

Making CACFP Child Care Healthier: Evaluation of Twist & Sprout in Minnesota

Background

Each day, more than 3.6 million children receive meals through the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This makes CACFP an excellent platform for improving the health and well-being of young children across the nation.

Providers Choice is the largest sponsor of the CACFP program in the United States. Based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Providers Choice operates in every county in the state. Providers Choice administers CACFP and provides education, enrichment, and assistance to child care providers. More information about Providers Choice can be found at <http://www.providerschoice.com/>.



The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC partnered with Providers Choice to evaluate Twist & Sprout in the summer of 2014. More information about FRAC can be found at <http://www.frac.org>.

Twist & Sprout

Twist & Sprout is a nutrition and wellness initiative for family child care providers in Minnesota. It is designed to support providers in putting nutrition best practices into action. It is divided into five focal areas:

- *Serving vegetables twice a day* – Providers learn how to create a meal plan that serves vegetables twice a day, every day.
- *Family-style meals* – Providers learn best-practices for eating with the children as well as letting the children serve themselves.
- *Budgeting healthy foods* – Providers learn how to improve the nutritional quality of meals and snacks while saving money and staying within their budget.
- *Knife skills* – Providers learn how to use different types of knives effectively, efficiently, and safely when preparing foods such as vegetables.
- *Wellness policy* – Providers learn how to establish a wellness policy for their child care home that states the practices and values related to child health and well-being.

Providers attend a three hour workshop and learn about each topic, best practices, and actionable next steps. Emphasis is place on group participation and discussion to engage providers and make it more likely they incorporate what they learn in their child care home.



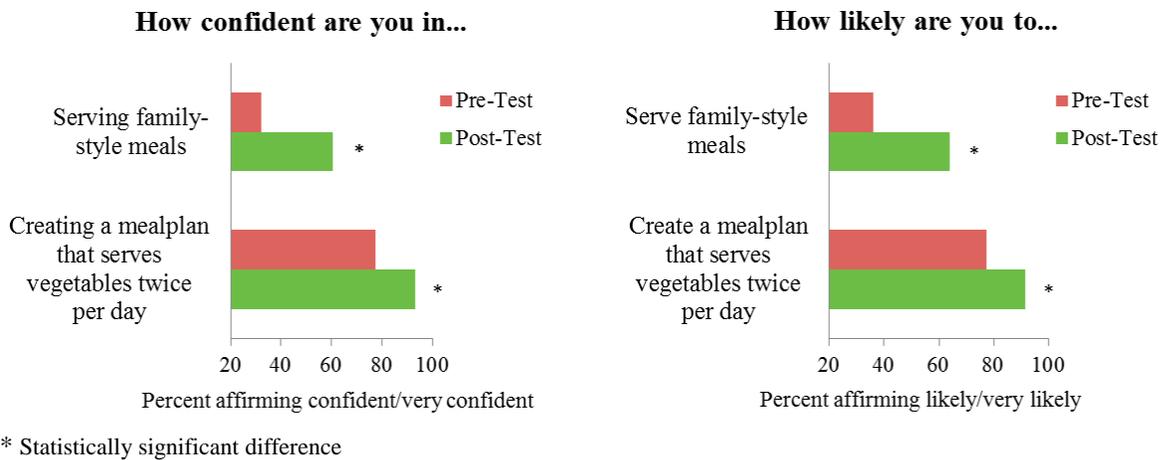
Methods

The program evaluation used a pre-test/post-test design. Both pre- and post-test were completed electronically online. Before the Twist & Sprout program, CACFP child care providers completed a brief survey that included questions about confidence, importance, and likelihood related to the focal areas listed above. Participants then went through the program and completed the post-test (which was exactly the same as the pre-test) about three weeks after the program ended.

Results

Twist & Sprout drastically increased confidence and importance given to the focal areas listed above. Twist & Sprout also increased the likelihood of actually performing positive-practices related to the focal areas. Highlights from pre- to post-test include:

- *Confidence*: 13 to 30 percentage-point increase in confidence related to serving vegetables twice a day; serving family-style meals; serving healthy foods within budget; using a knife effectively when preparing vegetables; and establishing a wellness policy;
- *Importance*: Nearly 20 percentage-point increase in importance in serving family-style meals and establishing a wellness policy;
- *Likelihood*: 8 to 30 percentage-point increase in likelihood of creating a meal plan that serves vegetables twice a day; serving family style meals; and establishing a wellness policy in next month.



Participants were almost universally satisfied with the program: 97 percent of respondents said they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with Twist & Sprout.

Conclusion

Twist & Sprout is an effective program for increasing confidence and importance related to healthful practices among CACFP providers such as serving vegetables twice a day, serving family-style meals, and establishing a wellness plan. It also increases the likelihood providers will actually perform these practices.