MEIRS Community Newsletter

MAINE IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE SERVICES · LEWISTON, MAINE

AUGUST 2026 EDITION

GATHER. PLAY. CELEBRATE. CONNECT.

5TH ANNUAL FAMILY FUN DAY · AUGUST 21, 2026

400 backpacks, one very full park

On Friday, August 21, Mike McGraw Park filled up with families from every corner of Lewiston-Auburn. From 2:00 to 6:00 PM there was soccer, music, henna, bouncy houses, hot food off the grill — and a backpack packed with school supplies for every child who walked through the gate.

Backpacks and school supplies going out to kids at Mike McGraw Park, August 21, 2026.

400	40+	5th	8
BACKPACKS GIVEN OUT	GUN SAFETY BOXES	ANNUAL FAMILY FUN DAY	PARTNERS & SPONSORS

A park full of neighbors

THE DAY ITSELF

Family Fun Day started five years ago as a simple idea: give families one afternoon at the end of summer where everything is free, everyone is welcome, and nobody has to fill out a form. This year was the biggest yet. Parents arrived with strollers and folding chairs. Teenagers came straight from the soccer field. Elders sat under the trees along the fence line while kids ran the obstacle course and lined up for face painting and henna.

The park sits directly behind our office at 256 Bartlett Street, and for four hours it belonged entirely to the community — music from the speakers, the smell of grilled food, and a crowd that stretched from the bouncy houses all the way down to the soccer pitch.

Families gathering as the afternoon got underway.

Bouncy houses and the obstacle course ran nonstop all afternoon.

400 backpacks, out the door

BACK TO SCHOOL, READY TO GO

Every child who came to the park left with a backpack filled with school supplies — **400 of them in all**, up from more than 350 last year. Notebooks, pencils, folders, and everything else a student needs on the first morning of school, handed out by our staff and volunteers from tables that stayed busy from the first hour to the last.

For a lot of families in our community, back-to-school shopping lands in the same month as rent, heating deposits, and a return to work schedules that don't bend. A free backpack is a small thing on its own. Multiply it by 400 children walking into a Lewiston classroom in September with what they need, and it stops being small.

Picking out a backpack.

Supplies going out to families all afternoon.

> "Give families one afternoon where everything is free, everyone is welcome, and nobody has to fill out a form."

Coaches who show up

THANK YOU, MAINE LEGENDS & STAR ACADEMY — TEAMS AND COACHES

The soccer tournament is the heart of Family Fun Day, and it runs because two whole clubs show up for it. Our deepest thanks to the **Maine Legends** and **Star Academy** teams and coaches — they ran the matches, organized the players, and handed out the trophies, and they do far more than that the other 364 days of the year.

To the **Maine Legends coaches** and the **Star Academy coaches**: thank you for your leadership. You set the tone on the field and hold these young people to a standard. And to the **players on both teams**: thank you for showing up, for playing hard, and for the example you set for the younger kids watching from the sideline.

These coaches are mentors. They keep young people busy, disciplined, and connected to something bigger than themselves. They notice when a kid stops showing up. They teach teamwork to boys and girls who arrived in this country a year ago and are still finding their footing. The difference they make in the lives of our young people is real, and it is measured in years, not afternoons.

Teams lining up for kickoff, organized by the Star Academy and Maine Legends coaches.

A huddle before the match — coaching that lasts long after the whistle.

Ready for the soccer tournament.

Thank you, Lewiston Police Department

We are grateful to the **Lewiston Police Department** for being with us all afternoon. Officers didn't stand at a distance — they walked the park, talked with parents, and spent time on the field with the players between matches. Before the game, LPD officer and MEIRS Executive Director **Rilwan Osman** gathered the players in for a straight conversation about the choices in

front of them — the kind of talk that lands differently when it happens on a soccer field instead of in an office. Relationships between police and the families they serve are built exactly this way: in ordinary moments, on a summer afternoon, with a soccer ball nearby.

Over 40 gun safety boxes, hand to hand

SAFETY YOU CAN LOCK

MEIRS distributed **more than 40 free gun safety lock boxes** to families at the event — and, just as important, staff sat down with each family and showed them how the box works: how to set the code, how to lock and unlock it, and where to keep it at home. Thanks to Maine Gun Safety Coalition for the partnership to distribute the locks to families.

Over 40 lock boxes went home with families — every one demonstrated before it left the table.

Staff walked each family through setting the code.

A lock box left in the packaging protects no one. Handing it over with a demonstration, in the family's own language, is what turns a giveaway into prevention. Firearm safety in the home is one of the most direct ways to protect children in Lewiston-Auburn, and this work continues year-round through our Safety Committee and our community violence prevention efforts.

A Lewiston PD officer and Executive Director Rilwan Osman talking with the players about choices.

The players gathered in to listen — choices, safety, and looking out for each other.

Conversation with the teams before the game.

Food that tastes like home

THANK YOU, ISUKEN CO-OP

Thank you to **Isuken Co-op**, the Somali Bantu's farm-to-table food truck, for feeding the park. Isuken served fresh, locally grown, culturally familiar food to hundreds of people — the kind of meal that makes a public park feel like a family kitchen.

Our thanks as well to **Poland Spring** for keeping cold water flowing on a warm afternoon, and to everyone who worked the grill.

The grill ran from open to close.

Water and refreshments for every guest.

None of this happens without partners who say yes months in advance. Our thanks to every sponsor and supporter listed below — you are the reason this event is free, every year.

THANKS TO STAFF, PARENTS, AND YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

To the **MEIRS staff** who set up tables at noon and were still breaking them down at dusk: thank you. To the **parents** who cooked, carried, translated, and watched over other people's children as if they were their own: thank you. And to the **youth volunteers** who ran stations, managed lines, kept score, and looked after the little ones all afternoon — you are the reason this event feels like a community and not a program.

Every station had a name behind it: face painting, henna, backpacks, soccer, photos, obstacle course, gun safety, food, bouncy houses. Not one of those tables ran itself.

A family enjoying the afternoon at Mike McGraw Park.

Backpack distribution

OUR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

Thank you for standing with our families in 2026.

ISUKEN CO-OP FOOD	Poland Spring WATER	SOMALI BANTU COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION	MASJIDU SALAAM
SLRO	United YES	MAINE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SERVICES	LA Youth Network Inspire. Nurture. Alleviate. Inclusive

See you at the 6th Annual Family Fun Day next August.

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