

# Food as Fuel for Mind and Body: Russell Library's Charlie Cart Project

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Over the past year the Russell Library has participated in an exciting program – we believe it is a first for Connecticut. Using a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Connecticut State Library, our library purchased a Charlie Cart (<https://charliecart.org>), a mobile food preparation station complete with “kid safe” kitchen supplies and a curriculum guide with recipes and tasks to engage young minds and hands in cooking and eating healthier.



Gail Thompson-Allen, recently retired from the Russell Library, first saw the Charlie Cart at the PLA Annual Conference in Philadelphia. The kitchen on wheels sparked a programming idea and Gail applied and received \$7500 in LSTA funds, which the library matched to complete the purchase of a Charlie Cart, to hire nutritionists and other food educators to lead programs, and to purchase books on healthy cooking for children and adults.

Beginning in fall 2019, programs included “Meet the Charlie Cart,” first for library staff members and then for potential outside presenters, cooks, and educators. We found that 6-8 participants at a time worked best for in-house programs. Everyone could participate and not crowd too closely around the cart as cooking was taking place. Topics for these early sessions included healthy holiday treats, silly sandwiches, and tasty desserts. Survey results were very positive!



Fast forward to late winter: COVID. We could no longer offer in-person cooking sessions; social distancing is not a part of the Charlie Cart. Instead, Gail located two wonderful presenters, both involved with nutrition education for youngsters, to create video demonstrations of their cooking (example: <https://www.facebook.com/RussellLibrary/posts/3567327193326505>).

Completing this grant during an historic pandemic was certainly a challenge, but even in these conditions, the Charlie Cart provides a fun way for young folks to become engaged in and learn about healthy eating.