



Perham Students Dig into Nutrition

“The kids were so proud. It was that moment that we knew they were really able to dig into it and love the garden.”

Amber Gullingsrud
Mental health Practitioner at Lakeland Mental health Center
Perham School District’s Day Treatment Program
Perham, Minnesota



Students enrolled in Perham School District’s Day Treatment program have spent the last year learning valuable lessons about nutrition and social life through opportunities funded by Partnership 4 Health (PS4H).

PS4H, a grant funded through the Statewide Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has been working with local businesses, communities, clinics and schools to help reduce chronic diseases that can be brought on by inactivity, unhealthy eating habits and tobacco use.

Amber Gullingsrud, Mental Health Practitioner for Lakeland Mental Health Center, has been working with Perham School District’s Day Treatment Program to help enrolled students get involved in the community and out in the school gardens.

“A few years ago we were talking about getting kids involved in the community,” Gullingsrud said. “We received funding for plants and seeds, so we were able to take the students shopping at ShopKo. Students were able to learn how to ask for items and how to use money to purchase supplies.”

After growing pumpkins and attempting to make connections to math and other situations, Gullingsrud and her associates saw the potential in a school garden project. They were very pleased with the outcome they have seen in student’s attitudes towards the variety of vegetables they were able to plant, grow and harvest.

“We helped to plant and to teach students how to use the harvested food and herbs to create healthy recipes,” said Community Nutrition Educator, Marilyn Hoffland. “Rather than the kids forming quick opinions about the foods, they can actually taste it first.”

“They were surprised to learn what vegetables they liked,” commented Gullingsrud. “One student ate all the lettuce, even when they said they didn’t like it before,” she added amused.

On top of being able to introduce nutritious foods to the students during the program time, the project has allowed students to bring produce grown in the garden home to their families.

“Most of our kids are at risk and come from families that may not be able to afford the fruits and vegetables we are teaching them about,” Gullingsrud said. “Kids are asking their parents for more fruits and vegetables and now, they can bring them home so their family has them for a snack, lunch or dinner,” she happily added.

While students are thrilled to be able to take their fresh grown produce home, they are ecstatic about being able to share the produce during lunch as well.

“Everyone uses lettuce for our free lunch,” Gullingsrud said. “We had it with spaghetti and it was so much fun to be able to see the kids be so proud on how they shared their lettuce, they went around saying ‘We picked that this morning,’” Gullingsrud proudly stated.

“The kids were so proud.” Gullingsrud enthusiastically added. “It was that moment that we knew they were really able to dig into it and love the garden.”

Perham School District plans to continue teaching students nutrition through the hands on work in the schools gardens. The District also has an apple and blueberry orchard.

“This fall we will continue the garden, as well as teaching students how to make salsa and pickles,” Gullingsrud added. “When the kids first saw the ‘fruits of their labor’, they were already excited for next year.”

With a variety of vegetables being planted such as: corn, tomatoes cauliflower, colobbie, carrots, onions, basil, cilantro, jalapenos, kale, potatoes, green beans, lettuce and more, Gullingsrud said students and parents have already put in requests for more kale, corn and basil.

“This really would not have been successful without SHIP,” Gullingsrud appreciatively said. “I am so thankful for the kids and SHIP’s involvement so that we could make a difference.”

