SNAP-Ed Staff Makes Special Efforts to Teach Nutrition Education to Hearing Impaired Students

It is hard to see a difference when Kathy Ellis, SNAP—Education instructor, presents “It’s Fun to be Healthy” curriculum at Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center in Peoria. The pre-school students are happy and active like normal three, four, and five-year-olds. The difference with this specific classroom is the entire class is hard of hearing.

“One of Extension’s federal directives is to reach underserved audiences,” explained University of Illinois Extension County Director Earl Allen, “that includes people with disabilities. Kathy’s efforts at Valeska are one example of the work our staff does to reach a variety of underserved audiences with our programs.”

The core of Kathy’s monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) lesson at Valeska stays the same for this classroom. She reads a story highlighting the nutrition topic of the month and works with the students to make a healthy snack. The difference is that Kathy works alongside a sign language interpreter and she also wears a special bluetooth enabled microphone. These special efforts allow Kathy and the students to interact and engage with each other like a typical classroom. The students learn about the importance of the five food groups, physical activity, and drinking plenty of water.

“I notice the classroom teachers making their own special efforts by introducing new vocabulary words and the corresponding signs,” Kathy mentioned. “Words like stir and cinnamon are new words they were practicing the signs for during our most recent lesson about dairy foods.”

The students are always included in the process of making the snack. Each student takes a turn adding, stirring, or measuring for the recipe.

“Our students really look forward to Kathy’s visit. The children are so excited to try new and healthy foods,” stated a teacher at Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Learning center.

Including nutrition education in a preschool curriculum is a great way to introduce healthy eating habits at a young age. SNAP—Ed staff sends newsletters home to encourage healthy eating habits at home as well. “It is so rewarding to hear students tried one of our recipes at home,” mentioned Kathy.

Throughout Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties U of I Extension SNAP—Ed staff reach over 6,000 residents with nutrition and healthy living education. The overall impact of the programming reaches even further when including the family members in which the education filters.