



LIVERPOOL NURSERY NUTRITION PROGRAMME

Executive Summary

May 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HEART OF MERSEY - Catherine Donnelly and Nicola Evans.

LIVERPOOL PRIMARY CARE TRUST - Kate McFadden and Annette James

NURSERY NUTRITION STEERING GROUP including; Clare Jones, Claire Campbell, Allan Hackett and Sue Harding.

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY - Hazel Cheung, Julie Abayomi and Gill Smylie and SportsLinx, for supporting in the development and delivery of training

MENU MATTERS - Nicky Dexter

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL - Ffion Lloyd-Williams

CAROLINE WALKER TRUST for allowing the reproduction of the CHEW resources and general support.

And of course the participating nurseries.

INTRODUCTION

HM Partnerships* were commissioned to develop and manage the Liverpool Nursery Nutrition Programme. This comprised of an educational package and supporting resources for nursery staff in early years nutrition, as well as an evaluation of its impact.

The programme follows on from a review of existing practice, knowledge and provision in nurseries (Phase 1) carried out in 2009 for Liverpool First for Health and Wellbeing Partnership. This report showed that all nurseries required support on healthy eating and nutrition at a policy, knowledge and training level. It recommended that the support provided should address concerns relating to both menu planning and ingredients used in food provision, giving nursery staff the skills and knowledge to implement changes to improve food provision for children under 5.

*HM Partnerships is a public health consultancy, based in North West England and established as a Community Interest Company (social enterprise) in 2008. As a social enterprise, profits are re-invested into the prevention of cardiovascular disease through the sub regional charity, Heart of Mersey

1: Background

The period before a child starts school is one of the most critical times for their growth and development. It is essential that their food offers good quality nutrition since it provides the nutritional building blocks for the development of essential physiological systems and it sets patterns of eating habits, good or bad, for life. The childcare setting therefore provides an important opportunity to contribute to children's health through the provision of a healthier diet.

There is evidence that the diets of children under 5 years of age do not provide sufficient energy, iron, zinc and vitamins A & D. Findings also report excess intakes of sodium and saturated fat²³⁴. The food provided by day care nurseries has been the subject of an increasing number of studies in recent years. A number of studies of nursery food¹⁵⁶⁷ found that menus tended to reflect these dietary inadequacies.

Surveys across Cheshire and Merseyside¹⁸⁹ found that training on healthy eating for under 5's by catering staff was not common or considered a priority in the early years sector; this was partly due to the lack of suitable training available for staff in early years nutrition. The survey also found that day care food policies on healthy eating were not robust and reflected the lack of national guidelines.

Scotland¹⁰, Northern Ireland¹¹ and Wales¹² produced non statutory guidelines for early years settings between 1995 and 2009 which summarised the principles of nutrition for under fives and suggested how to achieve these guidelines through best practice. At the time that this programme was taking place there was little national support or guidance available in nutrition for those working in early years in England. The Early Years Foundation Stage¹³(EYFS), the statutory guidance for those working in childcare, at present simply states 'where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious'. However, the EYFS is currently under review and England has recently produced non-statutory guidance for child care settings in the report 'Laying the Table'¹⁴, which has been endorsed by the EYFS review team. Much of the new guidance for England was based on the report 'Eating well for under 5s in child-care' produced by The Caroline Walker Trust (CWT)², a registered charity that promotes better public health through good food. The new guidance for England also suggests that early years practitioners should be offered training to enable them to provide appropriate food and drink. The report also highlighted the need for individual settings to be able to access support in interpreting guidance, from suitably qualified professional such as dietitians and public health nutritionists¹⁴.

2: Aim and Objectives

The programme offered nursery staff the opportunity to participate in training, increase their skills and knowledge and improve the nutritional provision for children under five years in Liverpool day care settings.

Programme aim:

- To improve the food provision for children under five years in Liverpool nurseries

The objectives of the programme are:

- To develop an accredited educational training programme to meet the needs identified in the evaluation of nursery food provision in Liverpool¹
- To improve the knowledge and skills of nursery cooks and managers in Liverpool
- To provide key resources to support nurseries in the provision of nutritionally appropriate diets in nurseries
- To evaluate the impact of the Liverpool Nursery Nutrition programme

3: METHODOLOGY

A multidisciplinary nursery nutrition steering group was formed to guide the content of the programme. The group was comprised of key staff in the areas of public health, nutrition, early years, environmental health and academia from Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Primary Care Trust, Heart of Mersey, Liverpool John Moores University and University of Liverpool.

