



Small Steps Leading to Big Changes

“Once a week we try a new fruit/vegetable. It’s great! Especially when we cook together.”

Julie Zachariason
Family Child Care Provider;
Lake Park, Minnesota



Julie Zachariason, a family child care provider in Lake Park, Minnesota, participated in a program called *ChildcareAlive!* from February to May 2014. *ChildcareAlive!* is an innovative program that is in part funded by a Growing Up Healthy grant through PartnerSHIP 4 Health, and 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 and valuable resources for providers. One of the primary goals of *ChildcareAlive!* is to encourage child care providers to make healthy changes within their child care program, specifically in the areas of nutrition and physical activity.

During Julie’s first *ChildcareAlive!* visit, an assessment of her program’s nutrition and physical activity practices was completed. Julie then created two goals for herself: reduce television time during the 12:00-1:00 PM timeframe and introduce a nutrition project once per week. These could have been daunting goals, but Julie decided to start by taking small steps to reach them. She started by choosing *ChildcareAlive!* activities such as “Trying New Foods” and “Choose to Move-Reducing Screen Time.”

Julie’s assessment revealed that about one hour of television was used each day during child care hours. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children over the age of two years old should only have about one to two hours of screen time per day. The recommended best practice in child care settings is 30 minutes *per week*.

Meeting this screen time best practice is often challenging for child care providers, so Julie decided to tackle this goal by trying to find other activities to take the place of television, especially while she prepared lunch or immediately before nap time. Julie found a variety of seldom-used floor and table puzzles, and started using those to entertain instead of television. Julie said that making this change was the most challenging part of *ChildcareAlive!*, but it has “worked out perfectly. It’s still going well instead of having the TV on.”

At the conclusion of her *ChildcareAlive!* participation, Julie was meeting the best practice goal of less than 30 minutes per week of screen time!

Julie didn’t just stop at reducing screen time; she also wanted to introduce more healthy foods to the children, so she started having a new fruit/vegetable of the week and cooking with the kids in her program. She also showed interest in cooking with whole grains, so her Child Care Aware coach provided her with a recipe for blueberry muffins made with whole wheat flour. Julie and the children not only made this recipe and tasted it together, they also delivered extra muffins to Julie’s neighbors.

Even some parents noticed a change in their children due to Julie’s efforts. “We noticed a big change in our picky eater. He would tell us that he learned that he needed to try new things and try new foods at home without us forcing him,” a parent reported. Another parent mentioned their “daughter has always been willing to try new foods but has been *excited* by it recently. She is also more interested in buying veggies and fruits when at the grocery store.”

Julie also made significant updates to her child care program policies that go out to parents every year. “I like that I have some new policies on nutrition and physical activity,” said Julie. By enacting these changes, Julie is setting up her child care program to continue healthy practices in the future.

Changing policies and practices within a child care setting can be very challenging, especially when it comes to reducing screen time and serving healthy foods. Julie’s story shows that baby steps can go a long way to making a big and impactful change for the health of children.

