

SHIP Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative

Final evaluation report

Prepared for CJRR as part of their SHIP grant evaluation

Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville (CJRR) counties are working with two child care centers in their service area to implement policies and practices that support healthy eating and increased physical activity. The project is part of a larger effort by CJRR, which is funded by the Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP).

This report provides a snapshot of the overall impact of this initiative, with emphasis on reporting for the most recent evaluation period (January 2011 through June 2011). This report was prepared by Wilder Research. CJRR SHIP compiled existing data and collected original data as a part of this evaluation, using tools developed by Wilder Research as well as existing tools.

Reach

There are a total of 3,400 children age 0-4 who live in Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville counties. CJRR SHIP is working with two child care centers: The Learning Funhouse and Little Huskies Daycare and Preschool. The Learning Funhouse serves 46 children, and the Little Huskies Daycare Center and Preschool serves 80 children. Therefore, this initiative has impacted a total of 126 children, which is 4 percent of the total child care-aged population in CJRR's service area.

Staff and parents are also involved in the intervention by increasing their understanding of child care nutrition policies and practices and encouraging them to offer healthy eating options at home. The reach is approximately 100 families and 25 child care staff.

Activities

Various activities related to this initiative have taken place at the two participating child care centers. Both centers have implemented the "Learning About Nutrition through Activities" (LANA) curriculum. The goal of the LANA program is to help young children learn to taste, eat, and enjoy more fruits and vegetables to promote good health. The "I am Moving, I am Learning" (IMIL) curriculum was also added to this initiative at

the request of staff members at both child care centers. The goals of IMIL are to increase physical activities, improve the quality of movement activities, and promote healthy choices every day. A Cottonwood-Jackson Community Health Services public health nurse and a University of Minnesota Extension Nutrition Educator provided training on the curriculum for staff of participating centers.

Child care parent surveys

Follow-up surveys were conducted with parents of children who attend the participating child care centers to assess the impact the initiative has had on their children's eating habits at child care and at home, as well as any policy, systems, and environmental changes they may have noted at the child care center. Six parents of children who attend The Learning Funhouse and eight parents of children who attend Little Huskies completed the survey.

NAP SACC

Baseline and follow-up Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) assessments were also conducted with child care providers involved in the initiative. NAP SACC uses an organizational assessment of 14 areas of nutrition and physical activity policy, practices, and environments to identify the strengths and limitations of the child care program. Following the assessment, goals and plans can be developed to improve practice. Seven child care providers from The Learning Funhouse and Little Huskies completed the baseline NAP SACC and one provider from each child care center completed the follow-up.

Policy, systems, and environments

One of the goals of SHIP is to change policies, systems, and environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice. In the case of the Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative, it means specifically changing policies, systems, and environments to create opportunities for healthier eating and increased physical activity in child care facilities.

Respondents to The Learning Funhouse parent survey stated that the LANA curriculum has increased their child's willingness to try fresh fruits and vegetables "quite a bit" or "very much." Compared to a year ago, parents also felt that the center's nutrition policies and programs have improved, although the majority of respondents do not remember reading or hearing about any formal or informal nutrition policies at their child's daycare center. Parents from The Learning Funhouse also stated that child care staff often eat the same foods as the children, and always encourage children to try new or different foods. All respondents agreed that their child eats healthy food at home, and half of the parents had participated in activities or programs related to nutrition through the child care center.

Parents from Little Huskies report that the LANA curriculum has increased their child's willingness to try fresh fruits and vegetables "somewhat" or "quite a bit." Parents also feel that the nutrition policies and programs have improved, and that the policy is enforced. All respondents are satisfied with the food their child eats at daycare. All of the parents agreed that their child eats healthy food at home, and that they have a good understanding of what kinds of foods their child should eat for optimal health. Half of respondents also noted that they serve more fruits and vegetables to their child compared to a year ago.

The baseline and follow-up NAP SACC survey results also note that a number of sites have improved their nutrition and physical activity practices. Compared with baseline results, sites have improved in the following areas at follow-up:

Policy changes

- Little Huskies Daycare Center and Preschool now reports that a nutrition policy exists
- Guidelines for food brought in for holidays and celebrations are now available

System changes

- Fruit and vegetables are offered more often at each child care center
- Cooked vegetables are no longer prepared with meat fat, margarine, or butter, and fried, sweet, and salty foods are offered less often
- All milk served is skim or low fat
- Children are now encouraged to try a new or less favorite food all the time
- Food is used to encourage positive behavior less often
- Staff at the child care centers consume the same food and drinks as children all the time
- Outdoor active play is now offered two or more times per day
- Children are seated for more than 30 minutes at a time less often

Environmental changes

- Fixed play equipment at each site now includes a wide variety and accommodates the needs of all children
- Outdoor play space at each site now offers plenty of open running space and a track/path for wheeled toys

- The centers now report that there are no vending machines on site
- Posters, pictures, and books about healthy food are now displayed in most rooms

These policy, system, and environmental changes will increase children’s access to nutritious foods and active play time, which will ultimately increase the percentage of children in Cottonwood, Jackson, Redwood, and Renville counties who are consuming five or more servings of fruits and vegetables and engaging in the recommended amount of physical activity daily. For Little Huskies, **practices have changed with a formal policy being adopted**. For The Learning Funhouse, **practices have changed without a formal policy being adopted**. The work at each site is **somewhat sustainable – some work may be sustained, but additional efforts are needed to ensure implementation**.

Longer-term impact

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, about one-quarter of U.S. children ages 2 to 5 are overweight or obese. Because almost three-quarters of preschool age children attend some form of child care, these settings have an important role to play in ensuring children get good nutrition and enough physical activity. Initiatives that focus on child care are one important way to address the issue of childhood obesity.

CJRR SHIP has achieved many of the targeted short-term outcomes of this initiative, including:

- Nutrition policies and practices are implemented that result in children having decreased access to sugar-sweetened beverages, high energy-dense foods, and increased access to high quality nutritious foods while in child care
- Child care providers offer increased quality, diversity, and child-appealing nutritious foods
- Parents support child care nutrition policies and practices by encouraging healthy eating at home
- Social norms and environment in child care setting supports healthy nutrition
- Existing policy, systems, and environmental improvements are sustained and integrated into the daily curriculum and schedule of child care centers

The work of CJRR SHIP staff with child care providers in their service area will have an effect on children’s access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity. Social norms and the environment in child care settings will also support healthy nutrition and increased physical activity. Ultimately, this will lead to an increased proportion of

children who are a healthy weight, and a decreased proportion that are obese and have chronic diseases associated with obesity.



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