Maine has a Weight Problem:  
Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP) are helping

**Introduction**

Maine has a weight problem. The majority of Maine adults are either overweight or obese.\(^1\) Preschool children in Maine also have a weight problem; about one third of them are overweight or obese.\(^1\) If we do not help preschool children become more active and make healthier food choices, there will be another generation of overweight adults in Maine with consequent health problems. Research has indicated that the most promising strategy for reducing obesity is early interventions.\(^2\) This means that childcare facilities are an ideal environment in which to make an effort to improve childhood physical activity and eating behaviors. Maine received a CACFP Wellness Grant in 2010. Half of the money was to be distributed to CACFP sponsors and individual facilities to improve their PAN environments. An initial CACFP conference was held to explain to participants how to apply for funding, what resources were recommended, and how to use existing resources. Maine has a very integrated way of connecting physical activity and nutrition (PAN) resources throughout the state. Programs such as 5210 Let’s Go Childcare, the state’s Community Transformation Grant (CTG), WinterKids, and SNAP-Ed, coordinate efforts to bring PAN to the childcare setting. The following are some of our success stories.

**Using Resources**

Some facilities used their funding to buy, create, or sponsor resources that would help increase physical activity and good food choices

1. **Resources from annual CACFP Wellness Conferences**

I am Moving I am Learning (IMIL) was one resource that was promoted at the annual Wellness conference. A CACFP sponsor, Penquis Community Action Program, was one of the sub-grantees. The following is how one of their teachers chose to use an activity in the IMIL Choosy Kids toolkit:

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Penquis CAP (Marilee Page, teacher)

While searching for ideas about how to explain force in relation to physical activity to children I found a good activity in the Choosy Kids activity box.

The activity card said to spread out the small parachute and explain to the children the circle in the middle is a hole and then give children a ball and ask them to roll the ball and try getting it in the hole. The teacher would then talk with the children about how much force was used to move the ball; too much or not enough. The children would decide, based on whether the ball went past the hole or did not make it to the hole, if the child used “too much” force or “not enough”.

After doing this just a few times the children were able to determine if the force used was too much or not enough. Even children with less language skills than others were able to say “much” or “nuff” to let us know if it was too much or not enough. We then introduced a variety of balls in different sizes, textures, and weights. After discussing the different attributes of the balls each child was given two balls. We would let the child try to get the first ball in and then ask if they felt they would need to use more force or less force to get the next ball in based on the size, texture and weight of the ball. To our amazement the children were quite accurate in their predictions about how much force was needed for the second ball. For example if the child was given a light weight large ball the first time they might be asked if the heavier smaller ball would need more force or less force then the first ball to get in the hole. Most of the children were able to accurately predict how much force was needed for the second ball; more or less.

After doing this activity several of the children were able to use the terms too much force and not enough force to describe other actions and movements they observed at other points during the day.

We repeated this activity several weeks later and all of the children were able to recall how to play as well as accurately use the terms too much force, not enough force, more and less force.

The children loved this activity and it was a huge success! We will do it again.
2. Mini-grants from Maine CACFP Sponsors’ Subgrants

Another way for the sub-grantees to utilize the funding was to give mini-grants. ACAP awarded several mini-grants to individual childcare facilities. One teacher, Kristen Fitzherbert, explains how she used some of her funds to augment free resources and to build upon what had been done before:

**Kristen Fitzherbert, teacher**

I have purchased some physical activity items, such as hula hoops, badminton and ball sets, an obstacle course set (with cones, balls, bean bags, parachute, etc.), crawl tunnel, jump ropes, and some items to add to my musical movement collection (tambourines, maracas, dance wands). Once school gets out, I plan to start a MyPlate lesson plan. I purchased some activity books for the children. Parents will be included. When we start, I plan to give all parents an informational gift bag. I purchased some handouts, magnets, bookmarks, and a physical activity musical CD to include in these bags. I was able to get some free MyPlate materials to include in these gift bags. I have put up a large MyPlate poster in our dining room and this has resulted in many conversations with the kids (and parents as well). The CD that I purchased for everyone is wonderful and all the children love it. It gives us quite a work out....I was ready to collapse after we went through only six songs! And because of some of the past activities that you all have taught us in trainings, and at the CACFP Wellness Grant conferences, the older kids were quick to point out how fast their heart rates were after we made it through a few of the songs. I also purchased physical activity journals for the older kids. This will be a week long project where they will be expected to track their meals and physical activity. The journals also include tips, recipes, and ideas to help them with the project.

