

Culinary Health Education & Fitness (C.H.E.F.) Program

Partners working together to promote healthful eating and activity and build healthier communities

Final Evaluation Report: July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2020

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November 5, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Culinary Health Education and Fitness (C.H.E.F.) Program was designed to help children and families in Lincoln, rural Benton and east Linn counties achieve higher-quality lives free of preventable diseases related to poor nutrition and obesity. It used evidence-based and promising-practice programs that combine physical activity, nutrition education and experiential cooking to foster a culture of health in our rural communities.

The program comprised three primary components: culinary education for children and families (nutrition-focused cooking classes), the school-based physical activity program Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH), and monthly Tasting Tables in CATCH schools to encourage children to try new fruits and vegetables. Twenty partners across the tri-county region worked together to implement these activities. Over the three-year program period, approximately 17,025 children and adults (duplicated count) were engaged in one or more C.H.E.F. components.

Culinary Education

Culinary education classes introduced 866 children and adults to new foods, taught them practical cooking skills and changed their attitudes about healthy food choices.

- A total of 56 nutrition-focused, hands-on culinary education courses were delivered to elementary and middle school students and their families in the rural communities of Lincoln, Linn and Benton counties.
- Noteworthy gains were seen in adults' confidence in the kitchen, knowledge about nutrition, and attitudes about cooking with their children.



- Statistically significant gains were seen in children's confidence and skills in the kitchen, knowledge about healthy food choices, and exposure to new foods.

A total of 89 community volunteers and College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific-Northwest students were trained to deliver culinary education courses. Participation positively impacted volunteer instructors.

- Volunteers were satisfied with the training they received. A majority strongly agreed (76%) or moderately agreed (14%) that the training content was well organized and easy to follow. A few felt that the training session was too long, but most (85%) felt it was the right length (typically two to three hours).
- Significant gains were measured in volunteers' knowledge and confidence around delivering the curricula and their own personal cooking skills.

The purpose of engaging medical students in the C.H.E.F. Program was to explore how teaching culinary education to

low-income children and families might affect the students' attitudes about the relationship between food and health and their intentions to talk with future patients about healthy eating practices. Twenty-five medical student volunteers completed the pretest and posttest surveys.

- Statistically significant gains were measured in medical students' knowledge about food preparation and their ability to teach culinary education.
- Statistically significant gains were also measured in the proportion of medical students who reported that they intended to talk about nutrition and diet with their future patients and that they were more likely to volunteer in their communities in the future.

CATCH

CATCH, a program that increases children's opportunities for physical activity while also providing basic nutrition education, was effectively implemented in selected grades at 11 middle and elementary schools.

- Over the three-year period, approximately 6,426 middle and elementary school children (duplicated count) engaged in moderate to vigorous physical exercise during PE classes. The CATCH curriculum includes a range of inclusive, high-energy games and activities.
- CATCH curricula provided a common language ("Go-Slow-Whoa") around nutrition and food choices.

Tasting Tables

Tasting Tables gave children the opportunity to taste a different seasonal fruit or vegetable each month and supported the establishment of a school culture that embraces a healthy lifestyle and increases student exposure to nutrition messaging.

- Tasting Tables were implemented at all 11 CATCH schools in conjunction with coordinated Pick of the Month flyers.
- Tasting Tables are accessible to students in all grades at participating schools, providing approximately 8,900



students an opportunity to sample the Pick of the Month fruit or vegetable each month.

C.H.E.F. built on momentum generated in previous collaborative projects and effectively wove three approaches into a seamless regional initiative to promote community health. Each year, children at participating schools were exposed to at least two components of the C.H.E.F. Program. Students participated in CATCH nutrition and physical education activities during their physical education class. Pick of the Month flyers were sent home with all students each month during the same week that they sampled the featured foods at Tasting Tables. Some students then concluded their day by attending culinary education classes after school.

Meaningful lifestyle changes that positively impact obesity and other preventable health issues do not come easily at either the individual or community level. To be maximally effective, healthier food choices and increased physical activity levels must be sustained. These health-promoting behaviors are more likely to persist when consistently supported by the local culture. C.H.E.F. has successfully addressed this issue by integrating three different approaches to support a healthier lifestyle in our rural communities.