

Child Care Centre Menu Planning Questionnaire Results – August 2010

In May 2010, xx menu planners were contacted by email and invited to participate by responding to a questionnaire posted on SurveyMonkey™. They were advised that the questionnaire was approved by MSVU Ethics Review Board and that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that ‘as the questionnaire tool is USA based, information provided may be subject to government searches. However as no personal or identifying information is asked, the risk to you is negligible. To ensure that your participation will remain anonymous please do not provide any identifying information in your responses’.

General:

There were 75 respondents to the questionnaire but as participants were allowed to skip questions, not all questions were answered. The ‘n=’ refers to the number who responded. About 40% (n=75) were directors, 20% ECE’s, 16% owners/operators and the remainder were cooks, foodservice managers or those doing multiple roles. Ten percent (n=74) of respondents were from centres with capacities for over 100 children, 5% between 75 and 100, 24% between 51 and 75, 35% between 25 and 50 and the remainder, less than 25. As expected, 50% (n=72) of respondents were from centres located in Halifax County and there was good distribution of respondents from the other regions. At least 89% (n=73) had access to computers and with internet access; thereby indicating the appropriateness for on-line resources.

Menus:

When asked how they would characterize their menus, the top four choices were nutritious, meet government policies, kid friendly and practical. While 87% (n=69) of respondents were satisfied with their menu characterizations, the reasons why they weren’t, were that they want their menus to be more interesting, practical and cost effective.

Ninety % (n= 69) of respondents said they planned their menus for four weeks or longer and that they cycled their menus. Just over half (n=68) had seasonal menus and gave great ideas for seasonal menus. Less than 20% (n=64) had costed menus but the comments indicated that the centres employed a variety of money saving strategies such as buying supplies from flyers or sales. While 60% (n=70) revised their menus within a year, over 40% hadn’t revised their menus in a year or more. Reasons to change menus were to remove unpopular items, add new items or recipes, make seasonal adaptations or in response to CFG. About 20% (n=69) of changes were to make special dietary or allergy adaptations.

The top five menu planning factors were Canada’s Food Guide, cost/budget, nutrients, government policies and ease of preparation. Most (95%, n=68) consult or involve others in the menu planning, including centre staff, public health nutritionists, cooks and children.

Recipes:

Many (59%, n=66) respondents sourced their recipes from cookbooks or from websites; about 13% said they don’t use recipes and the remainder got recipes from parents or they were created by cooks. Over

90% (n=54) did not use costed recipes. While 11% (n=64) don't update their recipes, most update or revise their recipes within a two year time period considering a variety factors such as CFG, Government policies/guidelines, cost/budget, ease of preparation, child preferences and allergies/special diets.

Resources:

When asked about all the resources used in menu planning, respondents identified CFG 88% (n=63) of the time. Next were menus from other centres (52%), menu planning books (40%) and nutrition books (38%). They also noted their own experience, input from parents, other staff members and public health nutritionists as valuable resources. Respondents were then asked to tell us what resources they would like to see. Sample menus and recipes topped the list as did a menu template based on the policies/guidelines. About 66% (n=61) wanted the resources on a website, 62% in a workbook and 36% said they were interested in having an interactive website or blog.

Other menu topics that respondents (n=63) were interested in included creative menu planning (79%), recipe and menu costing (65%), allergies/special diets (59%), nutrition (56%) and how to introduce new foods to children (54%). And finally, as was noted by one of our respondents, menus must be specific to the particular centre and its children – 'there can't be a one menu that fits all'.