

# ENTERPRISE-RECORD

## Anti-Hunger summit tackles post-fire obstacles



*The Mobile Teaching Kitchen, seen Tuesday in Oroville, is the result of collaboration between the Butte County Office of Education and Raley's. (Kevin Buffalino — Contributed)*

By [Natalie Hanson](#) | [nhanson@chicoer.com](mailto:nhanson@chicoer.com) | Chico Enterprise-Record  
February 26, 2020 at 4:00 a.m.

OROVILLE — Could food trucks and county collaboration be part of the answer to tackling student hunger? At the annual Anti-Hunger Summit on Tuesday, solutions for providing food aid around the county have taken shape, 16 months after the Camp Fire.

The Butte County Office of Education held sessions all day to bring together educators and those working to find solutions for hunger in the school districts, and among adults in the region.

“Each year the summit has grown,” organizer Patricia Chamberlain said. “This is about using food as a way to keep our communities healthy.”

### **Solutions for health**

The summit included a variety of programs with different connections to the problem of food insecurity. Office of Education Superintendent Mary Sakuma said she is encouraged by the county's forming of new partnerships, “making the best use of the resources that are available.”

"The needs of our kids have only grown after the Camp Fire," Sakuma said. "I'm pleased to have chances to partner with a number of agencies to create more ways we can support kids ... with so many remote, regional areas, this can be a really big challenge for us."

Sakuma introduced Susie Saephan of the Butte County Public Health Department, who used the Oral Health Program as evidence of tackling hunger to address health issues.

On average, three out of five children are affected by tooth decay, which is twice as common in disadvantaged socioeconomic populations, Saephan said. Oral health also affects childrens' performance in school — a survey in 2019 found 12% of children in Butte County missing school because of oral health problems, which Saephan said was high compared to other counties.

Others work to feed the adults who are looking after students and struggling to find food. Travis Sanchez, former summer meal veteran of CalKidz, is the statewide coordinator of the Back 2 Work program, a transitional employment program for adults.

Sanchez and Back 2 Work regional coordinator Derek Morris discussed their work feeding adults in various stages of life.

"People come out of prison and don't have a job, it's difficult," Morris said. "If I can't eat, if I get hungry enough, nobody's safe."

Part of his job involved identifying children and adults whose daily lives are impacted by hunger. Morris described a situation in which he identified a child who came from a home involving drug abuse who kept skipping school.

Morris said after discovering the boy's home situation, he decided to make them a meal.

"I went home, and I made a pan full of spaghetti with meatballs and sausage, and I knew it was enough for them to have to eat for that night, and enough to have for the next night," Morris said. "Next day, he showed up for school. He just wanted to eat."

Morris added that he is concerned that people understand how common it can be to struggle with food insecurity.

"People at food banks can have jobs, cars, but no money for food," Morris said. "It's because the rent in California is too damn high."

Audience member Jackie Furtado, who lives in Corning, said unemployment and limited job supply is a huge concern among parents she has talked to.

“It’s a common topic when I go to church — parents (have) also mentioned rent,” Furtado said. “We have people out there doing manual labor, working at fast food, and they are hurting ... for their kids. You have to give something up to make sure something else is there.”

Employees of the California Department of Education, Summer Meals Program Outreach Coordinator Cintya Loreto and summer meals unit Staff Service Manager Jeannine Cook presented current locations for food distribution around the county.

The department is also working to make sure families that could be affected by the [new federal public charge rule](#) know ways to get meals in their community, Loreto said. This includes redesigning brochures from the Department of Education with a note about food available to anyone, printed in Spanish as well as in English.

Chamberlain praised this work to address the fear of seeking aid from public programs.

“People are going hungry because of this fear,” Chamberlain said. “We need those trusted messengers to reinforce the message that these are safe spaces to get food.”

Between the sessions, the summit was designed to spotlight the unveiled mobile food truck the Office of Education invested in thanks to a grant from Raley’s, the Mobile Teaching Kitchen.

The kitchen will be used to bring fresh food to students and families who were displaced by the Camp Fire. In the case of future fires, the truck will be dispatched to deliver food to any affected communities.

## **Food trucks bring hope**

Mobile solutions for bringing meals to children and fire victims is not new to the area.



*Nadine Foreman, left, and Summer Food Service Manager Jennifer Faria, both of Paradise Unified School District, pose in front of a van Tuesday in Oroville. (Jessica Ng — Contributed)*

Food Services Director Tanya Harter is one of the Paradise Unified School District employees who has spent time in the trenches feeding children, specifically the children living or attending classes on the ridge. She and her staff serve 80% of the kids on the ridge — a very high participation rate, she said.

The nutrition services department was drastically affected by the Camp Fire, and participation numbers are down.

“Before the fire, in 2018 we served 36,000 breakfasts and 52,000 lunches,” Harter said. In October 2019, the program dropped distribution to 17,000 breakfasts and 24,000 lunches — largely due to dropping numbers of children in Paradise schools.

Harter said the department relied on food from Chico Unified School District all year.

“We felt it was important to provide food to kids on the ridge,” she said, with so many children attending school on the ridge who do not live in the area and must commute.

“So many families are disjointed right now,” Harter said.

Organizers Julianna Roberts and Patricia Chamberlain also addressed ongoing hunger issues post-Camp Fire.

“We need help daily for the working poor,” Roberts said.

Chamberlain mentioned how important it is to provide food aid to kids year-round, particularly during summer.



*Left to right, Lisa Roehling, Patricia Chamberlain, Julianna Roberts, Sarah England, Megan Riggs and Becca Whitman in front of the Mobile Teaching Kitchen in Oroville on Tuesday. (Natalie Hanson — Enterprise-Record)*

“Kids are 24/7, you know, they don’t stop needing food or learning once school’s out for the summer,” Chamberlain said. “We need to think holistically about how we keep kids healthy and on track.”

The Office of Education members hope the truck can be used to increase community participation to tackle hunger around the county, as well as access to food for anyone recovering from the fire.

Easing the stigma of seeking help with meals is part of their concern.

“I think many people are in a position of hiding their struggles, and that’s really difficult,” Chamberlain said. “These programs can make sure people can take care of their families.”

Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Agency Relations Specialist Lisa Roehling said, “Everyone’s struggling. It’s just part of our environment now.”

“To have families and children be able to access a pantry or after school program or lunch program, that connection that they’re feeling and that love they’re feeling is the only way you’re going to be able to pull yourself out of your situation if you have that.”