



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
PRESCHOOL FOOD &
HEALTHY HABITS INITIATIVE

Addressing the negative impacts of poor eating and inadequate physical activity.

**PRESCHOOL FOOD &
HEALTHY HABITS INITIATIVE**

The Orfalea Fund's Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Initiative (PFI) worked with directors, teachers, kitchen staff and parents to improve life outcomes for children. PFI helped local leaders create new norms for food and physical activity practices in Santa Barbara County early childhood education centers.

CHALLENGE**The Need to Start with Healthy Habits**

Santa Barbara County experiences the same childhood obesity epidemic as other regions of the country. Early childhood education (ECE) centers often lacked a variety of needed healthy practices, along with an understanding of the context in which healthy practices exist. Examples included the lack of a thoughtful, healthful nutrition policy and practices, a weak program for physical activity, no focus on recycling or minimizing the environmental impact of waste, and families who had poor nutrition and physical activity patterns.



APPROACH

Helping Centers Set New Standards and Practices

The goal of the Orfalea Foundation's Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Initiative (PFI) was to create "centers of wellness" in the early childhood centers of Santa Barbara County to benefit children, their families, and center staff. PFI was delivered under contract by the Consulting and Educational Services Division of the Child Educational Center, Caltech/JPL Community (CEC) in Southern California. It used the implementation design and infrastructure constructed for the Santa Barbara County Outdoor Classroom Project (SBCOCP) to deliver the new PFI content to ECE centers across Santa Barbara County.

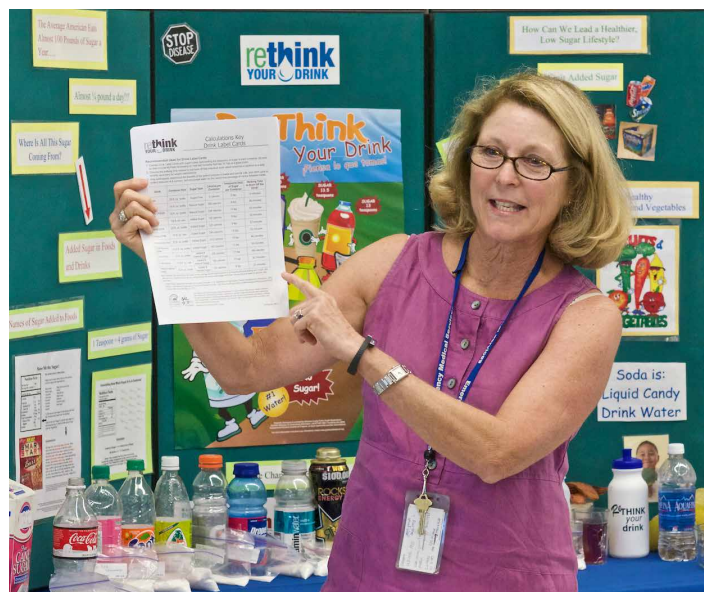
Implementation of PFI built upon the successful implementation strategy for SBCOCP:

1. an introductory county-wide event held in two locations
2. regional workshops organized as a two-year series of six sequenced events
3. center-site consultation and staff training

90 centers engaged with PFI in the first two years. Initially the program was delivered by two individuals working full time and three-quarter time, respectively. A third staff person was added at 50% time a few months into the project.

A 10-subject, 50-point matrix was developed and used to help centers identify their state of development as a "center of wellness." Subject matter content of the trainings covered the broad range described in the matrix.

A simple set of nutrition guidelines for food eaten in or brought into the center was fundamental to the initiative. Education was provided on subjects such as how food is grown and processed, the nutritional value of food, food additives, gardening, and recycling. One topic was "Rethink Your Drink," which taught teachers and parents about the amount of sugar found in popular drinks and processed foods. A special three-day culinary training was provided for cooks who prepared food for individual centers and groups of centers.



ADAPTATION

More Personal, Site-Specific Assistance

While the initiative was successful in engaging 90 centers, participation by those centers and staff over the first two years of the project was uneven across the county. This unevenness was evidenced both in matrix results and participation in the two-year, six-part regional training series. Initiative staff felt that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on center site visits to more effectively reach additional center staff and achieve greater progress on the matrix. Foundation staff felt that the matrix was bulky and complicated for ongoing assessment. As a result of these evaluations, three actions were taken during a second two-year funding period:

1. The six-part training series was repeated to allow all 90 centers to have staff complete all six parts
2. 450 center site visits were set as a goal (five visits per site average)
3. the matrix items on which the initiative focused were shortened from 50 to 12 for purposes of targeting improvement efforts.



IMPACT

Improvements in Food, Environments, and Family Habits

Over the course of the first four years, slightly more than 90 centers had staff that completed the full six-part training series. The targeted 450 center site visits were accomplished. Positive changes were achieved on the averages for all ten sections of the initial matrix.

Changes in the averages for the elements in the shorter, more focused matrix were more dramatic. On average, centers made significant improvements in quality of food served, recycling, and gardening. Of particular note were changes in eating and activity patterns of children's families.

Based on both teacher and parent reports, it was clear that the four-year focus on subjects relevant to "centers of wellness" positively impacted family awareness and behavior for many families. A frequent comment from parents was, "How did you get my child to eat that?!"





\$1,375,000
TOTAL GIVING

4
YEARS OF PROGRAMMING

\$275,000
AVERAGE ANNUAL COST

4,500
CHILDREN SERVED ANNUALLY

\$61
ANNUAL COST PER CHILD

CONTINUITY

A Cadre of Mentors and Good Examples to Follow

Sustaining both PFI and SBCOCP beyond the sunset of the Foundation has been the final focus of this seventh year of the combined SBCOCP/PFI endeavors. This work has involved establishing and developing the leadership of the Demonstration Site Network Steering Committee and expanding the base of Demonstration and Recognized sites.

As part of this activity, the Committee and the centers understand that their responsibilities include sustaining both the PFI and SBCOCP endeavors. A mentoring program has been established to facilitate support for less developed centers by those that are more developed.

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