



Success Stories

Washington Farm to Early Care and Education
May 2021

Growing Vegetables and Community Through Tiny Tots' Farm to ECE program

In the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle sits the long standing early care program [Tiny Tots](#), a staple of the community for 52 years. Through the support of Seattle's [Farm to Table initiative](#), Tiny Tots has built a flourishing farm to ECE program full of local foods, gardens, cooking classes, and field trips. With a focus on building community, they've successfully used farm to ECE to provide families and the Rainier Beach community with the knowledge and resources needed to live a healthy life.



Seattle, WA

A Plentiful Beginning

Tiny Tots began working with Leika Suzumura, consultant for Seattle's Farm to Table program, to make fruits and vegetables more accessible to the children and parents they worked with. Before being introduced to Suzumura, Tiny Tots used to order their produce from grocery stores. Now they order local products, ensuring that the children they work with have access to fresh, local produce.

Loralee Knudsen, operations director of Tiny Tots, explained how the switch to farm fresh produce has been a boon for the program, the families they work with, and the community at large. "Once we received the Farm to Table grant money, we could order large amounts of produce and had tons leftover. We decided to set up a farm stand and give it away to the families and parents in the neighborhood."

Tiny Tots not only provides fresh local foods to families, but also grows their own. Every Tiny Tots site has built a garden and their main campus even has a greenhouse. "The garden out front of the main campus grows tomatoes and pumpkins and tons of other yummy fruits and vegetables," said Knudsen.

This vibrant garden is not only a beautiful addition to the surrounding neighborhood, but the fruits and vegetables it produces are sent home with families, further increasing healthy food access. "When the kids pick a vegetable in the garden, they hold it up and say 'I want to give this to my mommy', and we're able to tell them yes, give it to your mommy," Knudsen said.



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Fruitful Learning Opportunities

Through Farm to Table, Tiny Tots has been able to deepen community ties by partnering with the nonprofit [Tilth Alliance](#), who helps to facilitate field trips to their [Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetland](#). While there, the children get to dig in the dirt, plant their own plants, learn about composting, and taste new foods.

Knudsen expressed how excited the Tiny Tots students get on their field trips. "One time they made their own apple cider with their own personal apple press. They just have a blast."

Along with gardening, the children have the opportunity to explore cooking through classes and activities, such as "ten different ways to eat apples", a series of classes taught whenever Tiny Tots receives a large amount of apples. These classes lead to meals full of apple salads, apple crumbles, baked apples, and sliced apples as snacks.

Pumpkin season is also a hit with the kids. It exposes them to pumpkin curries, pumpkin pie, and pumpkin bread. Knudsen described how pumpkin season just keeps on giving. "Once we gave each of the kids their own pumpkins to run around with and a few of them broke. Wouldn't you know, next year we had pumpkins sprouting up."



Growing Community

Tiny Tots' staff have strongly supported the farm to ECE program and the opportunities it provides to nourish the health and wellbeing of the children in their care. Along with benefitting from greater access to local produce, staff get to join in on the cooking classes and taste tests Farm to Table provides.

"The staff have even started to do their own cooking projects with the kids," said Knudsen.

Tiny Tots engages caretakers with both their farm stand as well as making the leap from center to home by providing families with recipes and at-home farm to ECE activities. These tools supply families with knowledge and resources while sparking culinary creativity and building excitement around the program.

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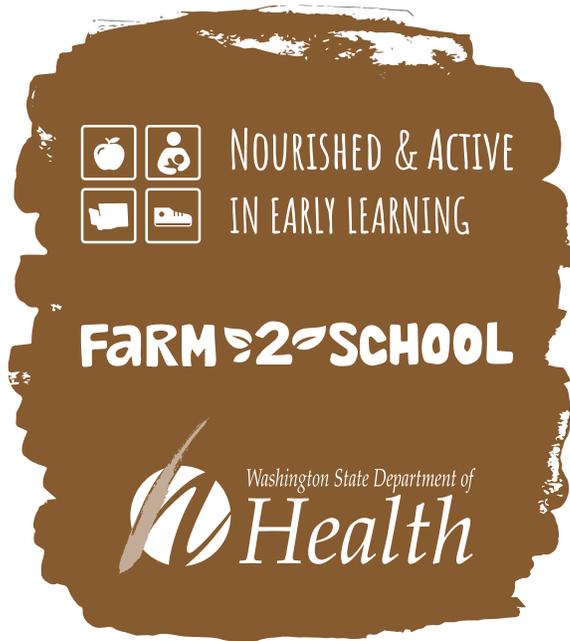
They've also encouraged family participation by building a program that is reflective of the families they work with. They ask parents to send in recipes from home that can be made at the centers and build menus that fulfill the dietary needs of their large Muslim population.

According to Knudsen, all the time, effort, and attention on Farm to ECE programming has been well worth it. "The enthusiasm the kids show for gardening and the food we provide has been exciting. Kids who would normally turn their nose up to vegetables are dying to try what they grew because they grew it. Just knowing where their food is coming from has made a huge impact."

While Tiny Tots has benefited from partnerships that have helped them build a robust Farm to ECE program, Knudsen made sure to note that other early learning programs shouldn't be intimidated. She advised anyone interested to think simple and just start.

"Just get a bucket, fill it with soil, and plant some seeds. You'll be surprised how much they love it, and how much you love it, and how easy it is, even if you've never gardened before."

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Want to Learn More?

- Contact Seattle's [Farm to Table initiative](#) at farmtotable@kellyokumura.com
- [Washington Farm to ECE Network](#) access resources on implementing and expanding food education, gardening, and local procurement practices, how to engage families and communities, and more
- Learn more about starting farm to ECE in your early learning program by taking our [online Farm to ECE provider training](#) for 2 STARS credits
- Join [Washington State Farm to ECE Community of Practice](#) to connect with farm to ECE partners throughout the state

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