



Community Action Head Start

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Head Start

In 1967 the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action opened their doors as a direct result of President Johnson's War on Poverty. As they saw a need in the community to work with the children, the Community Action Head Start began. The program has 13 sites and serves over 1000 children in Salem and the surrounding communities. Nutrition Director, Natalie Bratton, is proud and excited about the impact the program makes for the children.

"We are able to provide the families in our area with quality child care and at the same time provide the children with the food and nutrition they need in order to grow and develop."

Nutrition and learning healthy habits will benefit the children for their lifetime. The Head Start uses the Harvest for Healthy Kids Curriculum where each month a different vegetable and fruit are focused on through all of the senses. At the largest site, they have created a community garden where parents and children work together. They have also started a physical activity program, Imagination Yoga, where children not only strengthen and calm their bodies, they learn how to focus the mind to be ready to learn.

CACFP is an indicator of quality child care.

Through the CACFP and Head Start, there are requirements to serve healthy food, but Natalie's team goes beyond those. Last summer they started an initiative to incorporate more culturally diverse foods into their cycle menus to appeal to their families. They asked for feedback from parents, teachers, and students. The children love the menus because they were involved in the process and given the title 'Official Head Start Tasters'. Recipes are always available for families to take home and try.

Parents benefit from nutrition education available through Family Educators and monthly parent meetings. Community Action Head Start wants the children in their care to succeed not just now, but throughout life, in all areas of life. Involving the parents and asking children to participate in their nutrition choices is part of attaining the overall goal. Natalie and her team know that by providing healthy food and healthy activities, they are giving them a chance to flourish in their own development.

In Salem, OR Community Action Head Start Program has been a CACFP participant through Mid-Willamette Community Action Agency since 2008.

