

# **Evaluation of Cooking from Scratch**

## **1. Introduction**

The Cooking from Scratch courses were selected for evaluation because SureStart Shiremoor and Killingworth believed they had proven particularly effective in attracting 'hard to reach' people (people who would otherwise not usually engage with the Programme or further education) and encouraging them to become involved with Sure Start.

The Community Dietician, who developed the course, and the Food and Hygiene Worker, who teaches it, had been successfully running the course in other areas for two years prior to joining the SureStart programme team. It was therefore agreed that they should continue to provide the course within the SureStart area. The first of these ran in September 2001 and up until December 2003 a total of nine had been provided.

Cooking from Scratch is accredited by NCFE at entry level and operates like a franchise from North Tyneside College, the college pays the crèche and course fees, while SureStart helps to recruit participants. The course aims to give families a better standard of healthier cooking, to improve health and show that a lot of effort is not needed to produce healthy and economic meals. The Dietician and Food and Hygiene Worker also explained that although provision of 'the course does not contribute to a specific SureStart objective, it seems to fit into them all'.

The Food and Hygiene Worker also runs taster sessions for two hours each week for three to four weeks and they often act as an introduction to the Cooking from Scratch course. The taster sessions usually focus on 5-a-day and tackling the eating habits of faddy children. Meanwhile, those who have completed Cooking from Scratch then have the opportunity to do the Nutrition Skills course (see section on sustainability for more details).

## **2. Methods**

The findings from this study were gathered during January and February 2004 using the following methods:

- an in-depth semi-structured interview with the Dietician, and Food and Hygiene Worker
- two participatory appraisal (PA) groups with parents, the first with parents who had recently completed the course and the second with those who had taken part a year previously (note: only one parent attended the first group, but three came to the second)
- analysis of 22 evaluation forms completed by parents at the end of four of the courses.

### **3. Description of project**

#### 3.1 Course Description

Each Cooking from Scratch course takes place for 30 hours over 10 weeks, running from either 9.15-12.15 or 12 until 3.00. They have been provided at a range of venues across the programme area including Shiremoor Salvation Army Hall, Mooredge School, Backworth Community Centre, and Into Change at Moorside. There are also plans to run it at West Allotment Boys Club.

The Food and Hygiene Worker brings all of the ingredients, together with a costings sheet, and provides a recipe file for each participant in which they can collect the recipes and handouts used during the course.

The Worker described the course in the following way:

Session 1 – the parents fill in a registration form, the Worker outlines the course explaining the kind of cooking they will do, the type of food they will cook, talks about hygiene, awareness of sugar and fats in foods and cleaning the kitchen e.g. why clean the fridge out. She also highlights the benefits of bulk buying and freezing half of what you cook. She then finishes by helping the participants to prepare a meal that does not involve any cooking e.g. a healthy sandwich and coleslaw or a fruit salad or trifle using sugar free jelly and yoghurt.

The group also sets the ground rules at the beginning e.g. if you need a cigarette wait until coffee break, that long hair is tied back, be respectful, what to do about mobile phones, the need for hand washing and washing hands after smoking is also explained and leaflets are given out.

Session 2 – focuses on soups and how it's cheap to make bread to go with it.

Session 3 – looks at basics like cooking rice, making tomato and white sauces as a good basis for pasta and cauliflower cheese. The Worker also gives them a pot of mixed herbs, as many of the parents don't usually use them.

Sessions 4-9 - each week the course considers a different method and mixes theory and practice, as the participants need to do 1-1 ¼ hours theory a week to get accreditation. The Worker shows parents how to make healthy cakes like carrot cake, to cook a casserole in the oven, to make pizza and jacket potatoes using crumpets and wholemeal buns, plus she encourages them to make different kinds of meals and teaches about store cupboard ingredients.

Session 10 – the participants cook at two-course meal, for example in December they cooked a Christmas dinner with stuffing balls, wrapped sausages, with steamed vegetables, etc., which 'they thought it was absolutely brilliant'. This also teaches time management skills.

After every session the participants complete a self-evaluation form as this helps the Worker to continually assess how well the course is going.

