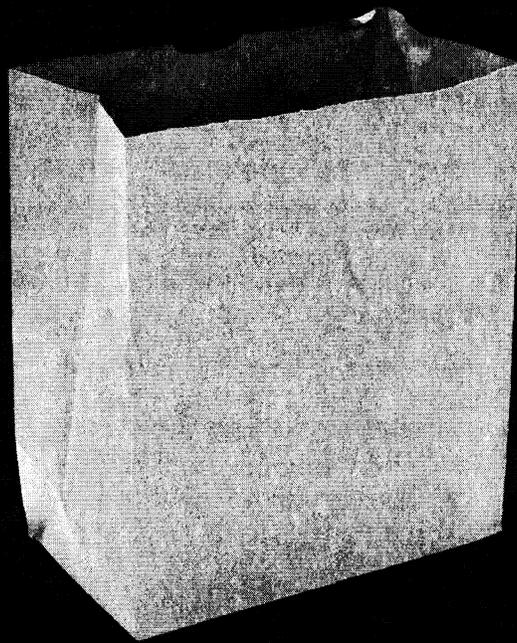


BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF CARBON COUNTY

**A Successful Club Model to Mitigate and Prevent
Hunger, Malnutrition and Obesity**



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**CHILDREN & FAMILIES INTERIM COMMITTEE
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Exhibit 9**

Problem

Many food-insecure Montana children are facing crises such as hunger, malnutrition, and obesity. Studies suggest that there are several contributing factors to these health related issues that go well beyond not having enough money to buy food. While giving away food or food vouchers provides necessary crisis relief to hunger children, it does not provide a foundation for long-term healthy habits. Policy needs to consider the entire scope of the problem, including strategic long-term prevention. Studies have identified the following factors as contributors to hunger, malnutrition and obesity in our young people:

- Inadequate caloric intake
- Inadequate consumption of nutritious foods that fulfill a body's developmental requirements, paired with overconsumption of high fat foods
- Misconception that nutritious foods are inconvenient to prepare
- Misconception that nutritious foods do not taste good
- Infrequency of family meals
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of relationships with a trusted parent or mentor to support positive activities that reduce the above risk factors

It is well documented that risk factors associated with unhealthy behaviors are significantly lower in young people who have an available and engaged parent or mentor. It is also well documented that young people do not get enough exercise. Additional facts are as such: Nearly 22% of Montana's children are food-insecure at some level.¹ While food insecure youth report less availability of healthy foods in the home, they also feel that nutritious food does not taste good, and preparing it is an inconvenience.² Additionally, food-insecure youth are much more unlikely to have a family meal than their food-secure peers.³ This is unfortunate, as family meals have been associated with higher nutritional value⁴ as well as a lower likelihood of being overweight.⁵ As such, even with a food hand out, young people are ill equipped to acquire the behaviors required for overall sustainable health.

At Boys & Girls Clubs across Montana, we see children in crisis every day. For example, at the Club in Carbon County, an astounding 34% of our families make under \$25,000 a year, well below the \$31,850 that Housing and Urban Development (HUD) classifies as "low-income" in our County. The federal poverty level is \$22,000, and many of our families are even living below this mark. In addition, 31% are single parent homes. Parents are alone, working nights/weekends, and unavailable on a consistent basis to teach their children skills and provide daily nutrition.

Those in poverty and single parents are not alone in the struggle. Feeding America reports that 55% of food-insecure homes nationally are actually above the poverty line, and 48.6% of food-insecure children live in two-parent households. Furthermore, reports from the American Academy of Pediatrics show that malnourishment is also caused by environmental elements such as parental substance abuse, neglect, family violence, disorderly household routine, and employment instability that can create food-insecurity and interfere with a child's food intake. Astonishingly, up to 39% of Carbon County kids report this kind of conflict in their homes, as recorded in the Department of Health & Human Services Prevention Needs Assessment.

Solution

The solution is to not only provide food during crisis, but also to teach and support positive habits that transition young people away from the behaviors and environments that lead to hunger, malnutrition, obesity, and overall ill health. Health is a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well being that is continuously changing as a result of life choices.

