

Public health starts at home. Scientists are proving things we've long suspected: positive health habits start at a young age. As more research on obesity is completed, scientists are identifying key points in a child's life where bad habits can be curbed; and the most common trend they've found is that the earlier parents instill good habits, the healthier their children are likely to be in the long-run.

The Children's Meal Program at God's Love We Deliver is part of that trend. It is a unique program of meals and family nutrition education that addresses hunger and malnutrition among children whose parents are living with serious illnesses. Last year, we delivered 58,200 meals to 279 children in 170 families affected by breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, and other illnesses.

A parent's illness affects the entire family. When parents are incapacitated due to a serious illness, they may be unable to prepare meals and care for their children. Our Children's Meal Program relieves household food insecurity, addresses the unique nutritional needs of young children, and successfully raises awareness of nutrition in vulnerable and low-income households affected by serious illnesses.

Because research is demonstrating that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, in 2010 we redesigned our Children's Meal Program. Based on feedback we received from our client survey, most children on our program benefit from the School Lunch program, so we replaced the lunch that we had delivered to children with a healthy breakfast kit that includes cereal, oatmeal, raisins, fresh fruit, milk, and yogurt. Now the children of our clients go to school with full tummies. We also added a nutritious after-school snack, to fuel their afterschool activities. The day's nutrition ends with a healthy, child-friendly dinner entree in age-appropriate portions with a variety of lean proteins, carbohydrates, and vegetables.

Additionally, Registered Dietitians counsel parents on healthy diets and eating tips for children, and provide nutrition education materials on childhood nutrition. We use a client survey to confirm our program makes a difference in the lives of the families we serve. Our 2013 interviews determined that:

- 92% of parents report that they make healthier choices about the food they provide to their children because of the nutrition counseling they receive from our Registered Dietitians
- 84% of children are eating breakfast regularly due to the home-delivery of breakfast kits
- 82% of children have increased their intake of fruit because of our Children's Meal Program
- 75% of children are eating more nutritiously because of our Children's Meal Program

Through nutrition education and meal delivery, God's Love is making a difference in the present, and the future, health of the children of our clients.

