

Promoting Health at the Library—a Community Hub

Erie 1 Board of Cooperative Education Services

Erie 1 Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) and its subcontractor, Healthy Community Alliance, is working with libraries to expand on their efforts to create a healthier Cattaraugus County.

Libraries Offer More than Books

Families with young children are harder to engage in wellness initiatives. Economic constraints, transportation, and work schedules make it difficult for them to participate. Erie 1 BOCES and the Healthy Community Alliance has expanded their efforts beyond schools, worksites, and corner stores to engage families with young children at libraries.

Libraries are vital to every community. In addition to providing information and resources, libraries offer a free and safe gathering space. Partnerships between public libraries and community health stakeholders can reduce disparities in access to health information and services because anyone can visit the library to read, gather information, take classes, and meet friends. In addition to making accurate health information available, libraries can support access to healthy foods.

This year, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) worked with the Blount Library in Franklinville to provide reliable and relevant health resources and support, and access to healthy options. Health messages were communicated through materials and policies implemented across the library system to ensure healthy options are available at library events, meetings, and vending machines. In addition, the partnership between CHSC and the library led to the development of toddler nutrition and physical activity-themed bags that families with young children can use at the library or check out.

Each bag is different and filled with activities like

hopscotch mats, activity cones, jump ropes, MyPlate placemats, yoga books, flash cards, recipes, and other educational materials.

“Our small patrons will have the option to take out these toddler bags to learn more about physical activity and nutrition with their families while playing games and reading books.” Katie Connors, community coordinator



Physical activity themed toddler bag

A Cattaraugus County Catalyst

The toddler bags were so well received at the Blount Library that CHSC approached other libraries in the CHSC districts of Cattaraugus County. As a result, six of the nine area libraries have gotten involved with CHSC and five have adapted physical activity and nutrition-themed toddler bags. The libraries have committed to replacing items from the toddler bags that are lost or broken with normal wear and tear. The library system's ownership of the toddler bags will help them become a library fixture, thereby allowing future generations to benefit.

The momentum is spreading. CHSC is planning to develop similar bags for children in kindergarten through 5th grade and older youth.

The more places throughout Cattaraugus County that support health, the more likely residents and visitors will engage in healthy behaviors. With the support of the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System, CHSC has reached families with young children and older youth and adults as well. Having healthier options available in the libraries compliments initiatives being implemented in schools, workplaces, and festivals across the county.



Healthy eating toddler bag



to learn more...

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**Creating Healthy Schools
and Communities**

The places where we live, learn, work, and play all contribute to our ability to become and stay healthy. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC), a five-year (2015-2020) New York State Department of Health-funded initiative, is helping build stronger, healthier communities.