

## Islington Mildmay and Canonbury East (MCE)

### EVALUATION REPORT ON NUTRITION & HEALTHY EATING SERVICE PROVISION

DEC 2005

#### INTRODUCTION

This report covers the nutrition and healthy eating service provision for 2005. In 2004, The Food Commission, the independent watchdog for safe and healthy food for all, was commissioned by Sure Start Islington MCE, to deliver a nutrition and healthy eating programme through a small grant fund and the services of freelance nutritionists Kate Millington and Annie Seeley. The service fits in with the 'Every Child Matters' Outcome: *Be Healthy*, helping to halt the year-on-year rise in obesity and increasing the percentage of children consuming 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. It aims to contribute to the outcome by helping to improve the diets of contact Sure Start MCE families through promoting healthy eating and good oral health, increasing knowledge and access to information about nutrition and improving confidence and cooking skills.

#### BACKGROUND

With increasing evidence of the links between diet and health, it is now widely accepted that diet in early childhood plays an important role in setting lifetime eating patterns. It is also well recognised that people in the UK on low incomes may experience particular difficulties in accessing and consuming a healthy and varied diet and therefore suffer disproportionately from diet-related diseases. Nutrition has been highlighted as one of the key underlying determinants of health, and targets have been outlined for improving the nutrition of families and children and other disadvantaged groups through better access and consumption of fruit and vegetables.

The Nutrition and Healthy Eating service remit was developed through identifying key Sure Start targets, consultation with parents during the autumn of 2004 and sharing best practice with Nutritionists working with other Sure Starts in London. Cross service links were made with other Sure Start MCE service providers including health visitors, speech and language therapists, child psychologists and stop smoking adviser. Links were also made with Camden '5-a-day' who provided funding for local produce to be used at Cook and Eat sessions. Sure Start Islington MCE is one of 6 Sure Starts in the borough of Islington. The Nutrition and Health Eating service also explored ways of supporting existing services in other Islington Sure Starts in order to provide a more comprehensive, joined up service.

#### EVALUATION METHODS

Methods included observation, feedback through participatory appraisal techniques, feedback forms and questionnaires.

#### SERVICES

##### Cook and Eat Sessions

- These sessions ran until June 2005 and provided an informal social environment where parents could improve their cooking skills and confidence. There was the opportunity to discuss healthy eating on a budget, recipe modification of family meals to make them healthier, how to understand nutrition labels and food hygiene. Several of the sessions included cooking with children from

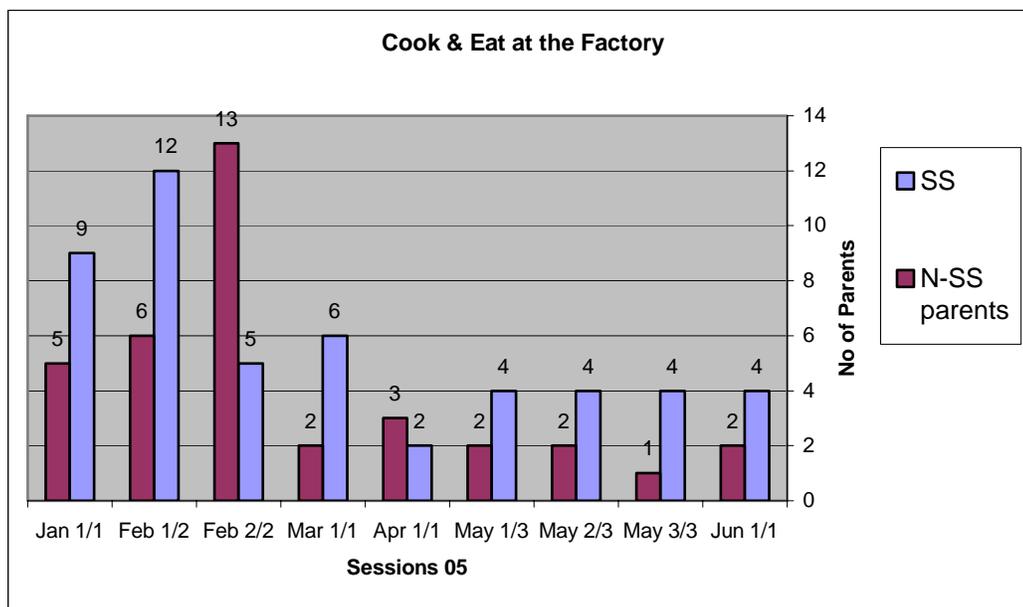
both the Factory crèche, and toddlers who had come along with their parents. Involving the children in food preparation proved to be a good way to encourage them to try new foods. Children were willing to eat foods that their parents had not tried with them or which they had previously refused. Eating together also encouraged good social interaction and the sessions promoted healthy eating messages to the young children, their families and carers.

