

HELP
Healthy Eating Lifestyle Principles
Fruits & Veggies 101
Pat Wells/Ron Frontella
July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011

It appears that *finally* the country has picked up on the epidemic of childhood obesity, and has begun some fundamental changes. If Mc Donald's can change their Happy Meals, perhaps there is hope that basic changes are beginning to take place. The statistics bear repeating, and these numbers are several years old, so perhaps are outdated already,...9 million children in America are obese, 10% of them under the age of 5 years old. The ramifications of this fact, are numerous and include childhood diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even stroke. As we can see, adult illnesses have crept into our children's lives, shortening them so that it is predicted that this generation will not live as long as their parents.

HELP's mission *to encourage healthy eating and combat the obesity epidemic and to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables* continues to be our guiding principle as we present our program, **Fruits & Veggies 101**, to the children enrolled in the Monterey County Head Start Program.

This school year, 2010-11 we continued our strategy to present Fruits & Veggies 101 to each classroom twice instead of our past four presentations each. It is this approach which allowed us to complete thirty eight (38) presentations in eighteen (18) sites, slightly over half of our established MCOE Head Start sites. We therefore encountered approximately six hundred and thirty-two children (632), making twelve hundred and sixty-four (1264) exposures over the course of nine (9) months. Our target was to present one fruit category and one veggie category per classroom. We encourage the pre-schoolers ages 3.5- 5 years old, to taste, to smell, to touch, and to use all of their senses in exploring the produce in front of them. We believe it is in using those keen new senses that help them to remember what they are experiencing and to learn about brand new foods. A ***hands on*** approach is also our way of getting them actively involved in all disciplines of learning through art, music, drama, dance, games, literature, poetry, science, and nutrition. We attempt to incorporate all of these methods at one time or another with a fresh new food, or perhaps an old favorite one. Remembering that small children sometimes need as many as twenty five (25) exposures to a new food to begin to "like" or even taste it. We rotate not only our lessons, but as the children move freely throughout their classrooms, they are encouraged to partake in the classroom activity of their interest at learning centers set up for them.

Our parent meetings have also continued this year; we conducted ten (10) meetings with parents averaging thirty to thirty-four (30-34) parents per meeting. Parents are becoming more actively engaged now; some of these parents have participated previously since they've had older children in the program. Our goal with the parents is to not only inform them about our activities in their children's classes, but to give them new information, and promote the consumption of fresh fruits and veggies. We in California sometimes take our wonderful bounty for granted, forgetting in other parts of the United States, *fresh* is not as accessible, or affordable, as it is here in California, especially in the Salinas Valley. These families love their children, and want the very best for them, and are sometimes stunned when they learn some of the nutrition facts that we share with them. For instance, when we discuss the soda consumption and illustrate the sugar involved, they are shocked, and often tell us they cut back or eliminate soda altogether from their homes... This is great news to us! We adhere to the idea that "when we know better, we do better!" We often incorporate our lessons of the day, done with the children, into our parent meetings, showing them how to make fresh applesauce, juice or smoothies... The Monterey County Foodbank has continued to send the wonderful produce bags to our parents, and these are distributed to them at the conclusion of our meetings. As our economy continues to be challenging, this added bonus is a welcome treat to many families. And we are very grateful to Leslie Sunny and her staff at the Food Bank, and to HELP for making this happen. We feel privileged to be the recipients of their heartfelt gratitude, even though this gift is not from us! We are confident that as the parents learn some new information, they go home and make some healthy lifestyle changes.

The Teachers of the Head Start program are also very involved with us as time passes, they become more personally involved. They have begun to share some of their ideas, and continue to ask interesting questions about the produce and nutrition we serve. They have certainly contributed to our Fruits & Veggie 101 Program significantly. We would not be able to carry on with our program were it not for these wonderful men and women who dedicate themselves to the healthy development of these small children. They truly are our heroes. It is our intention to model good behavior to our children, our parents, and especially to our teachers. We feel we have made some headway with them even on a personal habit level. Some report taking soda out of their lives, cutting down on sugars, and reading labels to become more informed. We often see examples of their integrating our lessons into their daily activities in their classrooms. Sometimes we see a nutrition bulletin board, or an art project directed at a food source, or we catch a glimpse of the remnants of a gardening project. Our time with each class is short, so it is very encouraging to see them doing what we hoped they would do, continuing on without us.

We travel the “food-service” circuit in most school districts in northern California, meeting with staff, directors, children and parents. There are some new and exciting trends becoming apparent and some new legislation in the nation and in California. Certainly **FRESH & LOCAL** is one of the most exciting new trends, and we see not only parents requesting a healthier lifestyle in the school districts for their children, but also the children demanding it.

Our children are becoming very informed consumers, and as we begin to educate these children at the young preschool level, we know we are exposing them to the best choices that will hopefully be their lifelong HEALTHY EATING LIFESTYLE PRINCIPLES throughout their lives....

We thank you for the opportunity to help make these presentations to not only the children, their parents and families, but to our educators who do not always have the time or presence to collect the data to use in their classrooms. This is the stuff that a great education is made of—new life experiences....and we thank HELP on behalf of ourselves and of the children.....

Teachers Pat & Ron
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