

## California

### Center Staff Team Up to Help Kids Grow Up Healthy

What motivated the staff at Hand-in-Hand Learning Center to focus on obesity prevention?



Preschoolers take new plants to the garden.

When Hand-in-Hand Learning Center staff frequently heard concerns from families about their children's health and realized that some children were already overweight for their age and height, the staff decided to make healthy changes in their programs. Serving nearly 70 children in the Colusa Indian Community, and the communities within Colusa County, in California, the center knew their efforts would make a real difference.

How did center staff get started?

As a first step, staff came together for a **strategy planning meeting**. During the meeting, staff shared ideas about how their program could help kids stay at a healthy weight and form healthy habits. Staff chose to focus on physical activity, nutrition, and gardening.

**Staff created planning committees.** Staff teamed up and formed five committees: nutrition, outdoor classroom/nature, garden, events, and Let's Move!. The Let's Move! Committee

How is the center helping kids eat better and be more active?

**The program worked with volunteer Master Gardeners to plan a garden.** Kids have fun being active in the garden and helping to maintain it, and they enjoy eating the fruits and vegetables they help grow. The garden is an extension of the classroom – it's used for learning about food, harvesting, and healthy habits. Throughout the year, parents are invited to garden with their children, teachers and center staff.

**Kids help make healthy meals and snacks.** Kids make fruit smoothies and vegetable juice from fresh produce. They also make fruit kabobs. For this activity, staff put out bowls of cut fruit on the table and let kids put the fruit onto skewers.

**Kids enjoy taste tests.** Kids get to try a variety of healthy foods and learn about new tastes and textures from cabbage and sweet potatoes to Swiss chard, kale, and spinach. They've also tried jicama, eggplant, zucchini, Brussel sprouts, hummus, guacamole, Pico de Gallo, roasted vegetable pizza and even baked tilapia!

**Staff created healthier menus.** Staff switched to low fat dairy products and began serving fewer foods high in sugar and fat. Then, they put a whole grain policy in place and added whole grains into the menu a little at a time. They also added fresh, local produce to the menu by working with a produce supplier.

**Physical activity is now a part of the daily routine.** The center incorporates activity into their daily plans and makes time for special activities like yoga, dancing and nature hikes.

**The center involves families by hosting special family events.** At healthy celebrations, families eat with their children, tasting the foods they enjoy each day. During "Take it Outside! Day," staff used produce from the center's garden in recipes like healthy pasta with olive oil and fresh herbs, green salad and fruit salad.

*"We see that children are benefiting. Not only are they more open to trying new foods, but they are also developing an appreciation for the tastes, textures, and types of foods that are healthy."*

— Director, Hand-in-Hand Learning Center

### Tips for Success

- **Divide and conquer.** By using teams to split up the work, making changes and planning healthy activities has been manageable for Hand-in-Hand Learning Center staff. Plus, all staff members get to be involved, work as part of a team, and play a role in supporting kids' health!
- **Be creative and focus on fun.** For example, take kids on a field trip to local fruit stands and farms to learn about where food comes from or bring chefs and food service staff into the classroom to have a fun day around healthy eating.
- Take advantage of free resources. Free resources are available at Farm to Preschool and Let's Move! Child Care. Look for free trainings in your area and online. Hand-in-Hand Learning Center staff attended a free Saturday training on Nutrition Education in the Garden.

We want to feature your story of progress and success working on the five *Let's Move!* Child Care goals. Please email a brief description of your story with your contact information, including program name, city and state, to [eeobesity@cdc.gov](mailto:eeobesity@cdc.gov) with the subject heading "Program Success Story."