

Stuffee [article](#) crocce

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Program teaches kids good eating habits

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LIVERMORE — Mom and health educator **Siah Fried** is determined to stop bad habits before they start. She believes it's never too soon to talk to children about what they can do to stay healthy.

Creator of "Healthy Starts Make Healthy Hearts," Fried first implemented her program four years ago at Pleasanton's Walnut Grove Elementary School, where she has daughters in kindergarten and second grade.

While earning her master's degree in public health 10 years ago, Fried centered her thesis around a 7-foot-tall, blue-haired doll that unzips down the front to reveal pillow-stuffed organs.

As a health instructor at Las Positas College in Livermore, Fried sees firsthand bad habits young adults pick up over the years. They often bring unhealthy snacks to class or stand outside the door to smoke.

"It's a little frustrating," she said. Fried's goal is to reach kids early in life before they ever get a chance to develop unhealthy tendencies. And there's nothing like a larger-than-life doll to grab kids attention.

When "Stuffee" is unzipped, Fried pulls out a heart, lungs, stomach and intestines — the small intestine stretching 22 feet — for the kids to examine.

She teaches them how nutrients are absorbed by the body from the food they eat and that some foods offer more benefits than others.

Foods go into two categories: "growing" foods and "sometimes" foods.

Fruits and vegetables qualify as growing foods, while cakes and pies get categorized under sometimes foods.

"It's OK to have cake sometimes," Fried told Pat Gephart's kindergarten class Friday at Croce Elementary School in Livermore. But she added the reality, "Vitamins and minerals don't get squeezed out of candy."

During her hour-long session, kids also play a fishing game where they pull out pictures of different foods and determine whether they are growing foods or sometimes foods.

Fried then has students draw a picture of what they learned. Some draw Stuffee, others draw healthy foods and some write the No. 5 to symbolize how many servings of fruits and vegetables to eat.

"I think it's great," said Gephart, who arranged for Fried to give the presentation.

As someone who was teaching 20 years ago, Gephart said she's noticed that more kids today are overweight.

"It's really important for them to start learning healthy eating choices," Gephart said.

For each class, Fried does a three-part, monthly series to follow up on children's progress. Many report eating more fruits and vegetables at home or bringing them in for snacks at school. Students also learn about exercise in follow-up sessions.

"It's really making an impact," said Fried, who currently has 12 participating schools in the Tri-Valley with students in kindergarten through second grade. "I really have big vision for this long-term because it's a really good way to get them excited. It's very rewarding."

Schools or organizations interested in holding or sponsoring a Healthy Starts Make Healthy Hearts presentation can e-mail **siah—fried@yahoo.com**, or call (925) 485-3248.

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[SIAH FRIED talks about heart health with the help of a 7-foot-tall doll at Croce Elementary School in Livermore on Friday.](#)

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