

# SNAP-Ed New Mexico Reaches Families and Communities



SNAP-Ed New Mexico funds six implementing agencies to conduct seven SNAP-Ed programs in communities across the state. These programs reach people throughout the age span with nutrition education, policy, systems and environmental change strategies, and social marketing campaigns that promote healthy eating and active living. Examples of the ways SNAP-Ed New Mexico is making a difference are highlighted below.



## Taste Testing at Las Cruces Public Schools



In southern New Mexico, Las Cruces Public Schools, a SNAP-Ed New Mexico program, provides opportunities for students to taste healthy foods as part of the curriculum. Taste-testing is integrated into the classroom where the students learn about and taste new foods. According to teacher Melissa Tankesly, “The kids are always very excited for Taste Testing day. They initially look surprised at some of the fruits and vegetables but they are willing to try them. We all have fun with it.”



In addition to the tasting, Ms. Tankesly has her 1<sup>st</sup> grade students do different activities involving the foods as part of the classroom lesson. These include learning descriptions of the foods, tracing the names of the fruits or vegetables they will be tasting, and drawing the foods. She even has them do related math problems. For example, she has them count how many more of one type of vegetable they have compared with another, and she has the students graph which fruits and vegetables they like most. Regarding the lessons, Ms. Tankesly said,

“This is something the students really look forward to. And I am really excited about the program. I love the integration of classes like math and science into the lessons with the fruits and veggies.”

Since beginning the taste testing lessons, Ms. Tankesly has observed changes in both the school environment and in the students eating behaviors. For example, the school now incorporates many of the foods from the lessons into school snacks. She has also noticed that the students will now eat many of the vegetables without dressing, which they would not do prior to the lessons. Students are also more willing to try new fruits and vegetables and to encourage each other to do the same. These are small changes every day that can make a big difference in the long-run.



### ICAN Offers Free, Fun, Hands-on Nutrition Education to Seniors



Ideas for Cooking and Nutrition (ICAN) works with people across the age spectrum to inspire healthy eating and active living. ICAN makes a special effort to reach older adults with limited-resources throughout New Mexico with evidence-based nutrition education and practical skills such as cooking, food resource management, and food safety.

At AHEPA 501 apartments, a senior living community in Albuquerque, committed ICAN staff provide nutrition lessons to older adults. Service coordinator, Mary Shortell, observed that residents learned so much from the lessons and many altered their nutrition behaviors as a result. She stated, “Some changes I see in residents are them adding more fruits and veggies to their dishes. They also told me they have begun reading labels on foods and looking for foods with less sugar and sodium content.” Mary commented that ICAN nutrition educator, Tina Louise Carpenito, is a big reason why the residents love the program so much. “She makes everything fun, and makes them feel valued,” Ms. Shortell stated.

Robyn Kowice, food service manager at Isleta Pueblo Elder Center, has also seen changes in the elders. Ms. Kowice stated that Ms. Carpenito talks with the elders about nutrition and that it helps them change their eating. “Elders will listen to an educator. I have heard them talk about how they have been to the doctor and their weight is coming down!” Robyn stated that Ms. Carpenito will gather questions from the elders each class, come back the next month, and answer each question and teach about the nutritional facts and recipes. “I don’t know if the program is offered everywhere, but this is an amazing program that everyone should have access to.”





## Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Partners with Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo to Increase Access to Fresh Produce



Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, a Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC) partner community, is increasing access to fresh produce among local elders. They are doing this through a community garden effort coordinated by Jennifer Denipah, HKHC coordinator. Last year, free fruits and vegetables harvested from the garden were distributed to the elders at the Ohkay Owingeh senior center. One recipient stated, “We really appreciate the fresh food.” And another senior observed, “The tomatoes...were very good; tastier than the kind in the store.”

Ms. Denipah also successfully applied for Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program checks from the NM Department of Health Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. She distributed 80 books of checks to seniors to spend at local farmers’ markets and then coordinated a senior center outing to the Española Farmers’ Market where almost \$2,000 was spent on produce. That money supports local and tribal farming efforts, stays in the local economy, and enriches senior diets. One Pueblo elder expressed appreciation, “Thank you so much. These [vegetables] come at a good time, so I can get stuff for our Harvest Dance.” Another stated, “Thank you for thinking of us old ones. We appreciate all you have been doing.”



Efforts to change policies, systems and environments in Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo are part of HKHC SNAP-Ed initiatives to reach low income populations and communities with limited access to fresh produce. This is another way that SNAP-Ed is making a difference in New Mexico.





## Social Marketing Works to Motivate Kids



Eat Smart to Play Hard (ESPH), a program of the University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center, is a social marketing campaign that promotes healthy eating and physical activity among youth. It engages students, their families, teachers, principals, and communities. At the core of the six week campaign is the ESPH Fun Book. It includes simple recipes and fun activities that children complete at home each week. Completion of the Fun Book culminates in a highly anticipated Fun Day to celebrate the children's accomplishments.

ESPH is made possible by dedicated school staff who help implement the program and serve as role models in the process. Principal Baty of Kirtland Elementary is a prime example of this – she joined her students on Fun Day making fruit smoothies by riding on the program's smoothie bike. The school also incorporated Eat Smart to Play Hard recipes into their after-school cooking club and ensured that the cafeteria services' Fruit and Veggie Program provided students with fruits and vegetables at least twice a week. She feels that this program provides some of her students that come from a low socioeconomic background with a way to "get on the same playing field" with the rest of the students when it comes to eating fresh produce.



