



Illinois Hunger Coalition

Working to End Hunger in Illinois since 1988

The Illinois Hunger Coalition's role in the creation of the Children and Family Benefits Unit of the Chicago Public Schools

The Illinois Hunger Coalition's pioneering work in enrolling Chicago Public School (CPS) families in food stamps (FSP) and children's health insurance using RealBenefits™ resulted in CPS renaming its outreach program the Children and Family Benefits Unit in 2005. Funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), this innovative collaboration between IHC and CPS resulted in improved access to nutrition assistance for low-income families and generated additional federal funding for the city's public schools.

Over an eighteen-month period in 2003-2004, IHC trained counselors, social workers, nurses, youth outreach staff, and school-based health center personnel on how to use the RealBenefits™ internet application. This tool was created in 2000 when IHC partnered with Boston-based Community Catalyst and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to create RealBenefits™, which includes a prescreening tool called a Quickscreen, and an application tool.



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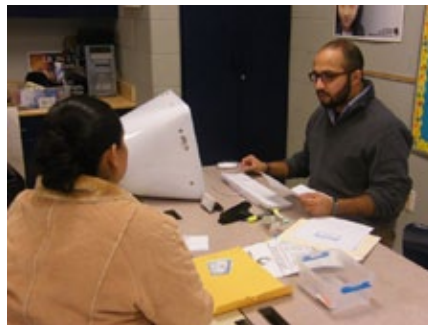


Chicago Public Schools Link Families to SNAP

A new partnership is helping low-income Chicago parents access SNAP benefits in a convenient and family-friendly location – their child’s public school. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS), with over 600 schools and more than 400,000 students, provides a highly efficient target population for SNAP outreach. Approximately 85% of its students are enrolled in free or reduced price school meals, so most of their families should also qualify for SNAP. However, about 85,000 CPS students receiving free and reduced price meals have no Medicaid card, which allows for targeted SNAP enrollment efforts. Therefore, these families may be missing out on SNAP benefits to which they are entitled.

Because healthy kids perform better academically, CPS leaders want their students to be well-nourished. The Chicago Board of Education initially established the KidCare Unit to help families enroll in Medicaid and State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The unit’s name was subsequently changed to the *Children and Family Benefits Unit (CFBU)* in 2004 when its goals were expanded to assist families with food stamp applications. The CFBU’s mission is to promote increased access, enrollment, and renewal of CPS students and families in public benefit programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid/SCHIP.

CFBU staff consists of a bilingual Hotline Coordinator and 14 Liaisons, nine of whom are bilingual. The Liaisons, trained in income support policies and procedures, are located in schools with the highest under-enrollment in SNAP. They explain SNAP eligibility at parent meetings and serve as family advocates.



A CFBU Liaison helps a CPS family complete a SNAP application.

The Hotline Coordinator logs incoming parent calls and disburses them to the Liaisons. The Liaisons return the calls and often complete the SNAP application over the phone using the RealBenefits system. They print out the application and mail it to the parents for signature. The Liaisons fax the signed applications to the appropriate Illinois Department of Human Services local office.

The CFBU uses multiple marketing strategies within the district’s infrastructure to market its services and inform parents of upcoming enrollment events

or policy changes. They conduct targeted mailings and distribute 1.5 million flyers at report card pickups. The CFBU also works with the CPS Office of Internal Communication to use its “on-hold” messaging system. The recorded message tells callers how the CFBU can help them submit a SNAP application. Since the call volume to CPS is very large, the on-hold message is an important reminder to families that they should receive the benefits they deserve.

Another technology the CFBU employs is the CPS automatic dialing system. The auto-dial system, which is customarily used to notify parents of a student’s absence, is programmed to dial the households of under-enrolled students. A recorded message tells the family that they may be eligible for SNAP and encourages them to call the CFBU Hotline for more information.

Efficient targeting of a large pool of eligibles and smart use of available technology make this one of the Midwest Region’s most innovative and cost effective SNAP outreach projects. *For more information, contact Diane Fager at dfager@cps.k12.il.us or Jessica Williams at jnwilliams10@cps.k12.il.us*

Submitted by Annie Lionberger, Former Manager of CFBU, and Ann Eubank, FNS Midwest Region SNAP Outreach Coordinator

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