**Beverly Edgecomb, teacher**

I purchased a few baskets of fruits and veggies (plastic). We talk about fruits and vegetables with the children and they understand why they are important to eat. I also bought food puzzles and have the children make up plates of healthy food. We purchased seeds and tomato plants for a garden which we planted and explained how food is grown and watched the seeds turn into food. We purchased some potting soil and the children planted flowers and decorated pots for Mother’s day. We planted the garden when the weather permitted.
To address physical activity, I purchased bikes, helmets, hula hoops, Frisbees, soccer balls, baby swings so we can enjoy the outside for all age levels. I purchased printer ink so I could print information from both Lets Go 5210 and USDA for the parents. I also purchased some copy paper for this purpose. Using local resources, I contacted the Maine Potato Board and they sent me some information for the parents and a little potato cook book. We planted corn, carrots, peas, string beans, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, and onions. Once these were grown and picked the children helped weed and pick the veggies to take some home with them for their families.

**Jody Thompkins, teacher**

I used most of my money for equipment to promote physical activity and coordination giving the age group I have (mostly 2yr-olds). I purchased stepping stones from S & S warehouse. This is a great catalogue with some very sturdy equipment. I also purchased stilt cups, a hopscotch rug, and some 3-wheel scooters...man can they go on those! After using these for a while, I have noticed the kids are gaining coordinated movement. I also purchased rolling platforms; they sit on and hold the handles and scoot along. Fortunately, most of what I purchased can be used both inside and outside so that even on a rainy or snowy day, they can bring them inside and still be active, with the exception of the scooters, which are mostly outdoors. I have watched them learn even just how to coordinate body movement to make them go. I also bought a water and sand table to promote creativity and imagination. I purchased a shopping basket with healthy plastic foods in them. I was also able to purchase hula hoops for all of them. I have smaller ones for the 2-year olds and larger ones for the older girls. It is fun watching them give it their best shot trying to make those work, and it keeps them active.

I also purchased a little wagon they use to move the stepping stones from one end of my deck to the other.

3. **Resources for older youth.** Other CACFP facilities help older children. The conferences held during the CACFP Wellness grant period provided resources for handouts and for sponsoring PAN activities and classes. These were appropriate for all CACFP facilities including those for older children. The following is one of their stories:

**My Place Teen Center (MPTC) – (Donna Dwyer, Director)**

Brianna became a member of MPTC at the beginning of the 2009 school year. One of her teachers, with whom she has a special bond, recommended that she participate in our
program. Her teacher connected her with this program because she found that Brianna needed extra support and guidance along with some positive role-modeling. Brianna completed 8th grade in 2013 and will attend high school in the fall.

Upon first meeting Brianna, she presented as a tough, angry, yet sweet, adolescent who was clearly in need of guidance. Brianna comes from a broken home and lives with her grandparents. Her brother lives in a residential program and her mother is in and out of jail. Brianna spends much time away from home as she feels she doesn’t belong there. However, her grandparents are present and active participants in her life.

Brianna is subjected to a lot of bullying and harassment about her weight and overall appearance. In defending herself, she becomes quite hostile and is physically violent. The staff at MPTC has been working with her to develop alternative coping skills. We have also role-modeled appropriate behaviors for her to adapt.

Funds from our CACFP Wellness sub-grant helped us sponsor nutrition classes. We enrolled Brianna in the weekly nutrition class, and encouraged her to engage in physical activity. We also connected Brianna with a mentor who spends a few hours with her a week which has assisted in increasing her self-esteem and provides her with positive reinforcement. Brianna has also brought her grades up since the beginning of the school year. The staff provides homework assistance to all youth and Brianna brings her school work to the center daily and completes assignments in a timely manner.

It is our hope for Brianna that she will have the confidence and support necessary to thrive. We continue to work with her to develop her blossoming personality and offer her responsibilities and opportunities that help build her self-esteem and motivation to reach her goals. Through the support and staff training made possible, in part, by the CACFP Wellness grant, Brianna lost weight, lowered her BMI, and increased her self-esteem. We are proud of the positive steps she has taken and the work that she has done to ensure her good health and well-being.

**Using Distance Education/Communication**

Since Maine is a rural state and travel for training is sometimes difficult due to limited time and fiscal resources, Maine’s CACFP requested that sub-grantees use funding in innovative ways including some type of distance education.
On-line Trainings

Two CACFP sponsors, Penquis CAP and Catholic Charities, used some of their sub-grant funds to create on-line trainings and/or demonstrations. The Catholic Charities YouTube demonstrations are described below under “Encouraging Providers to Increase Physical Activity.”