- Several Sure Start parents were involved with the sessions. One parent, who was studying to become an Environmental Health Officer, had trained in food hygiene and therefore gave a food hygiene workshop during one of the sessions. Parent volunteers also helped facilitate the cooking activities with the children.

### Attendance

- All 'Cook and Eat' Sessions were held at the Factory Community Centre because it provided good access to parents for promotion and engagement. With a large kitchen, lots of equipment and space it also provided excellent facilities. The first three sessions in January and February had higher attendance levels. These sessions were run on a Thursday and attended by both the parent/toddler drop in and, predominantly a Women's Group that meets regularly at the Factory.

From March the sessions were run on a Wednesday - the preferred day for the parent/toddler group. This resulted in the sessions being attended by parents only from the parent/toddler drop in and carers and toddlers from the crèche and is the reason for the drop in numbers. Non Sure Start parents also attended the sessions, some of them new to the Sure Start area and wanting to register, others that could not access this sort of service in their own area.



### Feedback

At the end of most sessions, parents were asked to give feedback by writing comments on post it notes prompted by various categories such as 'What I loved', 'what I learned', 'what I will leave behind'. Feedback indicated an increase in knowledge, confidence and skills and social benefits. Comments included –

**Increase in knowledge and information about nutritious eating and food safety**  
*"I learnt about hygiene and health and safety. I know now how to store food correctly"*

*“Once a child is involved in preparing a meal they will enjoy eating it.”*

*“My daughter loves the cook and eat session as she loves chopping up fruit and vegetables. She knows how it is very important to wash your hands before and after cooking.”*

*“Healthy food can be cheap and tasty!”*

*“You can eat a healthy nutritious meal without fat and salt”*

### **Increase in confidence & skills**

*“Try more different foods for myself and my son.”*

*“Look out and do more with my food/cooking”*

*“New recipes I have not tried before.”*

*“I loved when my child help prepare the food and the proudness he felt. Also you don’t have to use meat all the time.”*

*“How easy it is to make good food.”*

### **Increase in Social Benefit**

*“Son being able to cook with others.”*

*“I will let my child help me more often in the kitchen as I know he will feel proud.”*

*I and my son met new people.”*

### **Informal feedback**

Informal positive feedback has been received from both staff at the Factory and parents, that they found the sessions really useful and have cooked recipes from ‘cook and eats’ at home.

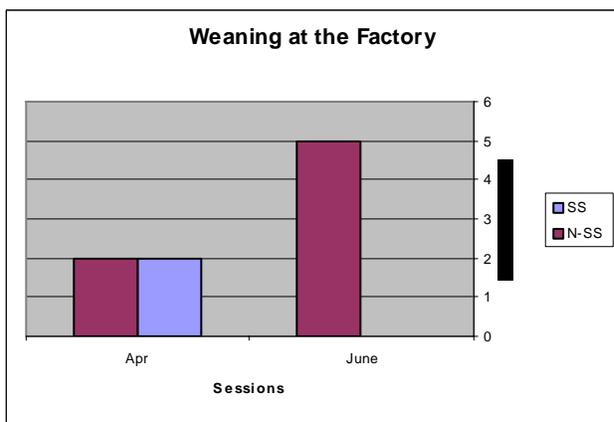
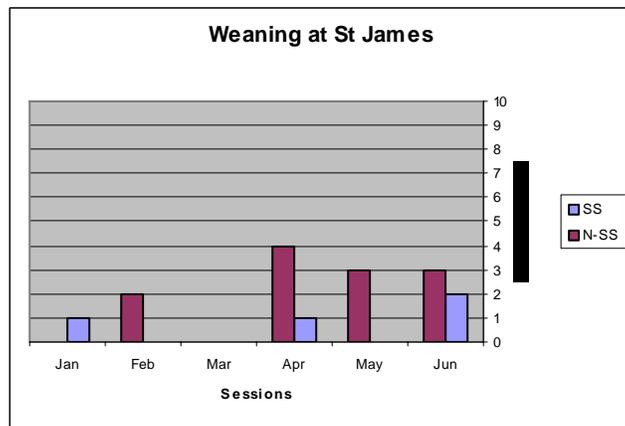
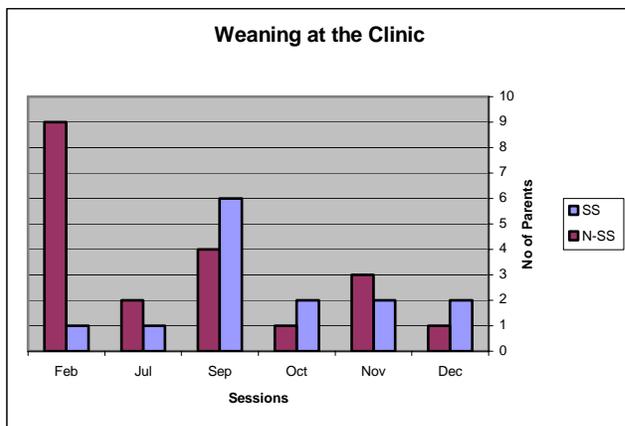
### **Weaning sessions**

