

Free Lunch Program Aims at Keeping Kids Healthy and Educated

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COLUMBIA - 93 kids attended Lunch in the Park at Douglass Park Tuesday. The program, which started 11 years ago provides free lunch to children who generally receive free and reduced lunches during the school year.

The children range in age from preschool to eighteen.

The Health Department aims at serving healthy lunches. Cindy Mustard of the Voluntary Action Center emphasized the importance of the health benefit of these meals. "It meets the guidelines of the Department of Agriculture. A fruit, a vegetable, a sandwich, and milk. It's not chips and cokes and things like that. It's good, nutritious food that a lot of kids don't normally get", said Mustard.

Aside from serving lunches, the program aims at educating the children.

Mike Heimos of the Public Works Department teaches the children about stormwater. "We do litter pickups, play games, color sheets, talk about the environment, and just do a variety of things." Heimos added, "it's a great program."

Last year the program served more than 4,000 lunches and averaged 115 kids per day.

Those numbers are expected to rise this year.