

Donna Speed, MS, RD, LD

Training Child Care Center Staff in the New State Nutrition Standards

After she rewrote and strengthened the Mississippi Nutrition Standards for Child Care Centers, Donna Speed launched a campaign to provide comprehensive training and educational support to child care center staff throughout the state. Donna is the Nutrition Services Director at the Mississippi State Department of Health.

Training Child Care Providers Throughout the State

Donna designed a three-hour workshop called Menu Writing 101. In the workshop, she explains the new standards and how child care providers can prepare menus using the new standards. In addition, the Mississippi Health Department purchased 1,500 Color Me Healthy Toolkits (at \$75 each). Color Me Healthy is a curriculum designed to improve fruit and vegetable intake and increase physical activity among four and five year olds in child care settings. Donna gave away the Toolkits at the trainings, along with handouts that supplied additional information and resources.

In the last two years, Donna presented 250 free trainings, reaching more than 7,000 child care center staff. She conducted trainings at child care centers, Head Start facilities, and at conferences. She traveled all over the state, including to the poorest areas of this poorest state and to the state's Indian reservations. Her trainings were always lively and fun. Her participants were engaged and asked a lot of questions.

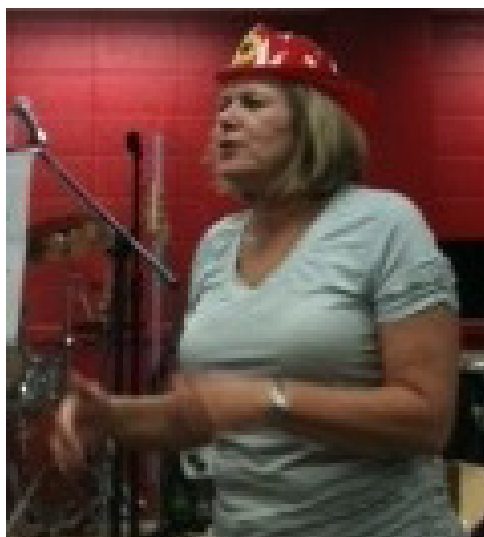
As a public health nutritionist with the state health department, Donna brought to this effort her commitment to environmental and policy change. Her work affected many thousands of pre-school aged children across Mississippi. "And everyone gets it," Donna said. "Everyone knows that Mississippi is the fattest state" and that we all need to work to make the state's youngest residents healthy for life. Donna reported that Mississippi has seen huge decreases in obesity in recent years.



Pictured: Donna Speed, MS, RD, LD

About Donna

Donna has worked in public health for eight years. In addition to her work to strengthen the state's nutrition standards for child care centers and to train child care providers in implementing the standards, Donna gives cooking demonstrations and offers train-the-trainer workshops for several of the state's physical activity programs. Before joining the state health department, Donna worked as a dietary director and has coordinated wellness programs for a number of organizations. With her extra time, Donna teaches water aerobics and is involved in a prison ministry. She enjoys deer hunting, riding ATVs and kayaking.



Pictured: Donna in action at one of her training workshops.

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Lessons Learned

Donna found that the best way to get child care providers excited about and invested in implementing the new standards was to explain that the purpose is to help our children to be healthy — now and into the future. Donna addressed the costs of serving healthier food and discussed how child care centers can save money.

Donna is planning to further strengthen the state's nutrition standards again this year. She wants to increase the requirements for whole grains and for vegetables and to stipulate that providers do not serve sweet snacks at parties.

Click here to view the state's current nutrition standards for child care centers.

In the future, Donna will offer training workshops regionally, organizing these trainings so that more people can attend, rather than offering many small training workshops in communities around the state. She would also like to make it mandatory that child care staff attend at least one training each year. Donna believes that these training workshops are an excellent way for staff to work towards their required 15 hours of continuing education each year.

Public Health Nutritionists Are Essential

Public health nutritionists are professionals with academic training and experience in both public health **and** nutrition, who are often registered dietitians with advanced degrees. Public health nutritionists possess diverse skills and expertise ranging from nutrition science...to food systems and food environments...to finance and grant management.

More information on the role and value of public health nutritionists is available in ASPHN's briefs on **The Role of Public Health Nutrition in Obesity Prevention** and **Improving the Nutritional Well-Being of Women, Children and Families.**

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