- These were informal group education sessions for parents. The sessions gave practical advice on when, what and how to wean, moving from stage 1, 2 & 3 (4 – 12 months), food preparation, hygiene and recipe ideas, food labels and bottle to cup. Parents also had the opportunity to discuss their experiences and swap ideas with other parents. An emphasis was also placed on the importance of feeding babies freshly prepared food rather than ready-made baby foods. In taste tests, baby food made from fresh ingredients was compared to similar jarred foods. A free weaning pack was also provided. The sessions were held at three venues: The Factory, St James’s and Newington Green Clinic.
- Parents heard about the sessions in various ways including the Sure Start newsletter, via their health visitor, drop in or another activity, friend/another parent and baby Massage sessions.

### **Attendance**

- Attendance varied. Again non-sure start parents often attended these sessions, these parents generally hearing about it via their health visitor or baby massage service provider. St James attracted very few Sure Start parents probably because of it’s location. Non-Sure Start parents

attending St James were informed about the sessions by their health visitor or through baby massage.



One-off weaning sessions were also run at the New River Green Children's Centre in October and Our Lady and St Joseph's in January. 12 Parents attended NRG, one of which was a SS parent. 3 parents attended St Joe's, all were Sure Start.

## Feedback

- Prior to October, evaluation was carried out through asking parents to give feedback at the end of the session by writing comments on post it notes prompted by various categories such as 'What I loved', 'what I learned', 'what I will leave behind'. This worked fairly well, although by the end of the sessions, babies were growing restless and parents were eager to get going. Comments were very positive and indicated an increase in knowledge and social benefits:

*"Reassuring and clear explanation of how to move from one weaning stage to another"*

*"To watch out for salt/sugar etc in packaged food"*

*"Good Information about weaning, when to change to a cup and the importance of it"*

*"Good advice on what to start with and the importance that breast milk must still be the main part of meals"*

*“Information given for after 6 months feeding has been very useful”*

*“The pack was really useful – all the things I was thinking of buying”*

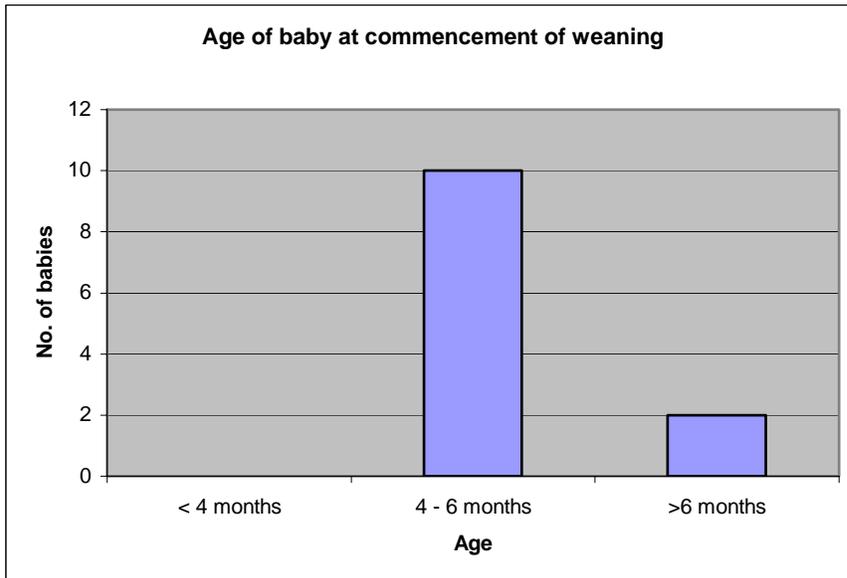
*“Very useful information on when to start, what to introduce, what time of day, how to build up, what to avoid, introducing the beaker, stopping bottle, etc.”*