Penquis CAP created on-line trainings for their CACFP facilities. The trainings included Gardening with Children, Winter Activity, Summer Activity, and Young Childhood Nutrition. Links to Lets Go on-line trainings are also available. These trainings are available to the public.

The following is how a Community Action Program in Maine’s northernmost county, Aroostook, (ACAP) used technology to share ideas and resources in an innovative way

Facebook Page

Aroostook Community Action Program actively collaborates with PAN programs within the state, including LetsGo! 5210 goes to Childcare, resources from the Community Transformation Grant (CTG), and CACFP resources from the CACP Wellness Grant. As a result, Aroostook County has a very active “CTG Early Care Sites” Facebook page. They use this page to share PAN activities and evaluations, and other information, including training opportunities, activities accomplished with the CACFP Wellness grant funds, 5210 Lets Go information, and as a communication vehicle to share PAN resources such as physical activity videos.

Involving Families

Joanne Burns, Health & Nutrition Manager

Our preschool/childcare programs at Educare of Central Maine used sub-grant funds to have parents complete a 5210 Healthy Habits Questionnaire for their child and then participate in a four-week nutrition and physical activity challenge based on the 5210 message. The questionnaires were used to promote discussion between our classroom staff and parents to help set goals related to nutrition and/or physical activity for their child and identify any topics the parent might want more information on. The nutrition and physical activity challenge had parents track behavior related to the 5210 topics,
along with a handout and trivia question. Each week our program had a drawing as an incentive for participating and returning their child’s tracking sheet.

Feedback about the questionnaire was very positive and it was a good way to open up discussion around children’s health habits. The families really liked the nutrition and physical activity challenge and although staff had some concern about the number of weeks and asking parents to do more paperwork, this really wasn’t a problem. Parents would be asking for their challenge sheet and assuring they returned them so they could be entered in the drawing. One parent shared with staff that the nutrition information was helping the whole family and especially helpful for the mother as she had some recent health concerns requiring change in diet and exercise.

As a program we have implemented program wide changes based on the success of this being piloted at Educare. Child & Family Services is now using the 5210 Healthy Habits Questionnaire at all our centers with families and staff will also be planning nutrition/physical activity challenges during the program year.

**Androscoggin Head Start**

Androscoggin Head Start involved families by creating kits that could go home with the children and be returned after a certain amount of time. There were three Home Activity Health Kits. Each kit was a different color to represent each topic. Each Kit contained activities with instruction and card for family feedback and how they were used at home

**Gardening Kits** included a:

- CANVAS GARDENING BAG with metal spade, shovel & rake
- Metal Watering Can
- Gardening Projects for Kids Book
- From Seed to Plant Book
- The Vegetables We Eat Book

Each kit also included jersey gloves, and Sow and Grow Pizza Plants Kit which the families could keep
Nutrition/Cooking Kits included a:

Set of Measuring Cups (4)
Basic Chef Set (Some cooking utensils)
Pizza Chef Set (Apron, rolling pin, small pizza pan)
Pretend Soup Cookbook
Baby Food Mill
Homemade Baby Food Book,

Each kit also included a Pizza Kit, Pizza Box & Paper Chef Hat, My Plate Placemat, My Plate, Portions Booklet, There’s A Way Booklet, and a 5-2-1-0 Healthy Favorites Recipes Booklet and a “In the First Year Booklet”

Physical Activity Kits included a:

TIC TAC TOE FLOOR MAT with 5 green & 5 red bean bags
Musical Scarves CD
Creative Movement for Children DVD
Choosy Kids Songs CD
Jump Ropes (2)
Pedometers (4)
Wrist Ribbons (4)
Nylon Tossing Scarves (3) & Booklet
Each Kit also included a 5-2-1-0 Water Bottle, Inflatable Beach Ball, and Cloth Folding Frisbee
Encouraging Providers to Increase Physical Activity and Nutrition

Catholic Charities

Our goal was to increase physical activity in the childcare homes by introducing new materials and resources. Monitors had noticed during their CACFP visits that some providers were lacking motivation to get children physically active and needed assistance to incorporate new ways of educating the children about nutrition and healthy eating. Because of long work hours, they also didn’t have a lot of time to spend on researching what new materials could be used. Using funds from the CACFP Wellness grant subgrant award, we decided to give childcare providers, children, and parents a role model that they could relate to and would make the learning process fun and exciting. We decided that Choosy Kids (http://www.choosykids.com/CK2/) would be a perfect fit.

