

Lunchbox Toolbox Workshop supports student achievement

Written By MARNI WALSH

The Farm to School Program, a project of Headwaters Communities in Action (HCIA) and the Food and Farming Alliance (HFFA,) will lead a free Lunchbox Toolbox workshop at Hyland Heights Elementary School this Thursday, May 9.

The event is a joint effort between the school councils of Primrose Elementary School and Hyland Heights Elementary which received a Parent's Reaching Out Grant from the Ministry of Education.

"The grant is intended to engage parents and find local solutions to involve parents in supporting student achievement and well being," says Farm to School Program Coordinator Adelle Barr-Klouman.

The workshop was inspired by the ongoing work of the HFFA's Farm to School programs, which aim to empower families to connect with the local food system.

Adelle Barr-Klouman says, "While working with young students and families in an educational setting, we were hearing that families were constantly facing challenges in packing school lunches."

She added, "Parents wanted to ensure their children ate healthy at school but had difficulty finding a variety of healthy choices, dealing with picky eaters and balancing it with environmental and budget considerations."

The Program Coordinator says, "Farm to School clearly saw a need to support families and share tools for improving school lunches, as we all struggle with the above challenges. Some parents do not realize the impact of nutrition on learning, while others feel like they don't have the skills, money or time to provide the variety and nutritional balance."

Adelle Barr-Klouman says, "Student nutrition has proven links to academic achievement, behaviour and readiness to learn at school. By offering a positive session exploring healthy local foods and options for lunches together, families can learn from each other and the local food professionals and apply to their own child's lunch, in turn it all supports student achievement and well-being at school and beyond."

The May 9 workshop will have stations for families to explore, hosted by dietitians, farmers, cooks and chefs.

Ms. Barr-Klouman says families will come away with recipes, food samples, a variety of options for lunchboxes, tips for working with picky eaters, comparisons between single serve items and buying in bulk, and eco-lunch options.

"We hope attendees will gain an understanding for the bigger picture of the connection between hunger and eating nutritious foods with improving overall student well-being and readiness to learn," says Barr Klouman.

The Farm to School Program describes the event as "evening of food and fun" that explores tools to help families "make packing school lunches more enjoyable and sustainable." The organization say the workshop involves a series of stations where parents will gain knowledge and tips from local dietitians, chefs, farmers and each other as follows:

(1) What is a healthy lunch? Nicole Hambleton, Registered Dietitian will explore Good-Better-Best choices for school lunches, which meet Canada's new Food Guide, and view a joint venture video with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.

2) How to talk to your kids about food. Jacalyn Dryland, Registered Dietitian explores issues such as "picky" eaters, the concepts of stomach, mouth or heart hunger, and the benefits of having children pack their own lunches.

(3) Make and Take. Farmer and cook, Rebecca Landman will have guests make a simple, scrumptious snack that will be a great addition to their child's lunchbox.

Ms. Barr-Klouman told the Free Press that HFFA will be compiling all information from the workshop into a booklet that will be available to families at the event and online after the event.

“Personally, I have found that after years of dreading the daily routine of packing lunches and struggling with variety and nutritious options in our own household, my own children are empowered to take it on themselves,” says Adelle Barr-Klouman. “After working side by side with my children, exploring and talking about good options, learning together and taking the time to get used to new foods, they now pack their own lunches (even the 5 year old!) I have confidence that they will eat what they chose to pack and I know that the choices we have in the fridge or cupboard are good options, so I can trust that they can do a great job of packing lunch themselves.”

Lunchbox Toolbox Workshops take place from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. at Hyland Heights Elementary School, 200 Fourth Ave in Shelburne on Thursday, May 9.

“We hope that families come away from the workshop feeling empowered to support learning through nutritious lunches,” says Adelle Barr-Klouman.

Families interesting in coming last minute, can email Ms. Barr-Klouman about a spot: at food@headwaterscommunities.org. Learn more about HFFA Farm to School programs at hffa.ca/farmtoschool.