*“Interesting to meet mums who have started and hearing their comments”*

One parent commented that she thought it was a drop in and arrived an hour into the session. Another commented on the need for an area to put babies down. Another parent who was French had difficulty understanding much of the session,

## Questionnaires

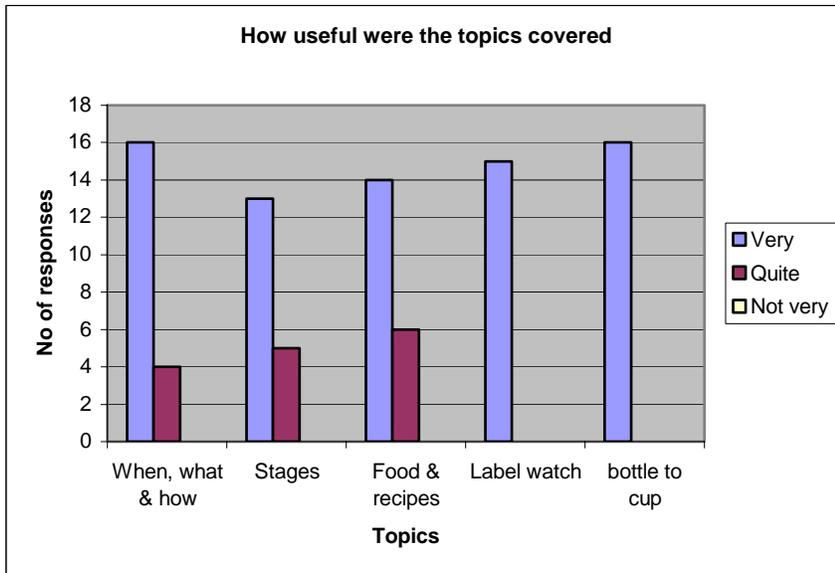
- During October, November and December questionnaires were used before and after each of the sessions. Parents were asked whether they were weaning and if so when had they commenced. The questionnaires were also used to assess whether the sessions had increased parents knowledge and confidence in weaning and food preparation.



12 of the 17 parents completing the questionnaire had already started weaning their babies, 10 of which commenced between four and six months and 2 at six months and over. No babies were being weaned before four months of age, in line with current recommendations for Weaning, (WHO 2001, DoH 2003). When questioned about the guidelines pre-session, the majority of parents were aware of current recommendations.

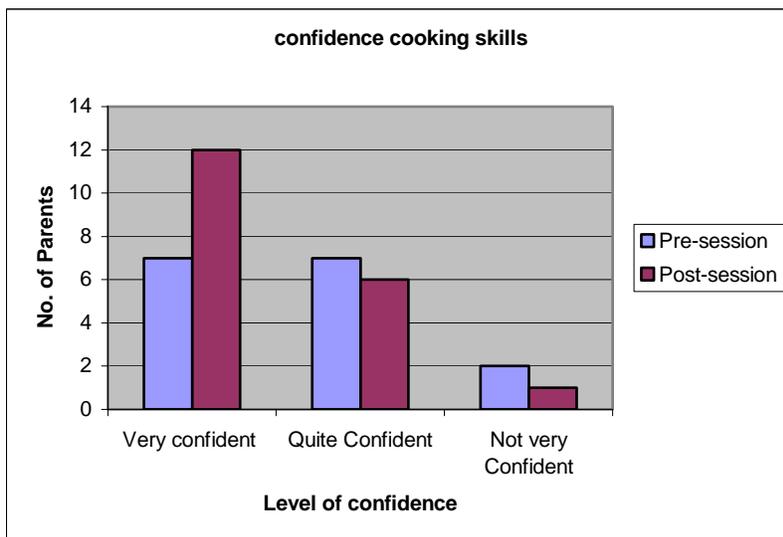
- Parents who were already weaning their babies were asked what kinds of foods they were using. All were weaning according to guidelines, with the exception of one mother of a four to six month old who was using meat and vegetable protein and another mother with a baby six months and over who was not using any form of protein.
- Parents were asked whether a statement about current DoH recommendations for starting to use a cup was true or false. 10 of the 17 that completed the questionnaire answered correctly, 3 incorrectly and 3 did not answer. When asked again at the end of the session 17 answered correctly, 1 incorrectly and 2 did not answer.

