

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



Integrating Nutrition Education into Early Childhood Education Summer Programming

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with the Children's Collective Inc. (TCCI) to increase healthy food access by implementing expanded/mobile produce distributions, implementing Smarter Mealtimes, and improving physical activity in early childcare education settings by implementing the Coordinated Approach to Child Health Early Childhood. Started in 1972, TCCI's mission is to improve life outcomes for children, youth and their families in South Los Angeles by providing high quality, comprehensive, educational and support services. TCCI's largest department, Child Development (CD), provides childcare for children from birth to five years of age. The organization's other community programs include a Family Support Center, two Black Infant Health programs, and the CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) program. The CFHL program partners with CD's nine preschool locations and one infant center to improve access to healthy food and beverages for enrolled children and their families. CFHL health educators work with TCCI preschool teachers and students to provide nutrition education and gardening opportunities using the *Grow It, Try It, Like It!* (GITILI) curriculum. Throughout FY 2023, CFHL educators taught 68 classes and provided 31 food demonstrations to over 240 preschool children. TCCI preschool teachers were also trained in GITILI and CD adopted it as their official curriculum for the Summer of 2023, which resulted in an additional 1,500 GITILI classes taught to TCCI preschoolers.

Body

THE NEED: Challenge

Over the past three years, the CFHL program at TCCI has worked with preschool students and staff to adopt and implement programs and activities that increase access to healthy food, while also decreasing demand for unhealthy food for preschoolers

enrolled at TCCI. All TCCI preschool students are eligible for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and reside in South Los Angeles.

One of the CFHL team's major efforts is to work with TCCI CD staff to help them increase both the quantity and quality of nutrition education and adult-led physical activity lessons provided to preschool children at TCCI. At the start of the term, the results of TCCI's Site-level Assessment Questionnaire (SLAQ) indicated that children received evidence-based nutrition education an average of once per month. Results also showed that gardening is incorporated into nutrition education, on average, once per month or less.

THE WORK: Solution

In the summers, CD has the flexibility to use a curriculum of their own choosing. CD staff were familiar with GITILI, as CFHL Health Educators taught several GITILI classes at each TCCI preschool site in the Fall of 2022. Staff enjoyed the lessons so much, they chose to adopt GITILI as the sole preschool curriculum for the summer of 2023.

CFHL staff first met with site supervisors at each preschool site to go over the plans for implementing GITILI throughout the summer. The CFHL Program Coordinator then met with the head teachers at each preschool site to present an overview of the curriculum using the Train-the-Trainer model. Logistics were also reviewed, including details of supply deliveries and schedule of lessons. The meeting concluded with Q&A to allow staff to ask any questions they had prior to implementing the lessons.

The CFHL team provided lesson materials, craft supplies, sample lesson plans, and fresh foods for taste tests each week. To streamline the process and provide ongoing technical support, CFHL developed a [page](#) on their website that provided regularly updated GITILI materials, such as lesson plans for each week; a list of all the supplies provided and the corresponding activities; and a summer calendar showing the schedule of weekly lessons.

Teachers taught GITILI every day, including the craft activities, garden activities, and nutrition lessons. CFHL educators dropped off fresh ingredients the Friday before each week's lesson. As part of the lessons, kids were able to taste test fresh fruits and vegetables, participate in outdoor gardening activities, and learn about MyPlate.

GITILI lessons throughout the summer complemented CFHL's current Smarter Mealtimes strategies, which are incorporated into the daily lunch routine and encourage kids to try more fruits and vegetables. Some of the vegetables and fruits that children sampled in GITILI lessons are also served at lunchtime by TCCI's Child and Adult Care

Food Program (CACFP), allowing kids further opportunity to try and consume fresh foods.

THE IMPACT: Results

As a result of the summer GITILI implementation, TCCI's preschool staff taught an additional 1,500 nutrition classes. Nearly 400 preschool kids were given the daily opportunity to learn about gardening and nutrition for nine consecutive weeks. More than 300 taste test activities were conducted.

Sustaining Success:

While CD's summer curriculum plan for 2024 is undecided, the current implementation of GITILI lessons throughout Summer 2023 is a huge step towards program sustainability. TCCI preschool teachers autonomously taught the entire curriculum and the feedback from both teachers and students has been positive. Over the next term, CFHL staff will work with TCCI administration to encourage adoption of another evidence-based nutrition curriculum for next summer. Teachers will also be free to conduct occasional GITILI activities throughout the regular school year and will hopefully integrate gardening activities and nutrition constructs into their regular classroom routines.

Favorite Quote

"The GITILI curriculum gave the children a new perspective on tasting fruits and vegetables. They especially loved trying smoothies and always asked for seconds."

– TCCI Childcare Teacher

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