

## Moving Arts Española



One of the major sources of support for providing nutritious food to young children is through a program that many people do not know about – The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). CACFP is funded through the USDA Food and Nutrition Services and offers up to 100% reimbursements to qualifying home provider, day care center, afterschool program, or emergency shelter sites. The program is part of the safety net to improve access to food and a healthy diet to at-risk populations. CACFP is an essential program

that allows us to ensure that children have the access to the quality food they need to grow and succeed. **Moving Arts Española (MAE)** is one New Mexico site that has tapped into the CACFP funding stream to provide **FREE meals** and to enhance their overall programming.

Moving Arts provides high quality, affordable performing and visual arts education and free nutritional and academic support for children and youth ages 3-18. The program's afterschool programming serves approximately 250-300 children a week. Over the course of a year, Moving Arts provides approximately 12,000 free meals to youth throughout the Española region. Given MAE's unique and generous meals distribution (they offer food to the parents/guardians of participating children), they receive partial reimbursement for the meals served through CACFP.

Moving Arts started their food program approximately 4 years ago, starting small. Salvador Ruiz-Esquibel, MAE's executive director and co-founder, says that the food component came about after seeing a need. He asserts that the third meal of the day is "extremely important... nutrition is essential." The MAE staff knew that by incorporating meals into their programming, they would be helping families, and providing kids with something they may go without after school. "You can tell that some kids need the food, they go for seconds, some for thirds," Ruiz-Esquibel says. Today, farm-to-table suppers are prepared fresh daily. They are prepared by in-house Chef, Laura Cox. The meals are served to all children attending the afterschool programming along with their accompanying family members.



When asked what advise he would give to any other out-of-school time programs, Ruiz-Esquibel stresses the importance of doing everything with the heart, "programs are replicable, but if you don't have the heart, it won't work; and it needs to have food, that's essential... hunger is so often silent." In his eyes, **"food solidified the program."**