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Teens Try Healthy Bites at Boys & Girls Club

Food Bank provides kids at afterschool program with food prep lessons in healthy eating

(WAYNESBORO, Va. – March 1, 2017) – Sometimes it takes a more hands-on approach to help kids learn healthier eating habits.

That's how Robin Swecker, partner services coordinator at the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's Verona headquarters, is getting teenagers at the Boys & Girls Club of Waynesboro to try food containing lower sodium, less fat and fresher ingredients, such as Crunchy Hawaiian Chicken Wrap and Chicken Parmesan over Whole Wheat Pasta with Broccoli or Green Beans.



Armed with a binder full of wholesome recipes, Swecker visits the Boys & Girls Club's Teen Zone once a week to prepare meals with kids so that they learn what's in their food and how certain ingredients might affect their health.

"We're trying to give them an opportunity to prepare something and then taste it," she said. "Getting them involved in food preparation helps them become more invested in the food. And that will make them more likely to try new foods and fresh ingredients they wouldn't otherwise choose."

The "Healthy Bites" initiative began last year in the Lynchburg area as a way to introduce healthier food options for kids in the Parks and Recreation Department's afterschool programs. Kristi West, partner services coordinator for the Food Bank's Lynchburg branch, worked with Jeanell Smith, a nutrition educator with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, to devise a healthy menu for the afterschool sites that receive snacks and meals



through the Food Bank's [Kids Café](#) program.

“We were worried that if we changed these meals up too much then the kids wouldn't eat them,” West said. “But they have been really receptive.”



Swecker wanted to increase the chances that teens in Waynesboro would try the healthier fare by adding an educational component about healthy eating and inviting kids to have a hand in making the meals.

Sometimes they are reluctant to sample new foods. One teen in Swecker's group at first turned down a chance to try a beef stir fry they made together. But after preparing it, he decided to give it a shot. “He ended up loving it,” Swecker said.

Teens participate in the Healthy Bites initiative on Fridays. To cover, please contact a member of the [communications team](#).

About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

Founded in 1981, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is the largest organization alleviating hunger in western and central Virginia. Headquartered in Verona, VA, the Food Bank serves 25 counties and eight cities through distribution centers in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Winchester and Verona. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank distributes nearly 24.6 million pounds of food annually to 114,400 people each month through a network of 215 community partners – food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, churches and other non-profit groups. The Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, a national food bank association that supports 200 food banks across the United States. For more information, visit www.brafb.org.

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