

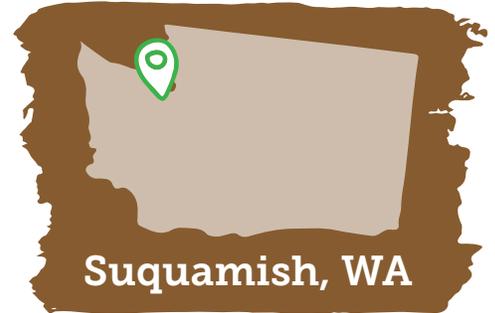


Success Stories

Washington Farm to Early Care and Education
April 2021

Traditional Recipes and Activities Teach Early Learners About Their Tribe's Food and Culture

On Washington state's Kitsap Peninsula, children attending the Suquamish Tribe's early learning center are learning about traditional foods through fun activities. Cultural Specialist James Abler works with other tribal programs to bring Lushootseed language and family recipes to the classroom. The children enjoy the activities and learn about new foods.



Starting off Strong

Although he started a new position as Cultural Specialist in Summer 2020, James Abler has already successfully introduced several traditional food activities to the children at the Suquamish Tribe's Marion Forsman-Boushie Early Learning Center. James, a proud member of the Suquamish Tribe with a background in early care and education, was inspired to begin teaching the children about traditional foods after taking a Plant Medicine class taught by his sister. Additionally, a former cook at the early learning center encouraged James to introduce the children to more traditional foods.

"We already serve clam chowder and baked salmon on our monthly menu," says James, but he wanted to add more foods to the rotation.

Since beginning his role, he has organized activities with traditional foods, like rosehip jelly, nettles, berry pemmican, and salmon dip. Many of these recipes were provided by his sister, who works with the Tribe's Traditional Food and Medicine program. James was even able to implement the rosehip jelly activity while the school was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When school shut down, that was the first thing I was able to pull off. I sent home ingredients for families to do at home," recalls James.

He successfully runs the traditional food activities by partnering with different programs within the Suquamish Tribe.

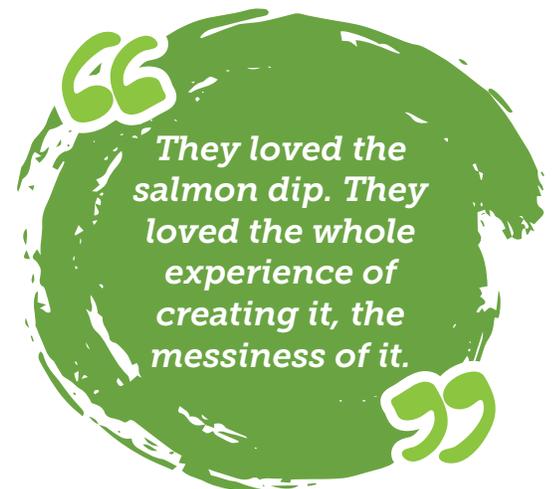
Partnerships for Success

The salmon dip recipe has been the most exciting traditional food activity so far.

"They loved the salmon dip. They loved the whole experience of creating it, the messiness of it," says James.

To make the salmon dip activity a success, James partnered with the kitchen staff to make kits for each classroom to easily assemble the recipe. "I try to make it as easy for the teachers as possible," he notes.

He also created a take-home recipe for families to participate and customize based on their own tastes. James searched for traditionally processed



salmon among the Suquamish tribal community, and even reached out to a neighboring tribe to find it. He was finally able to procure the salmon after his cousin caught and processed some local chum salmon and offered it to James.

To adapt the salmon activity for the infant classroom, James provided shakers out of clamshells with the salmon life cycle painted on the shakers.

James partners with the Suquamish Tribe's [Lushootseed Language Program](#) for the traditional food activities. He provides recordings of Lushootseed words related to each activity, which are also distributed home to the families. Using common programs like Microsoft Word or Publisher, he also creates coloring pages to accompany each activity. He incorporates Lushootseed words, English translations, and phonetic translations for early speakers into the coloring pages. A teacher at the early learning center also made a visual aid depicting the traditional curing and canning process for local salmon.

James has also enhanced the program by starting and maintaining a library of kids' books on Indigenous foods, such as Kevin Noble Maillard's [Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story](#). The Kitsap County Health Department and Washington State Department of Health assisted James in procuring and purchasing the books. After the COVID-19 pandemic is resolved, James hopes to spend more time in the classroom by reading the books to children.

“

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James, the benefit of the traditional foods is that “the kids are able to be exposed to that part of our culture. We love drumming and singing, but this is also another way to express what it is to be Suquamish, or Native American, or Indigenous.”

“They get to learn skills”

James believes that teaching the children about traditional foods is important because it helps them be self-sufficient and learn new skills.

“They can get the nettles themselves. They don't need to go to a grocery store,” he said.

Before he started this role at the early learning center, the children's' cultural learning mostly focused on other activities, like drumming and art. James is proud to bring traditional foods into the classroom alongside these important traditions. According to

Looking Ahead

After receiving glowing reviews from the salmon dip activity, James was inspired to plan one new traditional food activity per month. He is currently working on classroom activities for nettle, which he describes as a “superfood to us.” He is planning to serve a chicken-nettle soup, or a tasty smoothie he calls “The Earthshake,” which is packed with nettles, fruit, and vegetables. He continues to work with partners within the Tribal community and wants to form new partnerships with the Tribe's Family and Friends Center and other cultural programs.

During the summer, James' nephew spent a lot of time at James' home and loved helping out in the garden. “He pulled up a chair and wanted to watch the plants grow,” recalls James. He is now considering implementing a school garden at the early learning center so the children there can also become excited about plants.



To finish out the school year, the early learning center holds an annual clambake for the children, which James is excited about. His own children were able to attend when they were students, and he is looking forward to helping the early learning center continue engaging children in important cultural traditions.



Want to Learn More?

If you'd like to learn more about bringing cultural food education into tribal early learning or any early learning program, take a look at the resources below. Reach out to Chris.Mornick@doh.wa.gov, Farm to ECE Coordinator, for more resources and individual guidance.

- [Indigenous Foods in Early Care and Education](#) National Farm to School Network's webinar, including indigenous foods in CACFP
- [Celebrating Cultural Diversity with Farm to Early Care and Education](#) National Farm to School Network's webinar featuring practitioners sharing their approach to incorporating culturally relevant curriculum, resources and programming into farm to ECE
- [Multicultural Collection of Farm to ECE Books](#) The Food Trust's multicultural collection of books featuring underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, including many bilingual and Spanish books

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