

From Scratch Meals to Family Gardens: Three CACFP Leaders Transforming Child Nutrition

ROUND ROCK, TX, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Every Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) participant serves nutritious meals, but many go beyond the meal pattern to create experiences that inspire healthy habits for life. From preparing scratch-cooked meals and involving children in menu planning to growing vegetables alongside families, these programs demonstrate that nutrition education happens throughout the day, both during and beyond mealtimes. The [National CACFP Association](#) is highlighting three members whose innovative approaches to nutrition are strengthening children, families and communities across the country.



Mark Jacoby; Enrique Viejon Jr.; Bhavini Patel

Mark Jacoby: Fresh Meals That Keep Children Engaged

As Vice President of Business Operations at Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows, Mark Jacoby has spent more than four decades serving youth through Boys & Girls Clubs. During his time leading the organization's food service operations, he recognized an opportunity to improve children's dining experience by replacing heat-and-serve meals with mostly scratch-cooked recipes and fresh seasonal produce.

Today, Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows serves approximately 750,000 meals annually to 14,000 children across 27 sites through the CACFP, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). With three commercial kitchens and a dedicated culinary team, the organization provides fresh meals that children look forward to eating while remaining within CACFP reimbursement.

Mark has seen the results firsthand. Less food is wasted, children eat more of their meals and staff have noticed greater engagement and fewer behavioral challenges.

"When I first started in this position, I noticed during site visits that many kids were not eating their full meals, and a lot of food was being thrown away," said Mark. "We moved away from heat-and-serve items and began cooking more meals from scratch. We also replaced fruit cups with fresh fruit."

Enrique Viejon Jr.: Building Healthy Habits Beyond the Classroom

As Comprehensive Services Manager at Educare of Washington DC, Enrique Viejon Jr. oversees health and nutrition services for six CACFP sites serving approximately 375 children each day.

For Enrique, nutritious meals are only one piece of a child's healthy development. Through family-style dining, classroom nutrition education, gardening experiences and family engagement opportunities, Educare of Washington DC helps children develop lifelong healthy habits both at school and at home.

Children help set tables, serve themselves and participate in gardening activities where they plant, harvest and taste fresh produce. Inspired by ideas shared at the National Child Nutrition Conference, Enrique has also expanded opportunities for parents to participate in the garden alongside their children, reinforcing healthy habits beyond the classroom.

"Joining the CACFP is one of the most rewarding investments you can make because it fuels every part of a child's day," said Enrique. "By participating in the CACFP, you aren't just feeding kids, you're nourishing their potential, ensuring that every child that walks through your center is ready to thrive."

Bhavini Patel: Bringing Nutrition Expertise Home

Bhavini Patel, owner of Kirkland Child Care in Washington, has spent the past decade combining her background in nutrition with family child care. After earning a master's degree in nutrition, she has been able to apply her expertise into her child care business by serving healthy meals and providing nutrition education through the CACFP.

Each morning begins before sunrise as Bhavini prepares homemade breakfasts, lunches and snacks before welcoming ten children into her home-based child care program. Throughout the day, nutrition education is woven into everyday conversations. Children help plan menus, discuss balanced meals and learn how different foods help their growing bodies.

Families often share that their children bring these lessons home, encouraging healthy eating beyond the child care setting.

"CACFP isn't just a reimbursement program," said Bhavini. "It's a framework that elevates learning skills for the children and the quality of care that we provide to the families that we support."

A Shared Commitment to Children's Health

While their programs look very different, Mark, Enrique and Bhavini share a common belief: good nutrition creates opportunities for children to learn, grow and thrive.

Whether serving hundreds of thousands of meals each year or caring for ten children in a family child care home, each leader demonstrates how the CACFP provides more than healthy food. It creates environments where children build healthy habits, develop independence and gain the foundation they need for lifelong success.

About the National CACFP Association

Since 1986, the "National CACFP Association" (NCA) has been a leading national organization offering support to thousands within the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) community. Its overarching goal is to ensure nutrition access for families by facilitating access to vital food programs.

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