

Success Story

Good Food For All Pilot Project: Addressing Healthy Food Access in Wisconsin Child Care Centers

March 2023

Background

In response to the impact of COVID-19 on food access for early childhood providers, Healthy Early and their partners surveyed providers to better understand their top concerns in June 2020. Funded partially by the Healthy Kids, Healthy Future Technical Assistance Program (HKHF TAP), Healthy Early is the Wisconsin network of partners working to support opportunities for breastfeeding, healthy eating and physical activity for children. Early childhood providers identified food costs and supply chain issues as major concerns. Specifically, providers raised issues related to challenges in finding protein sources (e.g., meat), cleaning and disinfecting supplies, and food costs.

Healthy Early and the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) partnered to address some of these concerns through an innovative food access pilot. In 2020, child care centers in Wisconsin's two largest cities, Madison and Milwaukee, were part of a 22-city Midwest produce box pilot, 'Good Food for All'.



Good Food for All

Healthy Early and PHA worked with partners to create a 12-week produce box pilot. Healthy Early partner, the Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network, connected with existing food systems partners to determine a distribution plan for the produce boxes. This included partnering with distributors such as Castellini Produce Company to deliver produce boxes to two main 'drop' sites in Madison (Community Action Coalition) and Milwaukee (Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin), where the boxes were stored and organized for delivery. The American Transit Company picked up the boxes and delivered them to the participating child care sites. Additionally, Healthy Early formed relationships with community-based organizations, such as Little Johns, to take any extra boxes that could not be distributed to child care sites because of closures due to COVID-19.

Throughout the 'Good Food For All' produce box pilot, over 18,000 produce boxes were sent to child care sites in Milwaukee and Madison. The boxes could be distributed to any family that had children at the participating child care sites, taken home by child care providers that were experiencing food insecurity themselves, or used by child care sites for meals and snacks. Healthy Early confirmed with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Community Nutrition Team that if the produce boxes were used during meals and snacks, they could be eligible for reimbursement through the Child and Adults Care Food Program.

“Not only did the Good Food for All program provide temporary stress relief to the families in her care, it opened up a plethora of learning opportunities around healthy eating and learning with parents and children.”

Ruby Grisby, Grisby's Child Development Center in Wisconsin

Results

PHA completed a formal evaluation of the pilot. Altarum was the evaluation contractor that assisted with this effort. Since 2020, 'Good Food for All' distributed boxes of fresh produce in 29 cities across the United States. Milwaukee and Madison were the only two cities that used the ECE system for the delivery of the produce boxes. Altarum collected data from the participating ECE sites and families in Wisconsin.

The program brought over **one million** servings of fresh produce to **1,500 families** with children in the state's child care centers. Across participants from the start of the program to after: 55% ate more fruit and 59% ate more vegetables. Additional data on the reach of the pilot program in Madison and Milwaukee is below.



6,480
produce
boxes
distributed



396,360
servings of
fruits and
vegetables
distributed



31 community
partners
distributed
Good Food
boxes



12,180
produce
boxes
distributed



745,440
servings of
fruits and
vegetables
distributed



44 community
partners
distributed
Good Food
boxes

Madison

Milwaukee

Lessons Learned

As a result of the pilot program, participating child care programs provided nutrient dense food both at home and at their program. Lessons learned from the pilot include:

1. The importance of leveraging existing networks of providers (i.e. Early Education Shared Services Network) to ensure program success.
2. The importance of identifying partners to overcome logistical challenges. For example, working with a new partner, American Transit Company to deliver boxes, or partnering with community organizations to receive boxes that were unable to be delivered to child care programs due to COVID-19 closures.
3. Carefully deciding the scale and scope of these initiatives. For example, focusing on delivering boxes to ECE sites only instead of to both ECE sites and families to reduce logistical barriers.
4. The need to maintain connections with food system partners for future efforts to reduce food access issues that early care and education (ECE) providers are facing.

Based on the pilot experience, Healthy Early and partners are exploring how to link and align these efforts with existing Farm to Early Care initiatives and figuring out how to include 'lightly processed' fruits and vegetables in future food boxes.

To learn more about this success story or HKHF TAP, please contact dwolfe@kidsforward.org, ameinen@wisc.edu, or hkhftap@nemours.org.

Nemours Children's Health is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under a five-year Cooperative Agreement (6NU380T000304-03-01) to support state ECE organizations to integrate best practices and standards for healthy eating, physical activity, breastfeeding support, and reducing screen time in ECE systems and settings. The views expressed in written materials or publications do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.