- 18 of the 20 parents responding stated the session length (approx 1 ½ hours) was ‘Just Right’. 2 parents did not answer.
- Parents were asked how useful the various topics covered in the session had been to help inform future delivery of the sessions.



Where parents responded to the questions, the majority found all the topics very useful.

- 16 out of the 20 parents thought the handouts and weaning pack would be useful, whilst 4 thought it would be quite useful.
- When asked whether the session would change the way parents were currently weaning their baby 8 out of 14 said ‘*not really*’ of which, explanations included ‘*re-assuring*’, ‘*know I’m on the right track*’. 6 parents said that it would change the way they were currently weaning their baby.
- Parents were asked how confident they felt about preparing and cooking weaning food from scratch pre and post-session. Their response indicated an increase in confidence overall.



- When asked how satisfied parents had been with the session ('very satisfied', 'quite satisfied', 'not very satisfied') 16 parents were very satisfied, 3 quite satisfied and 1 parent did not answer the question. 18 parents said they would recommend the session to a friend, 2 did not answer the question.

## Weaning Sessions Review

- Parents who had attended weaning sessions throughout the year were invited back to a one-off focus group evaluation in November 2005. Unfortunately no parents attended the session but the evaluation questionnaires were sent out. 13 were sent in all to Sure Start parents only. 4 were returned. The questionnaires were used to assess whether babies had been weaned onto more healthy foods as a result of the session; to find out what type of foods were being used over the weaning period; and to assess whether babies had been weaned differently to older siblings (if applicable) and any noticeable consequences of this.
- 3 Parents attended a session when their baby was between four and six months old, 2 of whom had already started to wean, 1 had not. 1 parent attended when her baby was less than 4 months. All 4 parents had commenced weaning their babies between four and six months old. The 2 parents already weaning their babies at the time of the session were weaning according to guidelines and all reported going on to wean accordingly. Only 1 parent was using ready-made food.
- Parents were asked which weaning topics their sessions covered (see topics listed earlier), whether they had received any other advice prior to the sessions and how important they considered each of the issues were to their child's health prior to, and after the sessions. 2 parents felt that all of the topics covered were very important prior to and after the session. 1 parent felt they were all important prior to and after the session. 1 parent reported less importance (when, what and how to wean and recipe ideas) following the session. Only 1 parent had received weaning advice prior to the session. One commented –  
*"Hadr't really thought about weaning prior to session, but once I attended the session, I realised how important the above are"*
- When asked about the clarity of the advice given, 2 parents felt it was very clear, 1 clear and 1 quite clear. 3 parents found the advice very informative and 1 quite informative.
- When asked whether the session changed the way the 2 parents were currently weaning their baby, they commented as follows  
*"The thickness of food"*  
*"After advice, was able to create more recipes mixing various fruit and veg together and also bought more new healthy food products"*
- Parents were asked how confident they felt about preparing and cooking weaning food from scratch pre and post-session. Whilst 2 had felt quite confident and 2 not very confident prior to, following the session all reported to feel very confident with one commenting –  
*"Realised it was just how I'd cook my own food but just omitting certain ingredients"*
- Parents commented on what they liked and disliked about the way the advice had been given at the sessions:  
*"informal"*  
*"The group session was a good idea, with advice and ideas shared – Kate and Annie delivered the sessions very well and made all feel welcome and spoke to individuals separately, if they were too shy to speak out, as sometimes a parent's English was not very good"*

*“short, covering all issues, easier/quicker than reading a book, able to ask questions and phone up afterwards”*

*“It was relaxed, friendly session, wasn’t made to feel silly for asking questions”*

*“As it was the first session she did, I felt she didn’t know much but was happy to go and find out about it”*

