



“[We] cannot imagine not having these policies and changes in place.”

— Nancy Karn, Director/Administrator
Kids Depot, Madison

Planting the Seeds for Healthy Kids

A few years ago, staff members at Kids Depot Child Care Center developed an interest in health and fitness after engaging in a workplace “Biggest Loser” competition. Staff experienced the impact healthy food and regular physical activity (PA) can have on one’s body and well-being. This competition sparked Administrator, Nancy Karn, to apply for the *CACFP Child Care Wellness Grant* from DPI to raise the nutrition and PA standards for the children at the center.

Kids Depot is committed to providing children with nutritious meals and an active environment. With a “no food from home” policy, children are immersed in an environment with nutritious food options. The center revamped their menu to include daily fresh fruits and vegetables, more lean meats and fish, no processed foods, and all recipes made from scratch. For infants, Kids Depot began making home-made baby food. Nancy explained the value of continued parent education on the importance and rationale behind this policy to obtain full compliance. In addition, grant funds helped to create a raised garden bed for each classroom. The gardens provide hands-on learning opportunities and healthy snacks for the children. The garden produce is included in a monthly taste-testing, which has increased the children’s interest and acceptance of trying new foods. With the staff and children on board, it was also imperative to reach out to parents and gain their support. Parents are involved in tending to the gardens as well as attending workshops featuring topics such as meal planning, feeding picky eaters, and preparing quick healthy foods. Parents are kept informed through monthly newsletters and daily bulletin board announcements related to nutrition.

Nancy vouches that the initial time and effort spent on making these changes and implementing the strategies have been well worth it. Her advice would be to engage staff, children and parents, as well as develop policies and strategies that are sustainable. For the staff at Kids Depot there is no going back, these wellness initiatives are here to stay!

Why Healthy Bites Matters

Shaping eating behaviors at an early age helps establish life-long health.

Proper Nutrition benefits children’s:

- Physical growth
- Immune system
- Brain development

Healthy eating benefits everyone

Children who are well-nourished:

- Have energy to play and grow
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Are able to concentrate and focus on learning
- Enjoy a variety of foods

Early child care providers can improve child health and wellness by establishing policies that follow the expert recommendations about the nutrition environment and foods served in their programs.

The *Healthy Bites* guide gives providers concrete strategies to get kids eating well.



Healthy Bites

<http://dpi.wi.gov/fns/cacfpwellness.html>