Furthermore, as the Worker identified, the provision of the crèche is another crucial element of the course, as the children get to mingle and the parents learn to prepare a healthy snack such as: cheese on toast; fruit kebab; fruit, jelly and yoghurt Sundays; little biscuits, and raw vegetables, which they can give their children during break time.

All of this was confirmed by parents taking part in the focus groups, as they explained that the course had been different every week and had involved:

Making healthy food on a budget – it was interesting and I got to take home what I made.

We cooked soups, pastas, burgers, cakes, puddings everything. We also did kitchen and fridge hygiene, dangers in the kitchen and how to keep things in the fridge.

We started with the basics like sandwiches.

We did beef cobbler, pasta, breads, pizza, Sunday lunch, lasagne, fishcakes (different types for example Thai), sausage rissoles and chicken curry.

We looked at different diets, did theory about hygiene and food safety.

We played a game about fat, sugar and calcium, and how much there is in different foods.

We looked at the ingredients you need to make a balanced meal. We used chilli.

### 3.2 Participants

The number taking part in each course depends on the size of the kitchen, but there are usually five to six participants, although the maximum in one session had been seven. At the time of this study the Worker said she had worked with 45 local people, but added that demand for the course was still high. Indeed the Dietician and Food and Hygiene Worker said that the numbers they have worked with and the families they have managed to reach was their greatest achievement in relation to the course.

The age of participants has ranged from 17 to 54 and two men have attended with their wives. As the Worker explained

The men were absolutely brilliant .... One was 17 and they had just had a baby, but he had to leave part way through as he got a job, but he did six sessions and would always ask how to do things. He was really, really good and the women liked it as they'd make the tea and peel the potatoes.

Other participants have included a deaf woman who could lip read from the Worker and people with dyslexia for whom the Worker would read out the recipe and stay close at hand. Additional support was provided by the fact that participants always worked in pairs and were supportive of each other.

As the Worker described, participants:

tend to be from the local area, particularly as if they have a child in crèche they have to leave to pick them up, so they stay local, plus transport would raise a money issue, we would give them their bus fare but its better for us to be where they need to be, as a lot don't have time to travel when they have a child in school and we need three hours to do the course.

The Dietician and Food and Hygiene Worker agreed that the course brings them into contact with 'hard to reach' people, which they defined as:

families with disabilities, people with problems like dyslexia, people who are a little depressed and need to get away from the house, and some who need support to come through the door as they are overwhelmed, but once they are in they are fine, plus we'll go along and pick them up and bring them in if that helps.

### 3.3 Publicity

Information on the course is sent to people on the SureStart database, plus invitations are sent to those who have already expressed an interest in training, and the Dietician and Food and Hygiene Worker promote it when they meet people who they think might benefit.

The parents who took part in the focus groups explained that they had found out about Cooking from Scratch by doing the taster course, attending a weaning party, taking part in a positive parenting course or at a parent and toddler group. They said that when they first heard of the course they had:

Wondered what it would be like.

Thought there would be nothing to learn.

At the time wanted to do anything, wanted something to do and it was the only class available.

Thought it would be good because it had a crèche and it would get my daughter used to being with other children.

While two of the four explained that they had never done a course before.

#### **4. The benefits for participants and their families**

The Worker highlighted many benefits for participants and their families of taking part in the course. It:

##### 4.1 Introduces a wide range of healthy foods and meals to participants and their families

As the Worker described:

Some of the women don't even know how to prepare things, some don't like to touch meat but they take the food home and wolf it down and say 'I would never have made that', 'Its better than when you get it from a tin' e.g. macaroni cheese... Some haven't made lasagne and think it's 'absolutely gorgeous'.. Many of them didn't cook and they go away with the knowledge and confidence that they can do it, when previously they thought to make spaghetti bolognese you mixed mince and a jar of Dolmio. We get the healthy eating message across.

They talk about lots of things and tell you how if one week you made a pan haggerty how they made it at home the next night and their family loved it.

They also learn that you don't have to use fresh fruit and vegetables as long as you use tinned ones that are in their juice or frozen ones.

We give them a pot of mixed herbs as may of the parents don't usually use them and then we usually find they have decided to continue the experiment themselves and bought some others.

