

Child Care Sites in York County, Maine, Move Toward Better Health

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At A Glance

As of 2013, 43 licensed child care sites in York County, Maine, have learned how to create environments that get approximately 350 children moving more often. With support from a Community Transformation Grant (CTG) provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each site received training and resources to facilitate more opportunities for physical activity. York County's CTG initiative was part of a larger statewide effort to address childhood obesity.



Public Health Challenge

A 2011 youth health survey found that 38% of kindergarten students in Maine were overweight or obese. Birth to 5 years of age is a critical time to set the stage for healthy habits. Because many young children are cared for in settings outside the home, these environments can help encourage regular physical activity. Children who are active benefit from better health, lower body fat, and improved fitness. They also do better in school and have more self-esteem. Overweight

children are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, bone and joint problems, and weak immune systems. They are also more likely than their healthy weight peers to become obese adults. Creating opportunities for children to be more active at an early age can help them have a strong, healthy start in life. However, limited space and time proved to be challenging for child care sites in York County.

Find Out More

At home, children may spend a lot of time in front of the television or computer screen instead of being physically active. Child care providers have an opportunity to counter that behavior on site by planning and encouraging more active play. Making positive comments about physical activity and showing children how to make it a fun part of their daily routine can help them develop lifelong healthy habits. For more information contact Dawn Littlefield-Gordon, community health specialist, at dawn.littlefield@maine.gov.

With support from CTG, our center has been able to implement policies and practices that have had positive change on the child-care culture. Staff policies have been implemented that are focused on helping staff become better role models.

- Bobby Dion,
director, Northern York County Family YMCA Childcare Center

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Results

Thanks to training and resources provided by CTG, 350 children in York County now attend healthier, more active child care sites. During the 2012-2013 program year, 19 sites completed baseline and post assessments; 16 of those sites made changes to their physical activity environments. Staff members were trained to lead more structured, active play and to use curriculum that incorporates physical activity into lessons. On average, participating child care sites made five improvements to physical activity supports. Changes included limiting screen time to 2 hours or less per day and increasing time spent in physical activity. A total of 36 child care providers (teachers or staff members) received training in the WinterKids Guide to Outdoor Active Learning (GOAL) program or the Active Play: Physical Activities for Young Children program.

Approach

Through trainings and resources offered by CTG, child care providers gained skills to encourage and facilitate physical activity at their sites. CTG provided technical assistance to help the sites identify improvement areas and carry out action plans. Through participation in programming like Recess Rocks and Active Play, staff learned how to replace screen time with games and activities that promote children's physical movement. Child care staff from each site also received training from WinterKids—a local nonprofit that makes it easy to combine fun winter lessons with outdoor physical activity. All child care sites were given curriculum and lesson plans that can be used the entire year.

What's Next

To enhance and sustain these efforts, partnerships have been formed with Let's Go! York County, Healthy Maine Partnerships, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Healthy Preschool Project. Training opportunities and best practice resources will continue to be provided to 43 child care sites working to create healthier environments for the children they serve in York County.