We started our journey to introduce Choosy by creating four different physical activity and nutrition boxes (Indoor Physical Activity, Outdoor Physical Activity, Healthy Nutrition, & Healthy Behavior). Each monitor had a set of boxes that rotated throughout their providers’ facilities. The providers absolutely loved Choosey and the boxes and used the materials to get the kids moving more and to help educate the children on nutrition.

We felt that the activity kit evaluations (which were returned with such positive comments about their favorite activity and what they did) showed that they were used and just the use itself increased the activity level. The evaluation sheets were not mandatory for providers to complete, so we were thrilled when we had over 200 returned. Of those who filled out the evaluation sheet, 88% found the boxes useful. Sometimes the provider went into complete detail about how they used the kit. Examples of this include reporting on which age groups were (or were not) most interested in a particular activity. For instance, one provider mentioned that puppets were popular but that the toddler group was a little more scared than interested. The toddlers did enjoy the wrist ribbons. The
provider described “lots of running and arms waving”. Another activity, the fitness dice, kept the pre-K group active for over 30 minutes. Monitors reported that when the boxes were picked up after one week, providers were anxious to know when the next box would arrive.

We also developed a video project which worked with providers at their sites to create short instructional videos on physical activity and nutrition to be loaded to our YouTube page for other providers to view. Some topics included structured indoor play, yoga, outdoor physical activity projects, nutrition, and healthy behavior. We also created some “how to” videos to make some of the physical activity materials.

Yoga Class:

Water Sponge ball Obstacle Course:

We were able to create two training modules (Gardening with Children & Fun Multicultural Food & Exercise). The children absolutely loved the multicultural experience. They loved learning about Middle Eastern Food and helped prepare it along with a food tasting. They even learned and tried the art of belly dancing. Children love
music and this was a wonderful way to get children moving in new way. All videos will be loaded in the near future to our YouTube Page.

We also wanted to get our providers excited about being physically active and to teach them cost effective ways to incorporate physical activity into their daily schedules. Our goal was to show them that physical activity could be done in short time frames and still be beneficial. We also wanted them to learn that children could be active along while having so much fun that they didn’t even realize they were exercising. To do so, we hired Dr. Diane Craft, coauthor of Active Play to present a workshop on Simple Fun Physical Activities for young children. Our providers were moving while learning fun new activities to incorporate into their lesson plans. There was much laughter in the room as they moved and learned. We also developed training based on Diane’s material and presented it to other providers that were not able to attend Diane’s workshop. We received amazing evaluations from all the trainings. Many said it was the best training that we had ever provided! As monitor did visits they saw how successful our training had been because so many providers were using the material at their sites.

As a result of nutrition education training, our centers and providers implemented gardening projects. It was a wonderful experience for the children to learn how the food that they eat and purchase in the grocery store came to be. At one of our sites, each classroom decorated the wood for their raised bed gardens. This gave the children a
personal connection to their garden. Seedlings were started in the classrooms and then planted and harvested.

Harvest time:

The training on gardening was provided for our Family Child Care Providers (approximately 500). We were able to distribute over 5000 personal gardening kits to the children enrolled in our facilities. They were ecstatic to be able to try gardening at home. Each child received seed pots, soil pods, seeds, and information on different types of gardening. These included Building a Lasagna Garden, Grow a Salsa Garden, and Gardening in Containers. They loved all off the materials.
We learned that Gardening in Containers was a tremendous success because it helped parents and children (especially those living in apartments with limited space) understand that they could also grow their own vegetables. It also helped those who had no previous experience with gardening gain confidence to try gardening and to feel more comfortable with the project.

After having such success with the Choosy Kids model at all of the facilities, we wanted to make sure that we could provide sustainability for our project. In order to do so, we supplied each provider with a Choosy Puppet and CD. We also provided ChooseMyPlate food sheets (teaching the balance between eating well, being active, and having fun) along with Healthy Food Portion worksheets to be used with the children at their sites and then taken home to their parents. This material also helped educate parents on healthy food choices, appropriate serving sizes (along with a visual of what a healthy plate looks like), and physical activity around these topics. Providers were elated to be able to continue on their own with these materials. We felt this was a major success because we were able to reach all members involved in a child’s nutrition and physical health.