Hopefully what we are doing is carried on at home as a lot are seeing their child eat fruit, then they go and buy it and find they love it. You also get to know the parents and they tell you their problems like when the child is not sleeping and we discuss things together like things their child wont eat and what they can do and everyone gives each other advice as we're nattering as we work – its unlike any other group.

While the parents from the focus groups commented:

I thought it was good, it went from how to do basic things – even when you've made it, now you think I've not got this in the cupboard what can I make? It helps you think of different things.

My niece always used to ask what are you cooking today, can I have some, can I come down for tea? She's 13. So every Thursday I had to invite her.

I cooked things I hadn't thought of.

You got to make things you wouldn't necessarily make so he [husband] liked it.

And participants' evaluation forms showed:

The course was really good and I learned a lot of new recipes.

The course was very enjoyable and I will take what I have learned and use it in the future.

The meals were varied and tasty, I will try them at home.

I learned a different variety of meals and dishes.

#### 4.2 Enables participants to acquire additional skills

They learn about budgeting through the costings the Worker provides and:

are amazed at all they can get for £4 and feed 6-8 people and think how much they can save compared to a visit to a chip shop or Chinese take away

Plus they acquire time management skills from preparing a two-course meal.

#### 4.3 Motivates participants and gives them the confidence to continue learning

As the Worker identified:

Once people finish the course they seem to want to do other cookery activities.

They generally go on to do other courses as they've enjoyed cooking and found out the group is OK. One group went on to do a food and hygiene certificate, others have done computer courses, keep fit or got more involved as volunteers or in the SureStart parent's group.... A lot have also gone on confidence building courses.

And parent's explained:

I really enjoyed this course and I hope there is more courses like this to come.

#### 4.4 Helps participants make new friends

The development of new friendships and support networks was another important benefit of the course. As the Worker explained:

A lot of those who come are quiet at first, but we talk and get to know each other and lots of friends are made and its nice to see people grow.

The groups that ran at the Salvation Army or Into Change have stayed really friendly, they didn't know each other before, but are now like sisters, in fact one said she couldn't have chosen a better sister.

I know of two couples who go to each others homes and cook for each other and use the recipe book we provided.

And the evaluation forms illustrated:

The course was very enjoyable and everyone got on really well with each other.

It gave me a chance to meet other people.

#### 4.5 Has a good venue and crèche

The focus group parents also spoke favourably about the training venues and crèche provision, for example:

The children enjoy the crèche because it's the same people.

The venue [*Mooredge School*] and times were good – it was very flexible and it was OK to miss one. It had one room for cooking and another for the crèche.

As did participants completing the evaluation sheets, their comments included:

Kids in same place as us and it was very clean and tidy.

Crèche really good for kid.

Good as you can see your children in the next room playing.

Handy to get to.

Kitchen nice size and crèche just next door.

It was nice and warm.

#### 4.6 Highlighted the importance of welcoming and effective tutors

Something which parents explained during the focus group and through the evaluation sheets:

*The Food and Hygiene Worker* is very nice – if you were having a bad day she made you laugh with some of her stories.

Tutors were very good and knew what they were talking about in each session.

I found that the teacher was really good and explained everything clearly and was very helpful.

The teacher was very kind, helpful and a pleasure to work with.

Those completing the evaluation sheets also highlighted their satisfaction with the organisation of the course, while six out of seven were happy with the teaching materials and resources, although one commented:

I think we could have had more cooking equipment (cookers)

#### 4.7 General comments

The parents taking part in the focus groups also highlighted the following as being positive aspects of the course:

It was all good, there was nothing I could say I didn't like or was boring. I enjoyed going every Thursday morning.

You got a nice file with recipes in.

It was very relaxed and friendly.

It was a nice size group of up to 6.

There was no pressure even if you weren't feeling yourself people would help with your file.

#### 4.8 The best elements of the course

When asked what was the best part of the course the focus group parents said:

Doing the Christmas dinner, it was the best one ever because even though we all knew each other by then it was the first time we sat down and ate together. The crèche workers fed the children as we'd made 13-14 dinners.

You used ingredients you had in the house, there was nothing flash.

