

# Nutrition and Knowledge for the Summer

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## Philanthropy

BY JACOB OGLES SRQ DAILY FRESHLY SQUEEZED CONTENT EVERY MORNING TUESDAY JUN 13, 2017



Summer vacation may be a break in the rigors of school, but it's also a time when learning becomes a lower priority. And unfortunately, it also becomes a period when many low-income families lose access to free and reduced lunch for children. But a new partnership among several Sarasota philanthropic organizations looks to tackle early learning and summer hunger in a joined initiative.

Talking is Teaching, a pilot program launched on June 1, aims to educate parents and caregivers of the importance of talking, reading and singing to children at a young age, based on research that shows the value to brain development. The program kicked off in conjunction with All Faiths Food Bank's Summer Hunger Program, an effort now in its fourth year aimed at providing food to low-income families during the school system's summer break.

"The best way to help newborn to pre-K children get prepared to be educated and ready to learn to read is the simple act of talking, reading or singing to them," says Teri Hansen, president and CEO of the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation. Her organization partnered with the food bank, Children First, Forty Carrots Family Center, Sarasota County Libraries, Sarasota County Schools and Sarasota Memorial Hospital for the effort.

Michelle Kareillian, executive director of Forty Carrots, says recent research shows a how dramatic an effect talking, reading and singing to a child can have.

“We focus on early childhood because it’s where we can make the most impact with the least amount of investment,” she says. “It’s our goal as an agency, and should be our goal as a society, to help all children so they have all the tools and their brains are developed so they can become responsible, capable human beings down the line.” She noted 90 percent of a child’s brain is developed by age 5, so the encouragement of learning at a young age, even as young as newborns, proves vital well before a child is old enough to attend school.

Sandra Franks, All Faiths Food Bank CEO, says the goal for the Summer Hunger Program this year is to help 35,000 children. Studies show as many as 40,000 children could be at risk of summer hunger in the county, she says, and as an addition to the 21,000 students on free or reduced lunch in the schools, many have younger siblings not yet enrolled. “When school ends, summer begins and hunger begins for most of these kids,” she says. Of course, the young families also would be the target audience for Talking is Teaching, so it makes sense for the education-focused program to reach the same families helped by the Summer Hunger campaign.

Hansen notes that the summer bounds of the program allow a way to measure the success of the Talking is Teaching initiative by checking on the habits of parents and caretakers at the start of summer compared to what they do when school starts again in August.

*All Faiths Food Bank Sandra Frank announced Summer Hunger Program.*