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Certification programs provide new tools for child care seekers

Marissa Dandridge knows first-hand the health challenges that can arise when a family member lives with illnesses like asthma.

“My brother had asthma when he was little and it was hard sometimes for him,” said Dandridge, who has operated Dandridge Family Daycare in Moreno Valley for 18 years. “I think parents think about asthma more now because more children are being diagnosed with it.”

Dandridge recently underwent an on-site assessment that she hopes will end with her facility being designated as “asthma friendly.” The designation is part of a county wide program started by the Department of Public Health with funding from First 5 Riverside, to give families more information as they search for safer child care services in Riverside County. First 5 Riverside also funded the Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Program and NAP SACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care) Program certification.

“Parents have so many options when it comes to child care providers and the designations can help as they make their decisions,” said Consuela Edmond, Asthma Program coordinator. “It lets consumers know that child care providers who have been through the training can provide a safer and healthier environment for their children.”

To be certified “asthma friendly,” child care providers must undergo an on-site assessment to spot triggers that could cause illness to flare up, have asthma action plans on file for each child and complete an educational program that includes information about the storage and administration of asthma medications and more about the illness itself.

The “NAP SACC” certification is given when providers, among other requirements, review physical activity and nutrition policies and can show they have developed and implemented improvement plans. Child care providers will be trained to help support breastfeeding mothers and infants who are in their care. This support includes learning about the proper storage and handling of breast milk, and information about the 24-hour breastfeeding helpline.

Dandridge, who also is being certified through the NAP SACC program, said she believes parents will appreciate the work behind the designations. “It is something I can add to the conversation when I speak to parents,” Dandridge said. “It lets them know we take the health of their children seriously.”