



ChildcareAlive! Giving Children a Healthy Start

“Great incentive to try new foods and activities and change things up a little for the kids! I really enjoyed it!”

Sarah Groce
Family Child Care Provider
Moorhead, Minnesota



Research estimates that 90% of a child’s brain is developed before they reach kindergarten. In addition to this rapid cognitive development, most of a child’s preferences for food and physical activities are set before they reach school age. Almost 75% of all children ages 3-6 years spend the majority of their time during the week in some kind of formal child care setting. This means that child care providers play a key role in shaping children’s development, especially when it comes to preferences for healthy eating and active play.

Professional organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of child care providers in shaping children’s health, leading to the development of several “best practices” in nutrition, physical activity, and infant feeding. These practices include serving fruits and vegetables at every meal, providing at least 120 minutes of physical activity every day, and encouraging mothers of infants to breastfeed. However, many child care providers remain unaware of these best practices, as many are focusing on promoting other equally important areas of child development for the children in their care.

Sarah Groce is a family child care provider who runs her program out of her home in Moorhead, MN. Five months ago she was only vaguely familiar with these best practices. However, in October 2013, Sarah registered and participated in *ChildcareAlive!*, a local program that is in part funded by a Growing Up Healthy grant through PartnerSHIP 4 Health. This program aims to impact three different audiences: child care providers, the children in their care, and the children’s parents. This is accomplished through providing entertaining lessons for children (taught on-site at the child care program), helpful tips and recipes for parents, and valuable resources for providers.

Sarah chose five different lessons to be taught at her program including “Give me the Whole Grain,” “Dairy-licious,” and “Fun with Fitness.” Children were learning during these engaging activities, parents were receiving matching newsletters, and Sarah was learning and quickly implementing many of these best practices.

While participating in *ChildcareAlive!* Sarah began increasing the amount of whole grain foods offered, including whole grain noodles, tortillas, and breads. As a result of participating in *ChildcareAlive!* Sarah says that she now offers new foods more often, and children are more willing to try these new foods. In addition to these menu improvements, Sarah also reported participating more often with children during their active play time, and decreasing the amount of television viewed each week. Overall, Sarah has become a great role model for the children in her care by enthusiastically trying new foods and participating and leading in physical activities.

When asked about the impact *ChildcareAlive!* had on the children and her, Sarah said “The kids LOVED having *ChildcareAlive!* come in and teach them new things and offer new foods. This process was a great incentive to try new things and change things up a little for the kids!” One parent said that her daughter has become more active at home as a result of *ChildcareAlive!*, stating that she now “does squats at home when she is bored and is constantly asking to turn on music to dance or ‘exercise.’”

Sarah didn’t just stop at implementing new practices; she translated these new practices into policy by writing them into her program’s handbook that is given to parents. Children will grow up and eventually leave Sarah’s care, but Sarah’s child care program will likely continue to operate for years and years. By creating policies that reflect best practices for nutrition, active play, and infant feeding, future children who are cared for by Sarah will be positively impacted for years to come. This opportunity to impact the eating and activity habits of a generation of young children in hopes that they grow to be healthy adults is possibly the greatest reason to implement *ChildcareAlive!* in child care settings.

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