



Healthy Child Care Provider Leads Healthy Children

“The children weren’t the only ones who learned about healthy eating; I learned as well.”

Darcy Barry
Family Child Care Provider; Teddy Bear House
Moorhead, Minnesota



ChildcareAlive! is an innovative program that is in part funded by a Growing Up Healthy grant through PartnerSHIP 4 Health. It 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. The ultimate intention with this program is that the policies, systems, and environment in each participating child care program would support the growth of healthy children *and* healthy child care providers.

Darcy Barry, a family child care provider at the Teddy Bear House in Moorhead, participated in *ChildcareAlive!* from February to May of 2014. The changes that occurred in Darcy’s child care program and within her own personal life are nothing short of amazing.

When an initial assessment of Darcy’s nutrition practices was conducted in February of 2014, Darcy reported serving fruits and vegetables once per day, and many of the vegetables were starchy potatoes and corn. She also served sweet snacks (such as cookies) one to two times per week.

At the conclusion of *ChildcareAlive!* in May, however, Darcy reported dramatically increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables offered, essentially replacing sweets during snack time. She also increased the variety of vegetables to include green peppers, black beans, peas, celery, and cucumbers. In addition, she committed to serving children a salad at least once a week, offered only whole wheat breads, decreased the amount of fruit juice (and served water with snacks instead), and only provided sweet snacks once per week, if at all. When it came to offering new vegetables, Darcy learned that she just needed to give kids the opportunity:

“The most challenging part [of participating in *ChildcareAlive!*] was me because I am not a vegetable eater. Now I find myself trying new things. I had the children try new things too and found out they are willing to try,” she said.

All of these changes implemented by Darcy will no doubt have a significant impact on the children in her child care; however, they also made a significant impact on the health of Darcy herself. Six months after the conclusion of Darcy’s *ChildcareAlive!* participation, she reported that she had lost 20 pounds by making simple changes to her diet and lifestyle such as eliminating cream from her daily coffee and eating fewer sweet treats.

Darcy and the children weren’t the only ones who were impacted. Darcy serves a diverse group of families through her child care, and she believes the parents of these families enjoyed the program as well. At the end of each *ChildcareAlive!* activity, parents received an informative handout with tips and recipes. “The handouts were a fantastic resource for the parents. I observed many times them reading it and commenting on the recipes and the children telling their mom/dad what a yummy snack they made during *ChildcareAlive!*,” said Darcy.

But the changes didn’t stop with just her program practices; Darcy also made significant updates to her program policies that go out to parents every year. “My policies changed dramatically since I began this program, from eating, exercise, providing more information to parents, and continuing to try new foods,” she said. By enacting these changes, Darcy is setting up her child care program to continue healthy practices long into the future.

When child care providers have healthy practices and policies within their programs, it has a tremendous benefit to their children. When child care providers themselves live and model a healthy lifestyle, however, the impact is even greater. Darcy’s experience in *ChildcareAlive!* truly exemplifies this fact.

