

Food for Life at Anna-Ca-Soo Day Nursery in Peterborough



Anna-Ca-Soo Day Nursery

Anna-Ca-Soo Day Nursery opened in July 2000 and provides day-time care for 50 children in Peterborough city centre. There are currently 17 members of staff, who between them have over 290 years of experience in early years education. Owned by a husband and wife team and managed by their daughters, the nursery prides itself on the family atmosphere and approach to food. Before Food for Life the nursery already took pride in the food it served (all meals are prepared by nursery owner and chef, Mick), but were not yet making the most of food as a learning resource. Nursery Manager Louisa said, "it was a chance for us to see if there was anything new for us to learn". This case study explores what the team have discovered.



It's not loads of extra work to do, it's just implementing these little changes drop by drop.



Louisa Aschettino

Manager, Anna-Ca-Soo Day Nursery

Food for Life has inspired positive changes and new ideas via training opportunities

Louisa and chef Mick attended the Introduction to FFL Early Years training and Louisa attended the cooking and growing training sessions which followed. A point Louisa took away from the cooking training was how simple it could be to bake bread with young children. The trainer explained how a cooking session could have a single focus, such as measuring, mixing or chopping which Louisa felt made the thought of leading cookery less daunting for staff at the nursery. The cooking training also benefitted Mick the chef, despite him not having the time to attend. Louisa said that "going on this course has meant that I'm better able to support him in developing the menu and it's not just him in this lone area [the kitchen] where he's the lone wolf." On the day Louisa enjoyed "[not] communicating with just the teacher, but with different nurseries [as well]."

Before the growing training, Anna-Ca-Soo staff and children would begin their growing season in spring and harvest everything before winter. However, as an outcome of the Garden Organic growing training day she attended, Louisa now has knowledge of winter vegetables and how to maintain a year-round crop. The nursery has also managed to involve the children's families with growing activities, one example of this is how they sowed cress seeds at nursery and then took the plant home to nurture.

Impacts of cooking and incorporating food into areas of learning on the Early Years curriculum

Food for Life inspired a shift away from traditional baking activities



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and towards cooking and promoting healthier food at nursery and at home.

Cooking activities allow the children at Anna-Ca-Soo to learn about responsibility; they are involved in the planning process by going to the supermarket and local market to buy ingredients.

Whereas cooking before involved pastries, cakes and sweet puddings, it now involves savoury recipes such as pasta salads. Staff and children were cooking soups before Food for Life, but there has been a shift towards seasonal ingredients. Louisa said that "we're now thinking about the different types of soups we could teach for the different seasons." Staff have observed how cooking sessions have helped to calm behaviour, "they like the responsibility" said Louisa, "they love feeling they are doing a job for us".

Louisa has "definitely noticed their [the staff's] increased confidence in running more activities around Food for Life ideas" and has noticed the different ideas staff have incorporated into their planning. Staff frequently use food as a resource for learning, for example:

- Vegetable printing and natural pictures using leaves and items found in the garden (Art and Design)
- Children using different adjectives to describe the food; what they can see, smell and feel (Communication and Language)
- Counting, grouping and sorting vegetables and discussing shape and patterns (Mathematics)

Conclusion

Louisa feels that by the time the children are ready to start primary school they are knowledgeable about food and equipped to talk about different healthy foods. Furthermore, she believes the children are used to the social element of mealtimes, can use cutlery and are more open to trying new foods.

Food education is thoroughly embedded into daily life at Anna-Ca-Soo and great pride is taken in everything food related; from the lunches to the creative ways of using food as a learning resource. A recent questionnaire showed how parents thought communication relating to food at the nursery had improved and parents "liked that there was more support on the website and that everything was easy to read, easy to access", said Louisa. The nursery has also started sharing recipes with parents and has noticed how more parents are asking for advice than before.