Families also had some great things to say about how the ESPH campaign influenced their daily choices for the better. Ms. Nims, a librarian from Armijo Elementary, and her daughter, Sophie, a student at Griegos Elementary, experienced ESPH in action. Ms. Nims reported positive behavior changes at work and at home. Sophie not only incorporated the program into her own activities, she also encouraged and challenged her classmates to do the same. Sophie even threw a dinner party for her neighbors using ESPH recipes. She had a fun time making avocado tacos, veggie pizza, and fruit kabobs while her neighbors enjoyed a delicious, healthy meal.



ESPH is successfully using evidence-based social marketing to change the school environment and to change student behavior.



## Kids Cook! Gets Kids Cooking in Classrooms and with Community Partners



Kids Cook! provides hands-on experiential learning for elementary and middle school students and their families. The program promotes eating real food, with variety, and in moderation. Kids learn to prepare multicultural meals together and then they sit down and enjoy it as a class. Then they are encouraged to make the recipes at home with their families.

Anabel Olivas, a volunteer at Parajito Elementary School, can attest to the difference the program makes. Mrs. Olivas said, “My experience with Kids Cook! is really good. I love it. My kids enjoy it and they look so happy. And I love to see my kids happy.” She also noticed changes in her children after participating in the program. They began to talk more about healthy foods at home and they now actually ask her to cook healthier foods.



Community partners also had great things to say about Kids Cook! Anzia Bennett, Executive Director of Three Sisters Kitchen, can attest to the great things Kids Cook! has done for her business and the community. “It is really incredible. So many people from all over the city ask about the Kids Cook! classes held at Three Sisters Kitchen. And the focus of the program is exactly what we want; teaching kids and families to take control of their physical health while also enjoying good food!”

Kids Cook! classes are free and held at Three Sisters Kitchen every first Friday of the month, along with weekly classes at the farmers’ market, and additional classes for adults. Recipes using locally grown ingredients are demonstrated and taught in these classes. Anzia recalled how a parent approached her a few weeks after a class and told her, “We came to a Kids Cook! class and last night my 7 year old cooked dinner!” Anzia noted that Kids Cook! is helping families to create their own traditions that include healthy cooking habits.





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## Cooking With Kids: a Recipe for Fun and Healthier Eating



Cooking with Kids (CWK) is a USDA SNAP-Ed funded program that works with pre-kindergarten through sixth grade students in Santa Fe and Española Public Schools. The program motivates and empowers children to make healthy food choices through hands-on learning with fresh, affordable foods from diverse cultural traditions. Children engage in positive sensory experiences while cooking healthy foods and they identify personal food preferences, practice food preparation skills, and learn about cultures of the world.

Principal Felicia Torres at Amy Biehl Community School knows first-hand how CWK can make a difference. It provides her students with opportunities to prepare a variety of healthy foods – an opportunity they may not get at home. After her son participated in the program, Principal Torres noticed that he likes to try and learn about new foods. She said, “He is more interested in what he is eating.” Her son also wants to help with the grocery list and he is more helpful and patient in the kitchen.



Other families have also had some great things to say about how CWK classes have influenced their daily lives. Rebecca Martinez, whose son attends Española Elementary School, stated that her son enjoyed the class. He and his classmates learned how to cook meals they can enjoy. And they want to share the recipes with their families and get more involved in preparing foods at home. Overall, Mrs. Martinez found CWK to be “such a positive class for the kids.”



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## CHILE Plus Partners and Head Start Centers Partner for Healthier Children



The Child Health Initiative for Lifelong Eating and Exercise (CHILE) Plus program works with Head Start centers to give young children a healthier start. CHILE Plus is evidence-based and includes nutrition

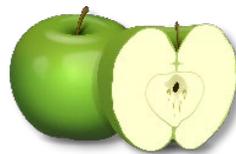


and physical activity education through fun, age-appropriate activities. The program also works with Head Start teachers and staff to make the environment supportive of healthy eating and active play.

YDI Head Start nutrition manager, Debbie Lopez, explains, “CHILE Plus has a clear message to eat fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and to drink water instead of sugary drinks. It is a direct and clear message.” Ms. Lopez really likes the changes she has seen in the children and families. She describes how children at the beginning of the school year would say “I don’t eat things that are green.” But by the end of the year they not only eat those foods, but their parents will ask about CHILE Plus recipes to serve them at home. Additionally, the center has altered its menus

to serve CHILE Plus recipes. They even include some of the students’ preferences discovered during the CHILE Plus lessons. For example, during one lesson the students compared yellow, green, and red peppers and the kids liked the red peppers best because they were sweeter. The cafeteria then switched from serving green peppers to red peppers.

By combining strategies at the Head Start level (purchasing and menus), the family level (recipes and physical activity suggestions), and the child level (nutrition lessons and physical activities incorporated into the classroom) CHILE Plus is making it easier for preschool-aged children to be healthy.



All of these programs demonstrate the reach of SNAP-Ed New Mexico which serves families from the very young to seniors in communities and populations across the state. SNAP-Ed New Mexico provides a variety of strategies that include nutrition education, cooking, taste testing lessons, and changes in community and organizational policies. Using multiple strategies makes it easier for people with limited resources in our state to eat healthier and be more physically active.

