

PRACTICE AND POLICY

Faith Communities Igniting Change for Improved Health

by Amy Paulson, MPH, AE-C; Instructor EVMS Pediatrics; Director, Consortium for Infant and Child Health (CINCH)

When we talk about working with the faith community to improve health, often the conversation first goes to intervening with individuals and teaching them to eat healthy or be more active. What if the places they regularly visit, like church, don't offer healthy foods or opportunities for physical activity? It's hard for someone to make a healthy choice at a church dinner if there are only unhealthy options.

CINCH's *Igniting Change: Western Tidewater Healthy Faith & Communities Project* focuses on organizational change to support health. *Igniting Change* creates healthier communities by implementing high impact and evidence-based strategies to create policy, systems and environmental changes that increase healthy food choices and physical activity opportunities for large numbers of people.

Igniting Change works with area churches to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Involvement in the project starts with a comprehensive assessment of the eating and physical activity environments. The church identifies a leadership team that works with our project staff to review recommendations and create an action plan for healthy change. Our project, with funding assistance from the Obici

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Healthcare Foundation, provides support for the church to implement the changes identified as most important to its membership.

Churches have started stairwell promotion programs; placed bike racks for use by those who peddle to church; adopted healthy eating and wellness policies and developed healthier menus to offer to congregants. Our project also provided commercial grade blenders and fruit slicers to support healthy eating policies so that smoothies and fresh-sliced fruit can be provided to children and adults in some churches. Congregants are more active through Instant Recess Programs during their meetings and services. These types of changes encourage a healthier lifestyle and provide tools for better choices at church, at home and at the workplace.

The *Igniting Change* project has been put into action in 15 churches with plans for more this coming year. All participating faith-based sites showed improvements in both policies and environments that impact over 4,000 people annually. The great part about this work is that it's sustainable. To learn

more about *Igniting Change*, contact CINCH at 757-668-6426 or CINCH@evms.edu.



Oakland Christian United Church of Christ uses the new commercial grade blender to provide healthy smoothies to their youth instead of healthier snack choices.

Preschoolers Learn the Value of Practicing Healthy Lifestyles

by Ipek Taffe, The Planning Council Vice President, Children's Services

The Planning Council partnered with early childcare centers in Western Tidewater to develop policy and practice changes that will help lead children and their families to adopt healthy nutrition practices in daycare centers and at home.

Through The Planning Council's Healthy Kids for Healthy Futures Project that was launched in Suffolk and Western Tidewater in 2012, 26 childcare centers/preschools and 35 family home childcare providers committed to making improved nutritional practices and physical activity a priority for children of young ages.

Approximately 1,900 children ages 0-5 continue to benefit from the changes made due to the guidance of The Planning Council staff with the support of the Obici Healthcare Foundation. It is our belief that overweight and obesity rates of 32% for young children will be effectively addressed through this effort.

Childcare programs that chose to engage in the project conducted a program self-assessment to identify their current nutrition and physical activity practices, including foods and beverages served, activities for children and training available to staff and parents. Using a research-based tool called C.H.O.I.C.E. (Creating Healthy Opportunities in Childcare Environments), providers reviewed existing nutrition and physical activity practices, established a starting point for staff training and parent education, and developed policies to make their childcare program healthier for children.

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Many programs also made changes to their menus and beverages, such as serving a lower fat milk and providing water throughout the day. Many programs have incorporated more fruits and vegetables into their menus, and have cut back on the amount of juice and sugar-sweetened beverages.

To continue with the efforts to build a healthier generation, The Planning Council is now inviting childcare programs in Western Tidewater to participate in the new Farm2Childcare (F2CC) initiative, connecting local farmers to the childcare programs to offer fresh local produce to its youngest citizens.

If you are interested in participating in any of the activities or in obtaining The Planning Council's assistance to develop nutrition and physical activity policies, please send an email to: Farm2childcare@theplanningcouncil.org.

Children enrolled in Western Tidewater daycare programs get early exposure to healthy lifestyles through The Planning Council's C.H.O.I.C.E. program. Lessons learned in good nutrition and physical activity are intended to last a lifetime.



Consider a Workplace Meal Policy

The Obici Healthcare Foundation implemented a policy last year that sets up guidelines for meals served with Foundation funds. If your organization wants to develop a workplace meal policy, feel free to edit and customize the text below to meet your needs.

Healthy Workplace Meeting Meals Policy

The Obici Healthcare Foundation will be deliberate in serving healthy food during its business meetings. The foods served will meet the American Diabetes Association's and American Heart Association's guidelines that include foods that are low in fat, high in fiber and nutrient dense but are lower in calories.

The Obici Healthcare Foundation recommends that grantees follow these same food guidelines when expending grant money on food served at meetings.