



Good Health Requires Planning!

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Michelle Obama is taking on several projects that might not be expected from a First Lady. The first spring that she and her family were in the White House she planted a garden. Ms. Obama involved children from a nearby school and allowed the television cameras to observe the process. Now the garden produce is used not only to feed staff and family but also guests of the White House. Some of it is donated to the city Food Bank.

Now the First Lady has started a new campaign to fight childhood obesity, but she states that she will not be able to see results unless she has cooperation from parents, teachers, health care personnel and other professionals.

There are four pillars to the campaign that Ms. Obama is promoting:

1. Helping parents make healthy family choices.
2. Serving healthier food in schools.
3. Making healthy, affordable food more accessible.
4. Increasing children's physical activity.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to be a guest for my grandson's Culinary Arts final examination. He was required to cook a meal for his guests in order to earn grade ten credits at Okotoks Composite High School.

Alexander had not been very thrilled about school until he started the cooking class this past fall. The school has three wonderful chefs on staff. They teach a combined group of grades ten, eleven and twelve students to do all the prep work, cooking and serving for the school's noon cafeteria crowd. What a great idea!

They also have a weekly skills class where students learn skills and prepare for provincial competition with other culinary students each spring. Alexander loves the program and can hardly wait to get to school each day.

For several years I have been thinking about how our communities could use the resources we have to create programs similar to Mrs. Obama's and the Okotoks School to help our children and families.

The media is always talking about the problems in society that negatively affect our health - too little exercise, overweight bodies, unhealthy lunch programs. And children have often told me that they feel "too old" for after school programs so they would rather be at home alone while parents are at work. There has to be a solution that we could implement!

What would happen if we were able to use fresh fruits and vegetables from the *Good Food Box* program, request volunteer hours from local chefs and utilize school kitchens to teach children in the after-school programs how to cook simple but healthy recipes? The idea might even be expanded at some point to include food preparation for the school cafeteria menu.

Most children love to cook and are always so proud of their creations. It is important to educate their parents, but the children also need to learn how to make healthy choices and setting up a program where they could make healthy drinks and snacks might make all the difference to their future!

Perhaps we could also follow the example of other communities that make gardening part of the school curriculum. Children tend to be more interested in trying foods that they helped to grow. And gardening also introduces an exercise component that has been missing for many students.

You see we are aware of the problems. We have the knowledge and the resources required. Now we just need to put a practical plan in place that we can implement.

What do you think?

Sounds good to me!