRIGADE <https://www.BremertonBackpackBrigade.org>

Myra Battin, Director 360-471-9588

Exists to provide a supplemental food source for children in need through the Bremerton School District-- currently the Brigade serves 8 elementary schools. Their normal distribution sources & food drives have been out of commission during the pandemic, but they're still trying to help about 170 families in need in the Bremerton community through their weekly "Take Home" bags. When schools moved into a hybrid mode, they continued to aid families in conjunction with the BSD Grab-N-Go meal program. In February, 2021, Brigade volunteers packed out about 33,800 lbs. of food support in 575 "Take Home" bags, 6,000 lbs. of which was donated by various businesses, organizations & individuals; the Brigade purchased over \$5,300 in additional food support. Protein vouchers/coupons can be used at their partners [@Grocery Outlet](#), [@WinCo](#) and [@SaarSuperFoods](#) to help round out the take-home meals. Community partner Salvation Army donated two pallets of food mid-March to help the Brigade keep their pantry shelves stocked, and the nonprofit was recently awarded a \$2,000 Appendix X grant by the Suquamish Tribe, which will arrive just in time to help purchase more food to fill the annual Spring Break Food Boxes that go out to families the week of March 29. Each major school break, the Brigade packs & delivers extra food for their families to help decrease the stress on those who are struggling.

SHARENET'S FOOD TO GROW ON (Food2Go) <https://sharenetfoodbank.org/programs/>

Carol Anderson, Board Member

Partnering with the North Kitsap School District, ShareNet provides supplemental food on weekends for about 240 children in need from all four Kingston schools. They rely on community support to fill bags/backpacks each week with nutritious food.

KINGSTON CARES (Food4Kids) www.kingstoncares.org

John & Penny Geisbush

Begun in 2013, Kingston Cares fills in the gaps during school vacations, meeting kids' nutritional needs over the two weeks of winter break, the week of spring break & 11 weeks over the summer. Families of over 120 local students pick up the food bags/boxes at a pre-arranged distribution point. 23,316 meals were provided in 2020. They rely on grants & donations to purchase the food, which includes fresh fruit and vegetables.

Beginning in May 2020, Kingston Cares' sit-down community meal became the free Grab and Go Community Meal. The nonprofit sponsors the meals with support from a grant from United Way & donations from local groups & individuals. They contract with local caterers & restaurants to prepare & package the meals to go, which are available to the community on the 2nd & 3rd Friday of the month, from 5-6pm, at the Village Green Community Center.

ADDITIONAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAMS FOR KIDS IN KITSAP COUNTY:

Stand Up for Kids <https://standupforkids.org/kitsapcounty>

--An organization whose primary mission is to assist homeless and at-risk kids in their efforts to improve their lives. They help youth ages 12-24 and are funded solely by community and individual donations.

South Kitsap schools: https://southcolby.skschools.org/our_school/backpacks_for_kids

Central Kitsap schools: <https://ckfoodbackpacks4kids.com>

Poulsbo & Suquamish schools: North Kitsap School District free "Grab and Go" breakfast & lunch items

Bainbridge Island: Kids' Pantry (during school breaks & summer vacation) <https://helplinehouse.org>

KITSAP COUNTY AREA FOOD BANKS INCLUDE:

South Kitsap Helpline <https://skhelpline.org> 1012 Mitchell Ave. Port Orchard 360-876-4089

Bremerton Foodline <https://bremertonfoodline.org> 1600 12th St. Bremerton 360-479-6188

Central Kitsap Food Bank <https://ckfoodbank.org> 3537 NW Anderson Hill Rd. Silverdale 360-692-9818

North Kitsap Fishline www.fishlinehelps.org 19705 Viking Ave. NW Poulsbo 360-779-5190

ShareNet <https://sharenetfoodbank.org> 26061 United Rd. NE Kingston 360-297-2266

BI Helpline House <https://helplinehouse.org> 282 Knetchel Way NE Bainbridge Island 206-842-7621

St. Vincent de Paul <https://svdpcbremerton.com> 1137 North Callow Ave. Bremerton 360-377-2929

Salvation Army <https://bremerton.salvationarmy.org> 832 6th St. Bremerton 360-373-5550

A number of churches and community organizations in most areas of Kitsap County offer free meals, some several days/week, some weekly, some maybe two days/month. View the websites below:

<https://www.kitsapgov.com/hs/Documents/FREE%20KITSAP%20MEALS%20-%20Autumn2020.pdf>

nkfaithlink.blogspot.com

KITSAP HARVEST <https://extension.wsu.edu/kitsap/gleaning>

Paisley Gallagher, Food Access Program Coordinator 360-228-7302

Works to alleviate food waste & to move toward sustainability by gathering surplus fruit & vegetables & delivering it to those in need. Partners primarily with homeowners who want to share their fruit trees' bounty & with local farmers who have unsold or unpicked crops. Volunteers are able to take a portion of the harvest home. Grow-A-Row program invites homeowners with gardens to plant extra & register their garden for pick-up, to be combined in baskets of fresh produce for distribution. Kitsap Harvest also provides Donations Stations at some of the area farmers markets, including Bremerton Community Farmers Market on Thursdays & Port Orchard Farmers Market on Saturdays. In 2019 Kitsap Harvest gave food to over 3600 individuals & their families, serving 75 locations.

MEALS ON WHEELS KITSAP (MOWK) <http://www.mealsonwheelskitsap.org>

Deborah Horn, Executive Director 360-377-8511

MOWK's mission is to provide meals, nutrition, and support services to improve the quality of life for seniors and others with hunger and health needs in Kitsap County. Serves men and women 60 years and older, their meal services based on nutritional, rather than financial, need. COVID-19 forced a change to MOWK's service delivery plan. Beginning early April, 2020, medically-homebound clients began receiving up to seven frozen meals delivered once/week rather than a daily meal. Clients who usually ate at one of nine Community Dining sites are now able to pick up five frozen meals one day/week at one of five different sites around the county. In addition, a phone reassurance program was launched to provide daily calls to seniors from volunteers. A donation of \$3/meal is suggested, but clients are not charged for their meal. In 2019 MOWK served & delivered 55,153 meals to 854 seniors.

MOWK's Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program runs from June 1-October 31. Income qualified seniors can receive \$40 in checks to purchase fresh produce at area farmers markets. Check their website around May 1 to view eligibility requirements & download an application.