



Media Release

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Free Cooking Classes Planned to Help Child Care Centers and Families

There are easy ways to prepare and spice up healthy meals that will make them more appealing to children and your wallet. The Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education has received a \$10,000 “Cooking Matters” grant to help families and child care centers across Arkansas learn these tricks. The program is for day care center staff and families served by the centers.

At no cost to the centers, the Division will bring a chef and a nutritionist to 15-20 different locations over the next few months. These food experts will teach center staff and families how to select nutritious and low-cost ingredients and prepare them in ways that provide the best nourishment possible. The program also empowers centers to serve healthy meals and create a healthy food environment for the children in their care.

“This is a great hands-on opportunity to show families ways to stretch their budget while still making healthy meals that kids will actually eat,” said Buster Lackey, program administrator for the Division’s Special Nutrition Unit.

The first class was held Friday at the main DHS building in Little Rock.

The Cooking Matters program is part of a nationwide effort by the organization No Kid Hungry-Share Our Strength to end childhood hunger in America. It began in 1993 and serves more than 12,000 families every year. Instructors teach participants how to budget their food money, buy healthy ingredients, and cook delicious meals the whole family can enjoy – empowering them for a lifetime of healthy eating. Recognizing that child care centers face many of the same challenges as parents in creating healthy meals with limited resources, Cooking Matters launched a program targeted specifically at those facilities.

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At the conclusion of a pilot launch of Cooking Matters for Child Care Professionals, organizers learned that program graduates were serving 64 percent more whole grains, 62 percent were serving more vegetables, 56 percent were serving more fruit, 45 percent were serving more water, and 45 percent were allowing children to participate in meal preparation more often.

At each participating center in Arkansas, there will be a day-long class for center officials and families of children who attend the center. Families that participate will receive recipes and educational materials they can use to practice what they learned.

Classes are scheduled in Little Rock, North Little Rock, Melbourne, Valley Spring and Hot Springs. To find out if your child care center will be a Cooking Matters site, contact your center's director or call Stan Cotton at 501-320-6404.