

SHAPING OUR PRIORITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD WELLNESS IN CUYAHOGA COUNTY.

Over the next three years, *Early Ages Healthy Stages* will promote strategies to improve risk and protective factors for early childhood health.

PRIORITY 1: HEALTHY FOODS ARE AVAILABLE

Young children have tiny bellies and big energy needs. Eating healthy food, full of vitamins and nutrients, helps children get the energy they need to grow, learn, and play. Young children cannot eat healthy foods if healthy foods are not available to them. Many of our young children in Cuyahoga County do not have access to the healthy foods that they need to grow and thrive. There are many environmental factors that influence the way that young children eat, including; availability, cost, time, and culture.



The problem. Young children and families in Cuyahoga County are not eating the recommended amount of healthy foods.

Young children develop their preferences for food during early childhood (ODH, 2016).

In Cleveland, 10.9% of high school students report eating no vegetables daily, far higher than percentage of US high school students at 6.6% (YRBS Cle, 2013).

SYSTEMS CHANGE SUCCESS:

ECE administrator Cheryl Johnson partners with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank to provide fresh produce to her families and community.

"During an EAHS meeting at the Cleveland Food Bank we were introduced to programs that the Food Bank offers, including the School Market Program. Many of our families are struggling to buy groceries. By the end of the month money is tight and food is limited. By partnering with the Cleveland Food Bank our families and community can receive healthy food to help their families make it through. As we distribute the healthy foods we hear, "We appreciate what you guys and the Food Bank are doing for the community." Our families now see that healthy foods are most filling and the children have learned to appreciate different and new types of foods as well.

The Food Bank has been a life saver for our community and families. We here at Education with Imagination really appreciate everything the Cleveland Food Bank has done for our families and community and would like to thank EAHS for introducing Education with Imagination to the Cleveland Food Bank and my good friend Laurie. This is a magical connection"

- Cheryl Johnson, Education with Imagination Child Development Center

"In July 2016, Cheryl contacted me to inquire about the School Market Program. In my role, I develop relationships with organizations that are able to partner with us in providing healthy food to children. I quickly realized that we were missing a huge population of children aged 5 and under. These included center and home-based ECE sites.

During that first distribution, EWI served 349 people, of which 167 were children. They have continued distributions without interruption each month of the year since then. Cheryl and I have joined the EAHS coalition in an effort to expand relationships and knowledge about ways to best serve the Early Childhood population and their families.

-Laurie Leverette, The Greater Cleveland Food Bank

HEALTHY FOODS | OUR GOAL:

Early Ages Healthy Stages will collaborate with our partners to improve systems and leverage programs that make healthy eating both accessible and desirable in Cuyahoga County.

Objectives: By December 31st, 2020, Early Ages Healthy Stages Coalition will:

1. Facilitate and evaluate partnerships between food security initiatives and ECE providers throughout Cuyahoga County.

- Hold community forums to promote opportunities for partnership.
- Establish contracts between initiatives and providers.
- Develop consistent evaluation measures among all programs.

2. Collaborate with community partners to provide tools, technical assistance, and family engagement materials to early care and education providers to connect them to Farm to ECE Initiatives.

- Engage partners to gather local resources for Farm to ECE Initiatives related to procurement, education and experiential learning, and gardening.
- Develop/adapt tool kits for connecting ECE providers to local foods initiatives.
- Connect providers to Farm to ECE activities.
- Secure funding for activities for broader dissemination of initiatives.
- Evaluate initiatives pre, post, and sustainably.



3. Build partnerships with local gardening initiatives to provide tools, technical assistance, and family engagement materials to ECE facilities for on-site gardens.

- Conduct community forums to gauge interest in establishing indoor and/or outdoor gardens on site at ECE facilities
- Provide professional development for staff on gardening by leveraging already existing programs from local experts
- Create "How to garden at early care and education facilities" resource to include; how to use food grown onsite within the food program, how to get reimbursed from CACFP for gardens in partnership with local experts.
- Establish gardens on site.
- Evaluate the impact of gardens on eating/activity habits of children and families, as well as the sustainability of the project.