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Kids get KickStart to their school day

Food bank expands nourishment program for needy kids

By AEDAN HELMER, SUN MEDIA

The Ottawa Food Bank launched the newly expanded KickStart program yesterday to help put nutritious food in the bellies of needy children.

Executive director Peter Tilley thanked corporate sponsors Adobe, Rogers and Sodexo for "incredible generosity" in partnering with the program.

"We felt compelled to put this program together after seeing the increased need in the community," said Tilley.

KickStart supports 16 school meal programs, 10 homework clubs and 13 Community House Summer Camps.

In its inaugural year, the program provided more than 89,000 breakfasts and 26,000 snacks to needy children, as well as 12,000 lunches during summer.

Tilley said the summer component was important for children who didn't have access to school meal programs in July and August.

Irene Cameron, principal of Connaught Public School, praised the food bank and its partners for expanding the program.

For years, principals had to drive to the food bank to get food for their meal programs.

Cameron said the new KickStart program will now deliver a consistent supply of nutritious food -- eggs, yogurt, milk, cheese, cereal and fresh fruit -- to her student-breakfast program.

"This is the kind of program that can really make a great start to a child's day and impact how they will learn and grow," said Cameron.

"All research shows that if a child is well-fed, especially with proper food and nourishment, their productivity will go up, they will learn better and they will attend better," she said.

Tilley said the program will pay immediate dividends.

"What an added bonus for us, that for these children from struggling, poor communities, who have so many problems that they're going through in their homes and their communities, that we can alleviate some of that burden," said Tilley.