

ChildcareAlive! Fosters Healthy Foods and Active Play

According to ChildcareAlive! “Children under 5 depend almost entirely upon adults for decision-making about food and physical activity. That’s why healthy habits shaped at childcares last a lifetime! Tastes are being set and preferences shaped; kids are absorbing everything around them. It’s a formative age in every way.”

Because of this, PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), local public health and partners in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail and Wilkin counties, collaborates with ChildcareAlive! to empower childcare providers to foster environments that support healthy foods and active play. ChildcareAlive! uses fun and engaging activities on-site at childcare settings for providers and children. It provides entertaining lessons for children, helpful tips and recipes for parents, and valuable resources for providers. ChildcareAlive! guides providers in establishing policy, system, and environmental changes supportive of healthy foods and active play.

Cindie Van Tassel, childcare provider in Breckenridge, Minnesota, participated in ChildcareAlive! during a Farm-to-Child Care program in the summer of 2015. Cindie’s setting, along with 19 other childcare settings, received community supported agriculture (CSA) shares and a variety of resources to increase access to local vegetables. “It was a great program offering us many types of vegetables that we had not tried before,” says Cindie.



After seeing such positive results from the Farm-to-Child Care program, Cindie registered for the winter 2016 ChildcareAlive! Program. After completing an assessment of the nutritional and physical activity practices at her setting, she received resources, one-on-one coaching, and examples of healthy cooking and physical activities. Cindie attributes the increased healthy eating and active play in her program to ChildcareAlive! and the on-site coaching visits from Krystle McNeal, PS4H staff and registered dietitian.

“It really helped us try new veggies when Krystle made a dip for us. The children looked forward to and responded to someone else encouraging them to try new things,” said Cindie. Other new foods that Cindie offered following coaching visits included peppers, squash, whole wheat bread, and noodles. Changes did not stop with healthy food options. Cindie increased the type and amount of daily physical activity. Children now participate in weekly yoga, use music to support movement, make obstacle courses inside on rainy days, play follow the leader outside, and move and act like different animals. “You know they are enjoying the extra movement when they ask about what they are learning today and what exercises we are doing today,” says Cindie.



In addition to reaching childcare providers and the children at each childcare setting, ChildcareAlive! provides newsletters to providers after each coaching visit which can be sent home with parents. Cindie was happy to have this support for parent communication: “I believe this got them more on board with understanding the changes I made over the last two years in food choices and exercise.”

In order to ensure that these changes would be sustained, Cindie updated the policies in her childcare handbook. These nutrition and physical activity policies reassure current and future parents that their children are cared for in a setting that values healthy foods and active play.

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Childcarealive!

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