

TACKLING CHILDHOOD OBESITY WITH "LANA THE IGUANA"



"LANA the Iguana" Helps Kids Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

Many parents - and childcare providers - struggle with getting kids to eat more veggies and fruit. But now they have an ally in "LANA the Iguana"!

LANA is the star in an innovative program spearheaded by the Dakota County Public Health Department. Using funding from the Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Program, the Public Health Department has brought the research-based preschool nutrition program to hundreds of children in the county through a partnership with childcare providers and parents. LANA helps children develop healthy eating habits by teaching them to taste, eat and enjoy more fruits and vegetables.



Childhood Obesity Will Lead to Future Health Problems

The proportion of children classified as overweight or obese is growing at an alarming rate in the United States. This trend places our children at increased risk for early onset of a wide variety of chronic diseases and health conditions, including hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Fewer than 1 in 5 Minnesota students report that they eat 5 or more fruits or vegetables a day. In Dakota County, Minnesota, 13% of children ages 2-5 who are enrolled in the county's WIC Program (Women, Infants, and Children Program) were overweight or obese in 2009.

LANA Program

Since many children receive more than 50% of their daily calories at a childcare facility, the Dakota County Public Health Department has launched a unique collaboration with childcare providers in the county. The LANA (Learning About Nutrition through Activities) program, developed by the Minnesota Department of Health and University of Minnesota, uses food tastings, menu changes, stories and activities to make children more familiar with and more likely to eat vegetables and fruits. "LANA the Iguana," the puppet mascot for the program, encourages kids to help make and eat fun and healthy foods. Parent education and involvement is another key component of the LANA program. LANA was initially tested with childcare centers, but the program was successfully piloted with 75 licensed family childcare providers and the 500 children and families they serve.

Results from the LANA Pilot

Dakota County licensed family childcare providers participating in the program report that children in their care were:

- more likely to eat fruits (67%)
- more likely to eat vegetables (78%)
- more likely to try new foods (92%)

In addition, 76% of providers offered fruits and vegetables more often at snack time, and the majority of parents reported reduced "pickiness" and fear of trying new foods.

Childcare Providers Like LANA

Positive comments received include:

-  *"Kids who had never tried some foods like sweet red peppers and sugar snap peas later requested these foods for snacks."*
-  *"The kids have a lot of fun with it. They love our LANA puppet. She makes the whole program for them more fun and inviting. Because LANA "tries" bites of things, they like to as well."*
-  *"I learned what vegetables and fruits are more nutritious and substituted them for less nutritious ones in my menu."*
-  *"I heard from many parents that the children were asking for the veggies and fruit at the grocery store. They were excited when they saw sweet red peppers and kiwi. Parents bought them and also incorporated new foods at home."*

LANA Expands

Based on the success of the pilot, LANA has been expanded to include Head Start and school district preschool programs serving high-risk children. In November 2009, an additional 100 licensed childcare providers and preschool staff were trained and are implementing the LANA program in their settings, potentially impacting 2,000 preschool children and their families. Childcare staff are also receiving training in the "I am Moving, I am Learning" program, a comprehensive movement course used in Head Start programs across the country.

Dakota County was the first county in Minnesota to provide the LANA program to home daycares, and following the successful implementation the Minnesota Department of Health is rolling out the LANA program in other counties in the state.

A Parent Praises LANA

-  *"The LANA program has not only benefited my kids in your daycare but our whole family. My twins have been shown a whole new world of great foods that not only taste good but are so good for them. We have had the usual grapes, apples, strawberries, etc., but now we have moved on to kiwi, apricots, and broccoli. There are so many ways to eat them that the kids don't realize they are eating healthy foods they never knew before. Aiden brought his "cookbook" to the store and came home with bags and bags of fruit and vegetables and is so excited to make EVERYTHING!!! As parents I think it is great to have the kids try new foods while at daycare since we all know kids and parents have a different relationship than with their care provider."*



For More Information:

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Visit:

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