



What did YOU tell US?



Info Sheet One – Mar 2005

Inside this issue:

We share findings from the questionnaire on:





-  Early childhood services use of the *What is better food? for early childhood settings* resource.
-  Barriers reported by services to using this resource.

Nutrition Support in Early Childhood project

This is the first of a series of information sheets sharing the results of the *Nutrition Support in Early Childhood* project. We appreciate your contribution to the project, and hope to continue to work with you to support quality nutrition practices.

What did we do?

Queensland Health, Central Public Health Unit Network (CPHUN) public health nutrition team sent a questionnaire by mail to all 588 early childhood services licensed with the Department of Communities in CPHUN in late 2003 including:

-  Long day care centres,
-  Family day care schemes,
-  Community Kindergartens, and
-  Limited hours and occasional care centres

CPHUN extends from south of Mackay, down the east coast to the northern banks of the Brisbane river and west to the Queensland border. Forty-seven percent of services returned the questionnaire, and were representative of service type, management type and categories of accessibility and remoteness.

But why?

It has been widely recognised that the early childhood years are an essential time for development of lifetime eating behaviours, skills, knowledge and attitudes around food and nutrition. Eating behaviours are strongly influenced by the family environment. But, as

reliance on childcare facilities rapidly increases, the childcare setting has become an early, yet very crucial, facilitator of nutrition understanding, attitudes and behaviours. Between 1995 and 2002, the proportion of overweight and obese four year old males and females almost doubled to 18% and 22% respectively, showing the need for urgent action¹.

This project aimed to identify if and how early childhood services are using the *What is better food? for early childhood settings* resource, and identify barriers to use of this resource by child care services. The project also looked at the content of nutrition policies and recommended food lists sent in by child care services, and how services were using their nutrition policies in a practical sense.

Which nutrition resources have services seen?

1. *What is better food? for early childhood settings* - **65%**
2. *There's More to Food than Eating* - **50%**
3. *Better Food for Kids Made Easy* - **36%**
4. *Your Child Care Centre Food and Nutrition Policy* - **20%**
5. *The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* - **19%**
6. *Caring for Children* - **15%**
7. *The Dietary Guidelines* - **12%**
8. *Menu Planning for Childcare Centres* - **9%**
9. *Your Family Day Care Scheme Food and Nutrition Policy* - **5%**
10. *Caring for Infants* - **1%**
11. *Member of Nutrition Australia Child Care Advisory Service* - **23%**

(% = proportion of total services that have seen the resource in their service).

The *What is better food? for early childhood settings* resource was developed and distributed by Queensland Health in 2001 after a gap was identified for services where families provide food.

¹ Department of Human Services (2003). *Social Health Atlas of Young South Australians*. Adelaide: Department of Human Services.

The resource contains three sections:

- ☞ Nutrition information for early childhood professionals + articles to insert into newsletters;
- ☞ Parent handouts on food learning activities and foods recommended for children in care;
- ☞ Activity sheets for learning activities to be used inside centres or by families at home.



How frequently do services use *What is better food?* For early childhood settings?

Most services that have seen the resource have used it at least one or more times (87%) with the most popular uses in the table below:

Top uses of 'What is better food?' for early childhood settings' by services	
Credible information source for parents	73%
Newsletter articles	62%
Nutrition handouts for parents	57%
Developing recommended food lists	50%
Staff training and orientation	46%
Food learning activities	41%
Others	35%
Food displays	25%

The most popular newsletter articles from *What is better food?*:

1. Newsletter articles section: 1-13 to 1-18.
The most popular articles were:
 - *Snack ideas*
 - *Have you got a fussy eater*
 - *Bottle decay and dummies*
 - *Food tips for child care*
 - *Super sandwiches*
 - *Lovely lunches*
 - *Hyperactivity and food additives*

Other popular sections for articles were:

2. *What is Better Food?: 1-12*
3. *Better Lunchbox tips : 2-3*
4. *Better ideas for fussy eaters: 2-23*

The top three most popular nutrition information handouts from *What is better food?*:

1. *Bringing better food from home:2-5*
2. *Better lunchbox tips: 2-3*
3. *Better snack ideas:2-7*

The top three most useful food learning activities for children from *What is better food?*:

1. *Shopping fun and find: 3-21*
2. *Better learning about many cultures: 3-17*
3. *Multicultural memory card game: 3-19*

The BIGGEST barriers to using *What is better food?* for early childhood settings:

- ☞ *Lack of time to become familiar with the contents of the resource (47%)*
- ☞ *Lack of control or influence over parents' food choice decisions (46%)*
- ☞ *Lack of time to implement *What is better food?* for early childhood settings (34%)*
- ☞ *Lack of interest in good nutrition by parents (27%)*
- ☞ *Limited understanding and familiarity on how to use *What is better food?* for early childhood settings (6%)*
- ☞ *Lack of guidance and support in implementing *What is better food?* for early childhood settings (5%)*
- ☞ *Limited confidence in communicating with parents and staff regarding nutrition (3%).*

What else?

If you would like to order *What is better food?* copies are available for \$10 (includes postage) from The Gowrie Qld, phone: 07 3250 8375.

Next issue will report on findings on how services use their nutrition policies and show the content of nutrition policies sent in by services. Stay tuned!

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