



Riverbend Head Start www.cacfp.org

CACFP Participant

Riverbend Head Start in Madison County, IL first opened their doors in 1916. They now have six Head Start centers and serve around 700 students. Jon Kuanfung had the opportunity to join the team two years ago as a Nutrition Specialist and is working alongside a passionate staff dedicated to the nutrition and betterment of the children they serve.

“The learning process is diminished when a child is hungry or unhealthy. Riverbend Head Start strongly believes that a child must be healthy in order to learn.”

Jon stresses the importance of teaching nutrition at an early age. As obesity rates and the amount of chronic diseases increase, the best time to educate children is when habits are beginning to form. Change is usually a difficult process and it is an easier task to help habits form rather than changing them later in life. If children learn the habits earlier and create a healthy lifestyle, they can rely on them through adulthood. The nutrition education that Riverbend teaches is two-fold focusing on kids at the center and kids at home.

Wanting to include more fresh, home cooked meals on the menu, Jon began establishing gardens at all of the sites. Both the staff and families are instrumental in the success of the gardens. The children tend and harvest the gardens. The nutrition curriculum from the garden incorporates phonics, math, science and social studies. Teachers focus on what healthy choices are, what fruits and vegetables do to strengthen our bodies, and lead monthly cooking activities.

Riverbend wants to ensure that nutrition education continues at home. Families are encouraged to visit the garden and harvest the vegetables for personal use. Cooking demonstrations are presented at monthly meetings and parents are able to taste the food their children eat. Cooking and nutrition lessons are taught on the Riverbend online channel where featured recipes are easy and quick. Riverbend hopes to grow both their programs at school and in homes to continue influencing children in developing healthy lifestyles habits.

From Alton, IL Riverbend Head Start has been a CACFP participant through Illinois State Board of Education since 1999.

CACFP is an indicator of quality child care.

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