The best strategy is to serve food through organizations where children already flock for other types of services that support healthy habits. Boys & Girls Clubs are recognized as being effective providers of food service programs, as the Club's ability to reach a large number of hungry children in a dignified, safe, enriching environment is substantial. The Walmart Foundation has teamed with Boys & Girls Clubs nationwide as a partner in their hunger relief initiative, and Feeding America also endorses Boys & Girls Clubs as an effective provider of daily snack/meal services and backpack programs.

The sole mission of Boys & Girls Clubs is to provide young people with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to make good choices and become self-sufficient, productive, and accountable individuals. Clubs provide long-term hunger-relief in our region by increasing access to food services during critical times when other resources are often unavailable - afterschool, on weekends, and during school vacations. But hunger relief at the Club does not come in the form of a simple handout. Instead, our young people become a part of a holistic approach that not only relieves immediate hunger, but also provides critical knowledge and skills development to make good choices.

Clubs are an ideal environment to mitigate and prevent crisis, as they addresses each of the contributing factors listed above for hunger, malnutrition, and obesity:

- Inadequate caloric intake: *Unlike many other providers, the Club serves a daily snack and/or meal each weekday year round, including during school vacations and summer vacation, helping hungry children to have consistent access to food.*
- Inadequate access to the nutritious foods that fulfill a body's developmental requirements, paired with overconsumption of high fat foods: *Club snacks/meals are nutritious and wholesome, helping to meet the immediate and long term needs of young developing brains and bodies while steering clear of empty fat calories.*
- Misconception that nutritious foods are inconvenient to prepare: *Club cooking classes and snack prep programs provide hands-on training for how to prepare fast, easy, nutritious meals, helping to break down perceptions that serve as barriers to eating healthy foods.*
- Misconception that nutritious foods do not taste good: *Nutritious Club snacks are always kid-friendly, giving children direct experience that proves to them that whole grains, juicy fruits, and crunchy vegetables can be delicious and fun to eat.*
- Infrequency of family meals: *Every single day, and twice a day during school vacations, children at the Club share mealtime with adult Club mentors and their peers, emulating a safe, supportive family environment that solidifies healthy behaviors and attitudes.*
- Lack of exercise: *The Club implements both daily and seasonal physical fitness activities geared towards a variety of interests and skill levels, helping to fight excess weight.*

- Lack of relationships with a trusted parent or mentor to support positive activities that reduce the above risk factors: *Club mentors have consistent, engaged, and long-term relationships with Club members, helping to provide the skills, support and modeling required for young people to make good choices short and long-term.*

In addition, Clubs provide daily academic, career development, and life skills programming that helps to build the self-sufficiency needed to end the generational cycle of food-insecurity.

Boys & Girls Clubs programs are evidence based and proven effective in reducing unhealthy behaviors. Studies of Club members nationwide have shown that they have improved healthy lifestyles, improved employability, and improved accountability.

The impact that Clubs in some of our most food insecure counties could have is immense. There are 33 Boys & Girls Club units across Montana, serving a total of 14,600 young people, nearly 30% of the number of food insecure youth in Montana.

Request

To achieve the highest long-term success rate for the lowest cost, policy should address prevention of all factors contributing to the problem.

Re-allocating a portion of the funds that are already spent on SNAP and TANF to provide food to the Boys & Girls Clubs program will transform allocations from merely a subsidy to a teaching initiative that supports improved lifelong habits in addition to nutritional needs.

This teaching process requires a structured program, trained mentors, facilities, and funding, almost all of which is currently being provided to Clubs by funding through the private sector. Club programs are already in place and positioned to expand if additional support is allocated.

¹ Child Food Insecurity Study. Map the Meal Gap. Feeding America. 2009.

² Widome, R, et al. Eating When There is Not Enough to Eat: Eating Behaviors and Perceptions of Food Among Food Insecure Youths. American Journal of Public Health. 2009; 99(5):5.

³ Ibid

⁴ Larson, NI, Neumark-Sztainer D, Hannan PJ, Story M. Family Meals During Adolescence Are Associated with Higher Diet Quality and Healthful Meal Patterns During Young Adulthood. Journal of American Dietetic Association. 2007; 107(9):1502-1510.

⁵ Taveras EM, Rifas-Shiman SI, Berkey CS, et al. Family Dinner and Adolescent Overweight. Obesity Research. 2005;13(5):900-906.