

FOOD & FUN



BY STACY WHITMAN **NURTURE AND HIGHER GROUND TEAM UP FOR HEALTH**

We're at Food & Fun, a special weekly class held at the Higher Ground Sun Valley summer camp for kids and adults with disabilities. On this refreshingly crisp July morning, a group of older campers, ages 13 to 50, has gathered to play a rousing game of Healthy Jeopardy. Created by Emily Armstrong, a certified nutrition educator for Nurture, the game is designed to teach and test nutrition knowledge. This isn't your basic boring nutrition lecture. Today, the campers in their matching canary yellow t-shirts learn while laughing and having fun.

At the end of the game, the group eagerly lines up to fix a healthy snack: a parfait made with Greek yogurt, fresh blueberries, and granola. A camper named Nathan, a 20-something with horn-rimmed glasses and an infectious smile, goes first, carefully layering the ingredients in a cup. He heads off to eat, and before some of his fellow campers have finished shuffling down the buffet line, he's back, having polished off his parfait and wanting more. "You liked it, huh, Nathan?" Armstrong asks. Pushing his glasses up onto his nose, Nathan breaks into a wide grin and

nods enthusiastically. Yes, healthy eating can be delicious.

This is the first collaboration between Higher Ground and Nurture, two Wood River Valley non-profits coming together to promote good health. The five-week session that took place in June and July featured Nurture's trademark nutrition lessons, games, and activities based on themes like "Go" and "Slow" Foods, Eat a Rainbow, and Sensational Snacks. And of course, since it just wouldn't be as fun without food, at each class, campers helped prepare and eat a wholesome nosh such as Apple Pie Porridge

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HIGHER GROUND

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Scenes from the Higher Ground / Nurture Food & Fun day camp.



ABOVE: The camp, held at the YMCA, is a good source of laughter and smiles. The partnership between Higher Ground and Nurture encourages campers to have fun with their food.

**“I’ll take ‘Snacks’ for \$300.”
 “Ok, here’s the clue: This healthy snack puffs up or ‘pops’ when you heat it.”
 “What is popcorn?”**

or a “Go” smoothie made with spinach.

While obesity rates in the Wood River Valley are lower than the national average, it is still an issue in our community—as are nutritionally related conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. And people with mobility limitations and cognitive challenges are particularly at risk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, kids with disabilities are 38 percent more likely to become obese than those without disabilities; once they hit adulthood, that number skyrockets to 57 percent. Armed with these stats, Higher Ground executive director Kate Weihe turned to Nurture for help.

“At Higher Ground, we wanted to better instill that physical activity is only the beginning of a healthy lifestyle,” Weihe explains. “The Nurture mission to educate kids and their families about making healthy eating choices aligned perfectly with our own goals.”

Best known for its work with military vets, Higher Ground (formerly known as Sun Valley Adaptive Sports) provides therapeutic recreational opportunities to individuals with

disabilities ranging from visual impairment to autism and Down’s syndrome. Since getting started on the Sun Valley ski slopes in the winter of 1999, the organization has grown into an established 501(c)3, conducting more than 5,000 hours of nationally-acclaimed adaptive programming all year round.

Like Higher Ground, Nurture is currently experiencing a serious growth spurt of its own. Founded in Illinois in 2008, Nurture began offering Food & Fun classes in Wood River Valley schools in 2011. In just two years, what began as Nurture founder Kathryn Guylay’s solo volunteer effort has blossomed into monthly programming for grades K-8 at the Community School and for select grades at four out of five public elementary schools. While summer tends to be “down time” for Nurture, the partnership with Higher Ground just couldn’t be passed up, Guylay says.

“Collaboration is the key to successfully addressing large social issues,” adds Guylay. “The collaborative spirit in this valley is something that makes our community ex-

remely special. I’m proud to be a part of it.”

Judging by the response of the campers—which included lots of smiling faces, enthusiastic participation in the activities, and only the tiniest of crumbs left behind on their plates—Food & Fun hit the mark. “I enjoyed the discussions and the games, especially Healthy Jeopardy!” remarked one camper on the final day.

“It was so rewarding to watch the campers week by week coming out of their shells, remembering previous lessons, trying new foods, and really learning that making healthy choices can be fun,” notes Armstrong, who taught the majority of Nurture’s Higher Ground classes.

“Our continued success and ability to provide unique, sustainable programs to our participants would not be possible without the committed support of our local donors, partners, and collaborators like Nurture,” Weihe adds. “By aligning our missions, we were able to convey the benefits of healthy eating to over 25 local individuals with disabilities. We see this as a pivotal step in helping our participants lead healthier, more independent lives.”

more info

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