



Healthy Food Bags

We first heard about the idea of Healthy Food Bags from another Head Start community at a conference we attended. We liked the idea so much that we thought we would try it. We really felt that it would be beneficial for our community and we could pick up where the community Health Nurse left off.

THE COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSE gives out food vouchers to our families who have children from birth to six months old. We felt that we could continue this on from six months to three years.

We first met as a team and discussed what we wanted the program to look like, and what we thought would be best for our families.

Once we started the program, parents ran with it. With funds from our Head Start budget, we purchased the groceries every month (September to June), and parents rotated turns coming into the center and putting the bags together. The groceries were very simple: a bag of carrots, one litre of homogenized milk, a bag of celery, one loaf of bread, some apples and oranges, a small block of cheese and a couple of treats (fruit leathers or something). We would also send

home parent information in each of the bags. This was the start.

We had three parents to start and they were really good about taking turns and putting the bags together. Everyone seemed to enjoy the program. It gives the parents a chance to visit with the staff member and talk about whatever they would like. When we hired Alice deViveiros, our Infant and Toddler worker, she really ran with the program.

When I took over, the procedure consisted of having the children decorate paper grocery bags to send the food home in, and compiling a list of what to include in the bag. Because the amount of food we send home has increased, we no longer have the children decorate the bags as there are sometimes two or three bags. I base the kinds of food included on the Canada Food Guide.





One challenge has been having the parents come in to put the bags together. They may be busy, not able to get a ride or just forget. For the most part, they are really good.

We send home a notice the week before, letting the parents know whose turn it is to put the bags together and when the bags will be ready for pick up. The groceries are purchased either on the weekend before or the Monday morning of the designated week.

We pick a week that is in between Child Tax Credit and Social Assistance cheques. It is the parents' responsibility to pick up, or arrange for pick up, of the bags during that week. We do not deliver the bags and for any bags not picked up during that time, the food

is put back into Daycare supplies. We used to freeze the milk until the bags were put together, but parents found the milk had separated and thought it was bad, so threw it out. They did not know that they needed to shake it to return it to the original state.

THE PARENTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VERY PLEASED WITH THE PROGRAM. They say how handy the bags come in some months and how they really appreciate receiving the bags. We have learned over time certain preferences, such as some families don't like frozen milk, and some don't mind. It's been a very good learning experience for everyone involved.

Tami Archie
Canim Lake Head Start

One example of a Healthy Food Bag

Fruits and vegetables
1 package of carrots
1 package of celery
6 apples
6 oranges

Grains
1 loaf of bread
Small box of macaroni

Dairy
1 litre homogenized milk
1 small block mild cheese

Meat & Alternatives
1 can tuna

I TRY TO BE CREATIVE EACH MONTH COORDINATING THE FOOD WITH THE SEASON. For example, at Christmas a fresh chicken breast was substituted for the tuna, a few potatoes and a box of Stove Top stuffing for the macaroni, and a can of cranberry sauce and gravy were included to provide a Christmas dinner for the family. One month, the children baked buns and made butter to send home. This was a big hit.

Sometimes I include a recipe and the ingredients needed to make it. In October, I sent home a recipe for pumpkin muffins with the ingredients, but this kind of muffin was not a hit. The parents are good at giving me feedback. As April is Dental Health Awareness month, April's bag will include some information on how to keep the child's teeth healthy and a toothbrush.