- None of the parents responding had older children so it was not possible to evaluate any physical or emotional comparisons/differences.
- Parents were asked to comment in general -
  - “As my child is getting older would like some more sessions held for feeding a toddler, keeping snacks/meals as healthy as possible”*
  - “As a 33 yr old mother who has few friends with young children (and whose own mother can’t remember weaning!) I found the sessions invaluable – even from the point of view of which books to read. Prior to the session I really wouldn’t have known where to start. I also liked that I was able to call Kate when I had questions. Thank you!”*

### **Oral health promotion:**

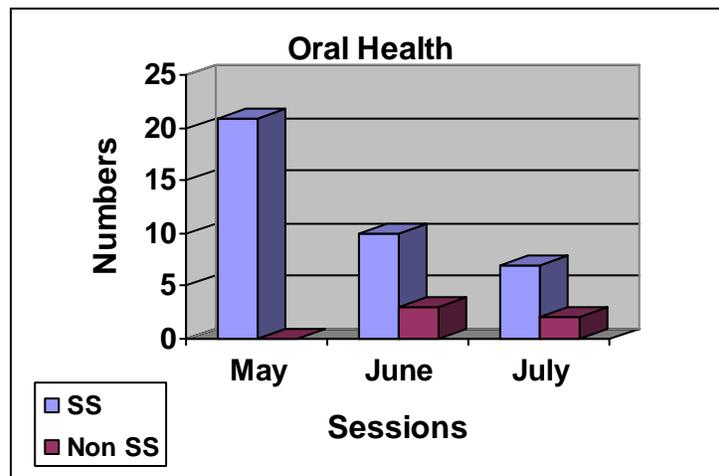
Happy Gnasher sessions were held at the Factory, Mary and St Josephs and at the Toy Library. A storyteller attended the session and told a story promoting good oral health (including brushing teeth and eating well for teeth). A reward poster that was given to parents in the free Happy Gnasher pack provided positive reinforcement of the oral health message told in the story. The poster encouraged children to eat healthily for teeth and to brush their teeth regularly and visit the dentist by putting a sticker on the poster each time they practiced good oral health. Also included in the pack was a Brush for life toothbrush and toothpaste, information on where to find a dentist in Islington and a Happy Gnashers booklet, which included information on how and when to start brushing, tooth friendly snacks and tooth rotting snacks and drinks. Toothfriendly snacks were provided.

The sessions at the Toy Library and Mary St Josephs Stay and Play session were informal as these are both drop in sessions. Advice and information was given to parents mainly on an individual basis.

The session at the Factory was more structured as parents were able to drop their children off in the nursery. So it took the form of an interactive workshop. For instance parents were given details of children’s snacks and drinks and asked to assess whether they were “tooth friendly” or “tooth rotting”.

### **Attendance**

The session in May was held at the Mary and St Josephs stay and play, which is well established with Sure Start parents, and hence only attended by Sure Start Parents. The session in June was held at the Factory. The session was promoted by staff and materials at the Factory, as parents are sometimes outside the Sure Start area, 10 parents were Sure Start parents and 3 were from outside the Sure Start area. Finally, the session held at the local toy library, had 7 Sure Start parents, 1 parent was from outside of the Sure Start area and one failed to give their full address details (see table below)



## Feedback

### Mary and St Josephs session (May):

This session was held in conjunction with a stay and play session at the community centre. With 21 parents and over 21 children it was very chaotic and as a result feedback was not collected from attendees.

**Factory session (June):** With children in the nursery this session was a great opportunity to have parents full attention.

Parents were asked to provide feedback on post-it notes under the following headings

#### What I loved

*"Kind staff and lovely food – we need more sessions."*

*"Great pack full of really useful goodies – very informative – thank you."*

*"Happy to come especially with first child – need to learn a lot because"*

#### What I will take away

*"To help my child eat ... be constant with brushing teeth – keep on trying."*

*"Give more attention to brushing teeth."*

*"Katie likes Philadelphia cheese and it's healthier than cheese."*

*"Useful information on good healthy food."*

#### What I will leave behind

*"Maybe more tips on ways to encourage young children to open mouth eg sitting in front of mirror."*

#### What I learnt

*"Learnt about healthy snack and cheese as an alternative."*

*"Learnt some tips to help with daily routine. Eg. Cheese after juice and cutting down on apple juice."*