Invites to attend the training course and take part in the impact evaluation were initially sent to nursery settings who had taken part in Phase 1¹ (An exploration of food provision and staff's food knowledge, attitudes and skills across the early years settings in Liverpool). All Liverpool nurseries were subsequently invited to take part in the programme; however, participation was not mandatory.

3.1 TRAINING

A course specialising in early years nutrition was required for the programme. The specification and objectives for this were set jointly by HM Partnerships and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). LJMU was commissioned to develop and deliver the training course for the programme; they were supported in this delivery by SportsLinx. The 'Food and Nutrition in Early Years' course was written by LJMU and is accredited through Open College Network as a Level 2 unit. The course was free for staff to attend and was taught over 30 hours, 24 hours of theory and a one day practical session.

3.2 THE EARLY YEARS SETTING

Liverpool has approximately 130 nurseries. In total 57 (43%) nurseries took part in the programme, the majority of settings were private businesses (60%), with 33% being nurseries based in Children's Centres. The programme nurseries had approximately 3,000 children registered to attend them. Ninety two members of staff attended the training, with 100% completing the course and gaining the accreditation. The roles of staff attending were nursery owners, managers, cooks and nursery nurse staff.

3.3 RESOURCES

A number of resources were produced and distributed as part of the programme:

- A three week menu package consisting of menus, recipes and shopping lists
- A Children Eating Well (CHEW)¹⁵ photo card binder with food suggestions, recipes and portion sizes
- A food and healthy eating policy which covered basic nutritional messages for under 5's

4: KEY FINDINGS

4.1 CHANGES TO PRACTICE & POLICY

- Increased use of nutritional guidelines during menu planning - 60% now using Caroline Walker Trust guidance
- 40% of nurseries have reported making a change to their food policy
- 55% of nurseries reported making changes to their menus - a further 36% were intending to make changes
- Reduction in use of ingredients high in salt
- More nurseries serving a variety of both wholemeal and white bread
- Nurseries now serving diluted fruit juice as part of 5-a-day
- Nurseries adapting recipes/cooking practices

4.2 PARTICIPANTS KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDES

- Statistically significant improvement in participants confidence
- Statistically significant improvement in knowledge and attitudes towards nutrition
- All nursery staff considered the training to be relevant

4.3 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Training provided an opportunity to exchange views and ideas with other participants
Improved working relationship between caterer and manager
- Role of the caterer viewed as more central in the nursery with more interaction with both children and parents being encouraged
- Impact noted on participants' own eating habits
- Role for nursery in informing parents to continue food improvements in home environment
Changes need to be implemented slowly in order for children to accept them
- On-going information/support required in nutrition for nurseries

5: CONCLUSION

Prior to this programme there was little comprehensive training and support available for nursery staff. In addition there is a lack of national guidance on food provision for under fives e.g. types, quantities and frequency of foods to be given has been left to the discretion of individual nurseries.

The programme has demonstrated that given the opportunity early years staff are keen to access training and to provide the best nutrition that they can for the children in their care.

The Liverpool Nursery Nutrition programme has had a beneficial impact on all the nursery settings that participated. Importantly, increases in staff confidence and perceived "ability to do" early years nutrition tasks such as menu planning, reading food labels, etc. have been observed in all nurseries, reflecting that the course was appropriate for all attendees and will ultimately improve the nutritional status of children.

Recomendations

- This accredited training course in early years nutrition should be made available for all nursery caterers and managers in Liverpool
- Catering company staff providing food to nurseries should access the training
- Development of a condensed version of the course should be offered to nursery staff who cannot take a lot of time out of the setting, childminders and children's centre staff
- Development of parents resources
- There should be continued support and updates for early years settings in food and nutrition legislation and guidance for the under fives
- Nurseries should be encouraged to build links with parents where possible in regard to healthy eating for the under fives
- The Caroline Walker Trust Eating Well for Under-5s in Childcare. Practical and nutritional guidelines should be actively promoted to early years settings in the absence of any national standards
- Funding needs to be secured to enable continuation of this programme

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