

FEATURING A CACFP ROUNDTABLE

CACFP Leader

July 2021



Fausat Rahman-Davies

LEAD CHILD NUTRITION AGENT

“Fausat is an advocate to end child hunger. She leads the Rialto Unified Child Nutrition department with such dedication and determination. She sees to it that the program provides the best for the students and community of Rialto. Her passion surpasses anyone else's when it comes to the health and well-being of our children.”

~Lorraine, Rialto Unified School District, one of six colleagues to nominate Fausat

Fausat leads the child nutrition department at Rialto Unified School District with valued support from the district's superintendent, Dr. Avila and Associate Superintendent Mohammad Z. Islam. After reading through nominations, there was no question that Fausat should be a part of our first cohort of CACFP Leaders. We sat down with Fausat over Zoom to learn more about her.

Lead from the Heart

In Her Own Words

"MY PASSION HAS BECOME MY PURPOSE."

Fausat's Passion

Fausat has been with the Rialto Unified School District for 26 years. It started as a part-time job. It wasn't her intention to be in child nutrition after she graduated from college. There was this moment though, when she caught a young boy trying to steal and she asked him why he was stealing. He said he hadn't eaten all weekend. He was so hungry and needed to eat. This touched her heart and from that moment on she decided she was going to do everything in her power to make sure kids are fed. "My passion has become my purpose," says Fausat.

Fausat, originally from Nigeria, shared that she was regularly exposed to hunger. Her mom did everything she could, including selling everything they owned, to get Fausat to the United States in order to provide Fausat with resources that would help her grow and be successful. So, when Fausat met this young boy she was appalled that childhood hunger was the same as she experienced in Nigeria.

Students shouldn't have to worry about being hungry. Kids come to school to learn and should not be thinking "where my does next meal comes from."

So, now Fausat runs six child nutrition programs for her district of 29 schools! The CACFP Afterschool program is the newest on the list of programs ensuring children are fed healthy meals. She applied for her 29 schools during the pandemic so she could feed the community additional and much needed meals. It took 10 months to finish the process but they are now all fully enrolled in CACFP. Fausat and her team serve 26,000 students throughout the district.



Leads from Behind

In Her Own Words

"I WOULD BE NOTHING WITHOUT MY TEAM"

"I would be nothing without my team," Fausat said regularly throughout our conversation.

There's a mutual trust between them. "They trust me and take on my cause as their cause." She mentioned this as she talked about the response to the pandemic, the incredible feats her team overcame to ensure children were fed, which included learning an entirely new program, figuring out how to do drive-thru meal service, and working with the transportation department to deliver meals to children in the hills that couldn't get to the schools. Despite complicated logistics, they still made it a positive community experience. There was one instance that stood out: the child nutrition program had started a farm-to-school initiative to get the kids involved in STEAM and learn where their food comes from. The gardens in which they were growing these healthy foods had died as there was no one to care for them during the pandemic. As part of the "Kindness Project" Fausat and her staff decided to fix the school gardens, not as part of their paid job, but as volunteers - buying seeds, planting them, coming in at 6:00 a.m. to maintain them. When the children return to school she wants them to see "beautiful gorgeous gardens."

I'm With You

"I can't go back to Nigeria. Rialto is my village. My goal is to make sure food insecurity ends here in Rialto." Fausat, isn't just making this happen by serving the meals. She's creating an entire community around it with music, dancing and joy. During the pandemic the community came together for BBQs on Fridays. They had mariachi competitions, dressed up for Halloween during drive thru pick ups and always had music going bringing joy to people during such a stressful time.

Fausat made sure she was always there, from school to school, showing her team and her community she was right there with them.

Always showing appreciation to her team she has the "I See You" project in which Fausat provides a small note and a gift card to a team member to make sure they feel appreciated.

Fausat talks about the three C's - Cafeteria to Classroom to the Community. She sees her role as a bridge builder connecting the three C's to ensure children grow into healthy adults contributing to society. "My role is to support education, make sure children have equal access to meals so they can go on and contribute to society." Therefore, Fausat works throughout the district with different departments, education and transportation among others, to make this a reality.

Empathy, Courage, Perseverance

In Her Own Words

"COURAGE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT VIRTUE. EVEN ABOVE KINDNESS OR COMPASSION BECAUSE IF DON'T HAVE COURAGE YOU CAN'T PRACTICE COMPASSION,"

When asked what the most important leadership quality is for someone in the child nutrition field, Fausat instantly answered "empathy and compassion." She explains that if you're not in tune to the students and can't put yourself in the child's position, you can't do this job the right way. She mentioned that some of her team members have never experienced hunger themselves, so they need to be able to put themselves where the children are. **Courage.** "Courage is the most important virtue. Even above kindness or compassion because if don't have courage you can't practice compassion," stated Fausat. She ended with perseverance because if you can't keep going when things get hard, you can't get anywhere.

"Even one single smile from a child. When I see the kids, I can feel the connection. I could tell we were doing something right. Something that is good for the community and the kids." Whether Fausat was talking about what she enjoys most about her job, or what keeps her up when she's frustrated and overwhelmed she always came back to the smile on the kids faces. Her passion is her purpose and she leads from the heart.

Thank you, Fausat, for your leadership in the world of CACFP and congratulations for being a CACFP Leader.