You were learning new things/recipes.

Meeting different people.

While parents who had completed the evaluation forms revealed they had most liked:

Learning to use different knives.

Easy recipes for kids.

Making different meals.

Eating the food and learning to cook from scratch.

Meeting new people.

Learning healthy ways to eat and health and safety issues.

How to store foods.

How to eat on a budget

The friendly atmosphere.

#### 4.9 Overall satisfaction

Satisfaction with the course was very high. The only change suggested by focus group parents was to make the course longer, while their only complaint was about some parents who would not help make the tea.

Of the four parents who took part in the focus groups one rated the course 10 out of 10 and the others 9-10 out of 10.

Such findings were supported by the contents of the course evaluation forms\*, with:

- 14 out of 15 participants saying the course was what they expected and one that they had not known what to expect
- six out of six saying they had got what they wanted from the course
- nine out of nine stating that the information they had been given was just right
- seven out of seven rating the course as very good
- six out of six saying they would recommend other people go on the course.

Again the only changes to the course that were suggested was to have spent more time on meals for children (2 participants) and on food hygiene (7 participants), and that the course should be longer (5 participants).

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\*Although 22 forms were analysed three different types of evaluation forms had been used, therefore the numbers quoted tend to be smaller.

## **5. Effect on participant's lives since completing the course**

The focus group participants were asked whether anything had changed for them or their families since they had completed the course. They highlighted the following:

### 5.1 A change in their diet

We're eating different things.

It has changed what I cook, I think more about what to buy, I think more about what I give to my family.

We have a more varied diet, you know you can cook something out of the cupboard that's basic and easy without spending a major amount of money.

### 5.2 The desire to do other courses

I'd like to do another course... I'm interested in doing something on women's health.....So the changes have mainly been for me rather than the rest of my family.

We've done more courses: nutritional skills, cooking with toddlers, mellow parenting, Steps to Excellence and Personal Success, anxiety management, self defence, healthy bodies and running our own keep fit classes, women's group and first aid.

### 5.3 How they have become more involved with SureStart

We got involved in the parents group, the drop-in and the Partnership.

We've been on trips and to events: Whitehouse Farm, Lightwater Valley, the circus, the Hancock Museum, Rising Sun, the bear hunt with Greenstart, and planting family trees.

Indeed all of the focus group parents were registered with SureStart and had a broad based knowledge and experience of SureStart provision.

### 5.4 New friendships

Have made more friends from the course.

Our social life has improved, we cook pizza and dips and our men come along, 'bad idea'.

### 5.5 Increased confidence

Our confidence and self-esteem have increased.

## **6. Sustainability**

Although the Dietician and Food and Hygiene Worker hope their posts will be mainstreamed when their contracts with SureStart end in 2006, they are also keen to ensure that the Cooking from Scratch course is self-sufficient.

Therefore the Dietician is training local people to run their own groups and at the time of the evaluation was teaching five parents as part of an accredited Nutrition Skills course. This course is largely theoretical, but also considers how to set up and run a group, and how to access funding.

## **7. Lessons that can be learned and conclusion**

The evidence gathered during this evaluation suggests that this course demonstrates good practice on a number of levels, which others could learn from. For it:

- Attracts and sustains the involvement and interest of people that might not otherwise have engaged with SureStart or further education. This appears to be due to a number of key elements, the:
  - informality of the course
  - good design and balance of the course
  - practical and interpersonal skills of the tutor
  - fact that it is held in local venues familiar to those who might otherwise lack the confidence to attend
  - provision of the crèche in the same building and consistency and quality of crèche workers
  - deliberately small number of participants on each course
  - inclusive nature of the provision, which has been able to attract men, people with dyslexia and a deaf woman
  - ability of the providers to continually evaluate the provision and learn from their findings
  - opportunity for parents to try the course out through the taster and to continue to develop their skills through the hygiene and nutrition skills courses.
  
- Plans to sustain provision by training previous participants to run and find funding for the courses.
  
- Has a longer-term impact on participants and their families by:
  - helping them to change their diet and improve their social networks
  - increasing their confidence
  - acting as a springboard to attendance at other courses and greater involvement in SureStart.