

CFHL, UCCE Central Sierra: Online Parenting Classes Remove Barriers

Background

Connecting with parents of young children has always proved to be a challenge in the rural Central-Sierra California county of Tuolumne. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Infant Child Enrichment Services of Tuolumne County (ICES) worked hard to coordinate their evening parenting classes. The evening classes often meant late nights driving to and from the center for families, and ICES had to provide both childcare and meals to those in attendance. As we look for successes in tumultuous times, online parenting classes via Zoom quickly removed many of these barriers, as families were able to join from the comfort of their own homes. In the past, in-person classes at ICES have drawn around 5 families. Via Zoom, over 20 families participated in a 5-week Plan, Shop Save, Cook food resource management series.

Narrative

ICES is Tuolumne County's main provider of both voluntary and court-mandated parent success classes. CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE has partnered with ICES in the past to provide training for at-home childcare providers and children's fairs, but had yet to connect directly with parents. As classes began online in the fall, CFHL, UCCE was invited to teach a 5-week series aimed at parents of young children, many of whom are also CalFresh recipients. Plan, Shop, Save, Cook (PSSC) was chosen because it offers practical advice on budgeting and food shopping tips and is available through online delivery. The first session featured a "tech support" component as CFHL, UCCE educators worked with families to teach the ins and outs of online learning to adults, many of whom were using phones or other devices from varied locations.

"Now I always double check the grocery list to see what healthy changes can be done. Also I look at nutrition facts more often."

- PSSC participant, Tuolumne County



More parents and families were able to attend evening parenting classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic than previous in-person classes.

SOLUTION

CFHL UCCE educators in Tuolumne County quickly realized certain features of interactive, online learning would not be possible with most adults using smaller screens. Families responded positively to quick cooking demos (easy veggie prep, quick kid-friendly snacks) presented by the CFHL, UCCE educator using EatFresh.org recipes. Making sure to emphasize routine, division of responsibility, and healthy eating for children, educators supplemented PSSC curriculum with materials designed for parents of young children. Twenty-eight families in total attended one or more classes in the series.

OUTCOME

Both ICES and CFHL, UCCE partners see merit in continuing to offer an online version of the classes. With financial and commute time barriers removed for both agencies and families, attendance and engagement was higher from participants than in years past. Fall 2021 will see another series of online courses offered by CFHL, UCCE with plans to utilize other approved curricula with

CFHL, UCCE Central Sierra: Online Parenting Classes Remove Barriers

parent success coaches, who are ICES representatives, becoming trained as extenders in the future.