*"To watch them[brush their teeth] til about 8 years old."*

*"I learnt its better to give my child water rather than fresh juice"*

*"Which food is better and to give fruit juice with meals."*

*"to keep my son's teeth healthy."*

*"Not to give Ribena."*

**Toy Library Session (July):** Parents were asked to provide feedback on post-it notes under the following headings

### **What I loved**

*“Good stories on teeth care and funny actions”*

*“It was very nice and interesting”*

*“Entertainment was great and loved the food.”*

*“The stories were lovely (all about teeth). Good ideas for snacks.”*

*“My first time here, the story was very interesting and I think the children enjoyed it. We had some information on brushing teeth and were given some healthy food, thank you.”*

### **What I will take away**

*“Packs and cups – very nice.”*

*“Advice on different ways to help children/nutrition as well as health.”*

*“Good info pack and good info about things to help with teething.”*

### **What I will leave behind**

### **What I learnt**

*“Bottle to cup – when and how, brushing, when and how and what to eat between meals.”*

## **Other Services**

- On a number of occasions healthy eating advice was made available to parents during parent/toddler stay and play sessions. Activities included -
  - **Children’s healthy eating activities:** Activities such as fruit tasting, 5 a day promotion, story telling with books related to food, fruit and vegetable printing help encourage consumption of fruit and vegetables among young children. Also being on hand in an informal capacity to provide informal advice to parents was deemed a valuable service by parents.
  - **Fussy Eating:** at the Toy Library, Almorah and at Mary and St Josephs Stay and Play.
  - **Healthy eating:** at New North Community School, Almorah, Factory, Toy Library
- Links were made with other service providers, including health visitors, the speech and language therapist, 5-a-day co-ordinator, child psychologist, Stop smoking adviser and the Turkish out-reach worker. A local organic grower and veggie box supplier called Growing Communities provided veggie bags at cook and eat session. This was funded by Camden 5 a day. This both increased access to local produce and introduced parents to a greater variety of fruit and vegetables. Links were then made between Sure Start and Growing Communities and parents and children visited the community garden in Clissold park in July, where both parents and children got involved in preparing the soil for planting, and planted radish seeds and picked chard, rosemary and other herbs. Parents were also given recipe sheets. In June a fruit picking trip to North Kent was also organised by Sure Start. Parents and children picked strawberries, spinach and gooseberries. Healthy recipes for spinach and gooseberries were given to parents.
- One-to-one advice was available to parents at the Newington Green clinic. In addition to this service, family support workers identified families who needed additional support and home visits were arranged. Where there were specific dietary issues that could not be addressed by a nutritionist the children were referred to the local dietetics service.

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cook and Eat sessions are a fun and relaxed way to discuss healthy eating issues, build confidence and to encourage parents to cook and eat with their children and socialise with others.
- The majority of parents attending weaning sessions have had very little advice beforehand. Most parents are beginning to wean between four and six months and many have already begun when they first attend a session. Promoting the weaning service to parents by way of invitation when baby is coming up to 4 months may help avoid certain foods being introduced too early. Weaning sessions should continue to run in the current format.
- Parents have commented that they would like sessions looking at post weaning (1 yr +), healthy eating for toddlers. This would provide a better opportunity to review weaning experiences.
- Oral health sessions were held at both stay and plays and stand-alone sessions. The feedback from the stand-alone sessions was considered more positive. The sessions should ideally continue with children in the nursery, so that parents are freed up to focus on the sessions, and the healthy promotion messages therein.
- The shift to Children's Centres will hopefully overcome problems with postcode access to the service and help it's availability to current non-Sure Start parents.
- This particular service provision is unusual in that most nutrition and healthy eating services are cross-borough and Primary Care Trust led, with service provision varying enormously across London. With uncertainty surrounding the shift to Children Centres, it is important to ensure this particular service is sustainable. Sure Start Islington MCE is one of 6 Sure Starts in the borough of Islington. In May, a report on the service was circulated to neighbouring Islington Sure Starts, exploring ways of supporting existing services in order to provide a more comprehensive, joined up service across Islington. A key issue is to encourage not only cross-borough partnership working but also the involvement of members of the community. This would be done through consultation with parents, working with parent volunteers and creating community food worker posts for parents and other members of the local community. The service would also help promote and utilise local community food business and initiatives and link in with other service providers in the area.